

chapter three

school rules

This is the “banking” concept of education, in which the scope of action allowed to the students extends only as far as receiving, filing, and storing the deposits. They do, it is true, have the opportunity to become collectors or cataloguers of the things they store. But in the last analysis, it is men themselves who are filed away through the lack of creativity, transformation, and knowledge in this (at best) misguided system. For apart from inquiry, apart from praxis, men cannot be truly human. Knowledge emerges only through invention and reinvention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry men pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other.

—PAULO FREIRE, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*

*I am in school to learn.
I pledge to accept responsibility
for myself and my school work.
I pledge to accept responsibility
for my actions toward parents,
teachers, and my schoolmates.*

—ROSA PARKS SCHOOL PLEDGE

School as a Sorting System

School rules govern and regulate children’s bodily, linguistic, and emotional expression. They are an essential element of the sorting and ranking technologies of an educational system that is organized around the search for and establishment of a ranked difference among children. This system is designed to produce a hierarchy: a few individuals who

are valorized as “gifted” at the top and a large number who are stigmatized as failures at the bottom. School rules operate along with other elements of the formal curriculum such as standardized tests and grades to produce this ordered difference among children.

Since this is not the prevailing assumption about the goal of education in our society, we must turn to alternative views of schooling for a theoretical explanation of the process of how social difference is created and reproduced in schools. One view is that of “radical schooling” theorists, and the other is that of the poststructuralist Michel Foucault. In contrast to the widely held liberal belief that schools are meritocratic and that through them individuals regardless of their social, economic, or ethnic background are able to realize their potential and achieve economic and social mobility, these alternative perspectives presume schooling to be a system for sorting and ranking students to take a particular place in the existing social hierarchy.

Radical Schooling Theory

The radical perspective assumes that educational institutions are organized around and reflect the interests of dominant groups in the society; that the function of school is to reproduce the current inequities of our social, political, and economic system. It proposes that the crucial element for creating and reproducing social inequality is a “hidden curriculum” that includes such taken-for-granted components of instruction as differences in modes of social control and the regulation of relations of authority,¹ and the valorization of certain forms of linguistic and cultural expression.² This hidden curriculum reflects the “cultural hegemony” of the dominant class and works to reinforce and reproduce that dominance by exacerbating and multiplying—rather than diminishing or eliminating—the “inequalities” children bring from home and neighborhood to school.

Pierre Bourdieu is representative of this school of thought. He argues that schools embody the class interests and ideology of the dominant class, which has the power to impose its views, standards, and cultural forms—its “cultural capital”—as superior. Thus the ruling class is

1. Bowles and Gintis, *Schooling in Capitalist America*.

2. Bourdieu and Passeron, *Reproduction*; Basil Bernstein, *Towards a Theory of Educational Transmission*, vol. 3 of *Class, Codes, and Control* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974).

able to systematically enforce the social distinctions of its own lifestyle and tastes as superior standards to be universally aspired to. This imposition is effected through the exercise of “symbolic violence,” the painful, damaging, mortal wounds inflicted by the wielding of words, symbols, standards.

Bourdieu’s concept of “symbolic violence” is particularly useful for an examination of punishment practices as symbolic enforcers of a cultural hegemony in the hidden curriculum. He directs our attention to the manner in which this type of violence operates through taken-for-granted notions of the form and content of “proper” behavior overlooked by liberal notions of schooling. For example, “politeness,” in his view, “contains a politics, a practical immediate recognition of social classifications and of hierarchies between the sexes, the generations, the classes, etc.”³ This example of the politics of politeness is one I will develop to demonstrate the way the social hierarchy of society is recreated by the school: how manners, style, body language, and oral expressiveness influence the application of school rules and ultimately come to define and label African American students and condemn them to the bottom rung of the social order.

Foucault’s Theory of Disciplinary Power

Foucault’s concepts of normalization and of normalizing judgments are also fruitful theoretical starting points for grounding the discussion of how power works through punishment. Though schooling is at the center of a vast social science investigation of socialization processes, most studies focus on classroom organization and interaction, on curriculum or on analysis of texts. In cases where discipline is the subject of inquiry, the salient issue typically becomes one of effective classroom management and style of social control for children.⁴ Punishment as a mechanism in a process of social differentiation is generally neglected in this research.

One reason for this emphasis is the role that school discipline is assumed to play in the learning process. Conformity to rules is treated by school adults as the essential prior condition for any classroom

3. Pierre Bourdieu, “The Economics of Linguistic Exchanges,” *Social Science Information* 26, no. 6 (1977): 646.

4. See, for example, Delwyn Tattum, ed., *Management of Disruptive Pupil Behavior in Schools* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1986).

learning to take place. Furthermore, rules bear the weight of moral authority. Rules governing children are seen as the basis of order, the bedrock of respect on which that order stands. Rules are spoken about as inherently neutral, impartially exercised, and impervious to individual feelings and personal responses. The question of how order is obtained, at whose expense, the messages this “order” bears, and the role that it plays in the regulation and production of social identities is rarely addressed.

Foucault provides an alternative approach to the function of discipline in institutions like schools. He conceptualizes discipline broadly as the mechanism for a new mode of domination that constitutes us as *individuals* with a specific perception of our identity and potential that appears natural rather than the product of relations of power. The disciplinary techniques of the school actively produce individual social identities of “good,” “bad,” “gifted,” “having potential,” “troubled,” and “troublesome,” rather than ferret them out and reveal them as they “naturally” exist. The objective of this mode of power is the production of people who are docile workers, self-regulating and self-disciplined.

Foucault asserts that normalizing judgments made through the allocation of reward and punishment are the most powerful instruments of this disciplinary power, whose function is not to suppress unwanted behavior or to reform it, but to

refer individual actions to a whole that is at once a field of comparison, a space of differentiation. . . . It measures in quantitative terms and hierarchizes in terms of value the abilities, the level, the “nature” of individuals. It introduces through this “value-giving” measure, the constraint of a conformity that must be achieved. Lastly, it traces the limit that will define difference in relation to all other differences, the external frontier of the abnormal. . . . [It] compares, differentiates, hierarchizes, homogenizes, excludes. In short, it *normalizes*.⁵

So, school rules operate as instruments of normalization. Children are sorted, evaluated, ranked, compared on the basis of (mis)behavior: what they do that violates, conforms to, school rules.

5. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, translated from the French by Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage, 1979), 183.

Foucault argues that disciplinary control is a modern mode of power that comes into existence with the formation of the bourgeois democratic state as a technique of regulation particularly suited to a form of governance predicated on the idea of formal equality. Under this type of regime, our status in a hierarchical system is no longer formally ascribed by birth but appears to be derived from how we measure up with regard to institutionally generated norms. "Each individual receives as his status his own individuality, in which he is linked by his status to the features, the measurements, the gaps, the 'marks' that characterize him and make him a 'case.'"⁶ We come to know who we are in the world, and we are known by others, through our socially constituted "individual" difference rather than through an ascribed status such as class or race. In contemporary United States, disciplinary power becomes a particularly relevant technique of regulation and identity formation in a desegregated school system in which status once ascribed on the basis of racial superiority and inferiority is no longer legitimate grounds for granting or denying access to resources or attainment of skills.

Individualization is accomplished in institutions through a proliferation of surveillance and assessment techniques. In school, routine practices of classification, the ranking of academic performance through tests and grades, psychological screening measures, the distribution of rewards and punishment construct the "truth" of who we are.

We turn now to look at some of the mechanisms of the school that classify, compare, evaluate, and rank children through standardized tests and scores based on the official, academic curriculum. Though the official curriculum is not the subject of this study, I offer a brief overview because, as I will argue, there is a strong relationship between the hidden curriculum and the formal academic one, between a teacher's subjective evaluations of students' character and behavior and the kinds of classrooms they end up in. A disproportionate number of the kids who are in the remedial, low-track classrooms are those getting in trouble. A number of studies indicate that the placement of kids in high- or low-track groups or classrooms within schools is not simply the result of test scores of student achievement but is influenced by such things as teachers' perceptions of student appearance, behavior,

6. Ibid., 192.

and social background.⁷ My objective is to suggest several ways in which to look at the interaction between objective standards and subjective modes of interpretation.

The Official Curriculum

Within Rosa Parks School, children are formally classified and sorted into classrooms on the basis of age (grade level) and on the basis of race or ethnicity. The official explanation for this sorting is that it is to maintain a racial balance in classrooms and in the system in general. This racial balance, however, is not replicated in the special pullout programs for kids who deviate from the academic norms of the school system.

Children at Rosa Parks are sorted and ranked on the basis of tests of academic and psychological “capacity” as well as through the discipline system of the school. They are rank-ordered in relation to each other and to national norms on the basis of tests. At one end of this range of potential, ability, and talent are those who fall into the category of Gifted and Talented (GATE), the vast majority of whom are white. At the other end of the spectrum are students who are below average, failing, “at risk.” The overwhelming majority are poor and black. In the final analysis, low-skill classrooms and supplementary programs like PALS are the place in school occupied by blacks, while enriched, innovative programs are largely the province of white kids.

These observations support Hochschild’s findings that classrooms in schools with official desegregation policies are more racially segregated than schools in general, suggesting the existence of inequitable disciplinary practices and the segregation of blacks and whites into different “tracks.”⁸ She argues that for this reason it is important to look behind the official accounting of racial equity in school districts and follow sorting practices into the classrooms. There we find students who have been labeled “at risk” being pulled out from their regular classroom during the day to attend special classes tailored to treat or

7. For example, David H. Hargreaves, Stephen K. Hester, and Frank J. Mellor, eds., *Deviance in Classrooms* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975); Perry Gilmore, “‘Gimme Room’: School Resistance, Attitude, and Access to Literacy,” *Journal of Education* 167, no. 1 (1985); Helen Gouldner, *Teachers’ Pets, Troublemakers, and Nobodies: Black Children in Elementary School* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1978).

8. Jennifer L. Hochschild, *The New American Dilemma: Liberal Democracy and School Desegregation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 31.

“compensate” for the specific deficiency for which they have been diagnosed. Here I briefly describe some of the methods of categorizing, ranking, and resegregating students and what this means for the actual quality of education they get, before turning my full attention to the valuation of children through punishment.

Individualizing Instruction

A student is placed in compensatory education, or “comp. ed.,” classes at Rosa Parks for two hours a week if they score lower than the thirty-seventh percentile on the California Test of Basic Skills (CTBS). The funding for these classes comes from federal allocations for poor and minority children to compensate for the “deprivation” in their home environments that they bring into the school. This remedy emanates from the prevailing perspective that black children and their families are “culturally disadvantaged”; it takes for granted the superiority of the white, middle-class culture of the school and the inferior nature of the values, life experience, knowledge that black students bring.

The CTBS ranks each child on a scale in relation to every other child in the state and in the nation. This test is considered an achievement test measuring what you already know and, according to my teacher informant, “ignores potential.” Every student in the state is supposed to take this test, and the score of each is compared to the national norm in reading and math. Schools, school districts, cities, and states are also ranked according to the test results that are published in the newspapers. This ranking is taken very seriously: teachers’ performance within school is monitored according to their pupils’ performance on the test, and the ranking enters into real estate values and a “calculus of community livability” across the United States. The CTBS score is put in each child’s file as part of the identifying material that follows them as a place marker from school to school.

Black students in the Arcadia School District placed below the national norm in reading, language, and mathematics in all grades, while whites placed above the national norm in all grades. So the overwhelming majority of children in the compensatory education program at Rosa Parks School are African American.

What is the approach being used to address this lack of achievement? When I observed the reading/language arts component of the program, I noticed two significant differences from the regular class-

room. First, the special classes had two adults to ten children in the room, while the teacher-student ratio was one to thirty in the regular classroom. Second, the entire system of instruction in the compensatory education class was based on computerized software, so that each pupil interacted mainly with a computer terminal.

My initial response was to be heartened by these differences, which seemed to provide the groundwork for some exciting educational possibilities for those who needed to catch up in terms of basic skills. By the end of the session, however, I was deeply discouraged. Even though the teacher-pupil ratio and the technology appeared to be at a level that allowed for a more challenging, individualized learning experience, the actual educational process in the special class was even more routinized and mechanical than in the regular classroom. It was, in fact, a system of instruction that kept the children locked into the same level of learning, and the low student-to-teacher ratio, rather than increasing the amount of time that pupils had to interact with a teacher, instead increased the level of surveillance and control that adults had over each child. Here is an extract from my field notes:

This was my second visit to observe in the comp. ed. room. I observed two different fifth-grade classes at work. There are six girls and three boys in one and three girls and seven boys in the other. Out of a total of nineteen, two are white, four are Asians. All the rest are African American. The teacher, Mrs. Smythe is white and her aide, Miss Alvaro is Filipino.

The classroom has a long table down the center. Big sunny windows face out on the street. Two rows of ten computers sit on the table back to back. All of the kids sitting at the terminals are either black, Hispanic, or Asian. This year one hundred seventy-nine children are in comp. ed. One hundred thirty-four of them are African American. Most of the others in the program speak English as a second language and need to practice English language skills.

On each computer is a paper cup with a number written on the cup. When children come into the room, they take a folder from Miss Alvaro and sit in front of a computer terminal. Each program is personalized so that each child is greeted at the terminal by name when they log on and at the end of each exercise is given their score by name. But this individualization is more apparent than real

since the children are all pretty much kept working in the same program and at the same level.

Mrs. Smythe generally has the kids start with “games” and with typing instructions. The typing program has exercises designated as accuracy and speed builders which are followed by accuracy and speed building tests. One boy, working on speed building, was typing rows of sas sas sas sas. Mrs. Smythe tells the group how valuable learning to type is because it is a way that they can earn some money later. This is the first and only time in my observation in the school that I hear a teacher connect a classroom activity with something tangible such as paid work.

Then Mrs. Smythe moves on to a reading exercise which teaches how to “get the main idea” from a paragraph. Kids read a short paragraph out of a booklet and then have to pick the correct answer from a multiple choice list. If kids don’t know how to pronounce a particular word or are having trouble with reading then they ask one of the adults for help. As I glance through the paragraphs, I notice that most are either about “nature” or about Indians. One paragraph is about how Indians made fishhooks. Another is about how they made the color red using plants. Indians are always presented as museum pieces, as if they live today the kind of life that they lived before the Europeans came to America.

I find the exercise frustrating because often more than one sentence could be the “right” answer. I have to check in the teacher’s book to make sure. Mrs. Smythe says she has the same problem. But the point to be learned here by the children is that there is only *one correct answer* and there is no discussion of why one answer is more right than another.

Children are admonished over and over not to read ahead. If they finish reading before the others they are encouraged to turn over their sheets and doodle on the back until the group is finished. Unlike the classroom, there is no incentive for working fast. Unlike the regular classroom, there are tangible rewards. Kids who get the answer right get a bean dropped in the paper cup on top of the computer. Mrs. Smythe tells the children that this exercise will help them do better on the CTBS.

When I return to observe a few weeks later, I was not surprised that the kids who read faster than others or who get all correct answers are still working in the same group.

The class also works on a series of exercises called sequencing. This is the most routinized and simplistic in a series of programs that seem to encourage the most rudimentary level of thinking rather than any creative effort on the part of the kids whatsoever. The graphic on the screen is a train made up of engine, car, and caboose. When you put three random sentences into proper order then the train moves off. The sentences in the sequencing exercise included the following sets of three: put on shoes, tie shoes, put on socks; pitch the ball, hit the ball, catch the ball; pick flower, plant seed, water seed; untie shoes, take off shoes, take off socks; find pencil, write letter, mail letter; wash apple, take a big bite, pick an apple; give present, buy present, wrap present. Fifth-grade kids who I already know from other places in the school as highly intelligent are working on stringing these sentences into the proper sequential order. I notice that kids play around with the sequences to get different responses from the computer.

The classes also work on a "logic" program. The graphic on the terminal screen consists of two tanks which hold different amounts of oil and pipes leading from the tanks into an oil truck. Each round of the game, the program gives a specific amount which must be taken from the tanks and put in the truck. The kids have to move the amounts back and forth between the tanks to get just the right amount into the truck. The material they are moving back and forth have cute names like funny fluff, odd oil, and jolly juice. The aim is to find the most efficient way of getting the tanker truck filled. Most of the kids are fairly attentive to the monitor screens as these problems are harder than the sequencing.

At the end of each exercise, one of the adults drops a bean in the cup by each child's terminal. These are counted up at the end and a stamp is placed on a sheet of paper in the kid's folder. Mrs. Smythe tells me that these stamps accumulate and can be cashed in for small prizes such as stickers, colored pencils, and prizes such as pizza parties.

The interaction between teacher and pupils is highly programmed. The level of control is intense. The movement between seats and activities that I observed in the regular classroom that was often initiated by the kids themselves rarely occur. There is no excuse to sharpen a pencil, get materials. Children sit and stare

diligently occupied with the graphics and movements on the computer screen for the entire period.

My observations in the compensatory education classroom confirmed the argument of radical schooling theorists that low-income and minority kids will be schooled to take their place in the bottom rungs of the class structure. My findings also corroborated those of Oakes that students placed in low-track and remedial classes are exposed to a severely restricted knowledge base requiring the most rudimentary learning processes. In a national study of secondary school tracking, Oakes found that learning in the low tracks rarely inculcated the knowledge and thought processes requisite for moving into a higher track; instead, it ensured that participants would remain at the lowest level, falling increasingly behind. She found that students were being trained to follow directions, to conform, to be passive, to take standardized tests rather than to think creatively and independently.⁹

A second technique for sorting students at Rosa Parks is through what used to be called special education classes. These are for children working at two grade levels below their capacity. More euphemistic names have been devised for these programs because “special education” classes came under heavy criticism in the 1960s for being a popular dumping ground for black students. As a result, a process was put in place to ensure that schools could not place a child in a special education program without going through a series of formal steps. A meeting between a team from the school and a parent or guardian takes place culminating in an instructional plan drawn up by the school psychologist based on a series of tests that “identify specific cognitive problems” that determines the child’s placement.¹⁰

The instructional plan will involve one of two options that exist under the umbrella of “special education”: a Resource Specialist Program (RSP) that pulls the child out of the regular room for one or two periods a day for individual instruction in a small group, or the Special

9. Jeannie Oakes, *Keeping Track: How Schools Structure Inequality* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 85.

10. For an excellent discussion of institutional practices for classifying students and placing them in categories such as “learning disabled” or educationally handicapped by committees such as these, see Hugh Mehan, Alma Hertweck, and J. Lee Miehl, *Handicapping the Handicapped: Decision-Making in Student’s Educational Careers* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1986).

Day Class (SDC) that is either a whole or a half day in a separate classroom. The object of RSP, according to one of its instructors, is to teach the children in ways that suit different learning styles. The SDC is reserved for students who “have such a severe learning or emotional” disability that it interferes with their ability to learn in the regular classroom. Several teaching positions and some administrative positions are paid for through compensatory and special education funding.

I participated as a reading tutor for two months in the SDC room. I found an incongruous mix of children, all but two of whom were black: some had “severe learning disabilities,” while others were there because they had been “acting up” and so had been defined as having an emotional disability. The kids who were pointed out to me as “emotionally disturbed” were all African American and predominately male.

There is a pullout program of a different type at Rosa Parks School. It is the program for the Gifted and Talented (GATE), the vast majority of whom are white. GATE children are pulled out of class and bused to another school where they have the hands-on, interactive learning experience that, as one of the teachers put it, most kids could benefit from in every classroom. Children in GATE are identified through a test given in the third grade. Unlike the CTBS, which is required for all kids, only those identified by teachers as having potentially gifted qualities are eligible for this test. It is worth speculating on the role that cultural capital plays here, on how different perceptions of what a “gifted” child looks and sounds like might determine who is given the opportunity to take this test. Perhaps as a result of such speculation, an African American teacher at Rosa Parks took the initiative to organize a program for minority students who show promise of going on for a higher education. These children meet twice a week with the teacher before and after school to work on science and math.

Several of the Troublemakers as well as some of the Schoolboys were in the “remedial” programs. Since these rooms involved more routinized work and a heightened surveillance rather than an enriching compensatory program, it seemed unlikely that they would develop the skills to catch up with the “norm” for their age grade. The exercises and drills they provided might help the kids perform better on the standardized tests, but it was likely that overall they would fall increasingly behind. However, the programs provide the institution with funds for several teachers and aides as well as expensive computer technology.

Now let us return to the subject of trouble and punishment, keep-

ing in mind the inference that there is an uneasy connection between the subjective and objective modes of evaluation of worthiness and potential in school. Both of these modes draw on and reflect hegemonic cultural forms and values.

Breaking the Rules

What do kids do that gets them into trouble in school? Referral forms disclose the following categories of offense: cutting class, tardiness, misbehavior, defiance, disrespect, disruption, profanity, gambling, obscenity, fighting. The forms typically contained descriptions of the interactions and events that led up to infractions as well as the severity of the punishment. A brief description of some of these suggests the array of behaviors that might contravene the rules through any school day. Some like cutting and tardiness are predictable and self-explanatory; we know what they entail. Other categories such as gambling seem out of place in an elementary school. The few official actions taken against gamblers that I found usually documented the incident in vague language: “gambling with dimes”; “gambling in the cafeteria.” This last, involving one of the Troublemakers, was punished by two days in the Jailhouse.

The category of “misbehavior” on the referral form covers a range of possible acts from minor misdeeds that were punished by benching during recess to more grave acts that result in doing time in the Jailhouse. Examples of these offenses gleaned from the files include the following charges: eating candy, chewing gum, littering, spitting, not lining up properly, shooting rubber bands, chasing and running in the halls, goofing off, messing around. All have to do with the maintenance of a general atmosphere of order, cleanliness, comportment in the school. These infractions often contravene the “right time, right place” principle. Over the course of the school year 70 percent of those referred and punished for misbehavior were boys and 30 percent were girls.

Getting in Trouble: The Wrong Time and the Wrong Place

It is easy for a kid to get in trouble in school. It can happen at any time and any place during the school day. Rules encode the pervasive, all-encompassing power of adults over the movement of children’s bodies

through the space of the day and the physical regions of the school. One school rule captures this pervasiveness graphically: “Students will be in the right place at the right time.”

The right place at the right time is the subject of the timetable and the spaces in which activities are allowed. All movement in school is regulated, organized, and monitored by adults. Let us look at some of the different sites as children navigate in and out of trouble through the space and time of the school day, when children are supposed to be in classrooms doing work, on their way to other rooms in which work takes place, in the cafeteria, or on the playground at recess.

In the classroom, the teacher controls movement of bodies through time and space. The teacher decides when tasks begin, how long they last, when they end, and where they can be carried out. In the classroom, pupils must be doing tasks set by the teacher. The vast majority of work involves individuals sitting and listening or writing. So kids create endless excuses for moving around. This movement can lead to breaking the “right time, right place” rule. Children can get into trouble in classrooms if they move too slowly from one task to the next or if they move too quickly from one part of the room to another. Foot-dragging, slowing the pace down between tasks, is a frequently used form of resistance.

Playing in the classroom is against the rules. Play is supposed to be confined to the schoolyard in the periods of time allotted for the two recesses of the day. Otherwise, the yard is used as the instruction space for the physical education classes. At playtime, children stream out of the building and for twenty minutes in the morning and fifty minutes at lunchtime are ostensibly free to move from space to space within the yard, which is surrounded by a high chain-link fence.¹¹

During recess, children must either be on the playground or in the school cafeteria. All entrances to the building are guarded by playground aides who also patrol the bathrooms that, in the case of the boys, are a potential trouble zone. The adults complain that the boys go into the bathroom and urinate on the walls in various competitions.

Because the cafeteria is too small to accommodate the whole

11. Movement into spaces on the yard, however, is constrained within gendered and racialized distributions created and monitored by the children. My observation in a racially mixed school was that groups were overwhelmingly racially homogeneous. For a rich ethnographic account of the gender patterns of play, see Barrie Thorne, *Gender Play: Girls and Boys in School* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1993).

school, each grade has an assigned time for lunch. When that time is up, the children must leave the cafeteria for the yard, in order to make room for the next group.

Children hurry through their lunch in order to go out and play. One result of this organization of eating is that they often get in trouble for having food in the classroom after lunch. Having and eating food, candy, or chewing gum in class is against the rules except during authorized parties and the numerous candy drives initiated by teachers to earn money for class projects. This food rule seemed to affect boys more. One of them explained why this was so: he and his friends often didn't want to waste time eating at recess because they had to go out and reserve a place on the football field for their team; he didn't want to miss being picked for one of the teams. Older boys, who ate in the last shift, do not want to interrupt the game in order to eat. Girls rarely play team sports during recess; they walk around with friends or jump rope or play spontaneous games of catch that they organize themselves and do not have to hurry as much to compete for playground space.

In the yard, children run, shout, jump rope, throw balls, push, shove, hold hands, hang upside down until the bell rings. Those who want to spend recess indoors must request a pass from an adult to go into the library. A few teachers stay in the classroom at recess and kids stay in and play board games, chat, or take care of the classroom pets. It is interesting that this was the one space in the school day when I saw kids voluntarily interacting across race and gender lines. However, this space only opened up if a teacher was willing to give up lunchtime.

The auditorium is a space of institutionally organized cultural productions. It exists between pleasure, play, and classroom educational activity. The events that take place in that space are called assemblies. Some are about entertainment: plays, music, school productions as well as visiting artists. Very rarely are the programs produced and organized by the children themselves with adults playing only minor roles.

Assembly is where children learn how to be an audience: when to be quiet, look, and listen; when to laugh; when to clap; when to stop clapping. Children sit with their class on the hardwood floor of the auditorium cross-legged or with legs stuck straight out in front, often for long periods of time. They fidget, wiggle, touch others with legs or hands or elbows. Teachers sit in chairs at the end of each class row. A continual surveillance, weeding out, picking off of children who are whispering, giggling, laughing more obviously than the others or who

are just unlucky enough to get caught or who are known as “trouble-makers” and “ringleaders.”

Children must have authorized passes or be accompanied by an adult in order to move from one space to another in the school. They have no automatic “right” to be anywhere in school though by law they are required to be *in* school. Children must have adult permission to make trips to the bathroom. They are sent from class, referral slip in hand, to the Punishing Room. They are also sent on errands by teachers.

These transitions between spaces are a glorious opportunity for children to gain free time and reduce the hours spent doing work. Passage down the halls without a teacher offers a myriad of pleasures. To be alone for even a moment is a pleasure, to meet other children making similar journeys, to pass the open doors of classrooms and meet the gaze of others happy for some diversion no matter how small. Dragging out a trip from one space to another is a fine art, but one that holds the danger of being too protracted through making too many stops, lingering in front of too many bulletin boards, and arriving late for class. This breaks the “right time, right place” rule and gets you into trouble.¹²

The public spaces of the halls are fraught with potential trouble. The right to be in such a place and *how* to be there is the province of adults. A child in the hall is open to challenge by any adult and must have a good excuse for not having a pass. Sometimes even a pass or a good excuse is not enough; just the fact of being forced to come up with an explanation for one’s presence is the precursor of trouble. What happened to Keisha, a fourth-grade girl, is a good example from my field notes of this vulnerability when one is not under the protection of the classroom teacher.

I am standing on the landing with the vice principal, Mr. Russell, when I observe how small misdeeds can escalate into bigger infractions bearing larger consequences or punishments in the course of any interaction. The bell had rung and children are moving between classes. We can hear some children chattering excitedly as they are coming up the stairs. They are not loud or unrestrained.

12. Some children feel sick and have to go and lie down in the room, which serves as staff mailroom, copy center, and dispensary. Sickness as a ploy to get out of work did not seem to be used much by the kids at the school as an escape since the sickbed is right under the eye of many adults.

As they get to the top, they see us and fall silent. One little girl, very engrossed in the telling of a story, goes on talking after she glances at us.

Mr. Russell stops her. "Is that how you're supposed to behave in the halls?" The other two girls who have been quiet, scuttle down the hall and Mr. Russell tells Keisha to go back and come up the stairs properly. She obediently walks back down the steps in the direction she had come from and then returns making a silent, demure entrance. But there is the barest hint of parody in her primness which Russell does not miss. She is acting the part of ladylike decorum rather than sincerely expressing it. He calls her over and begins giving her a proper dressing down. She stands there shifting from foot to foot, looking him in the eye. This seems to me the correct stance since when children don't look adults in the eye but stare at the ground, the adult is likely to bark, "Look at me when I'm talking to you." He tells her to stand still, which she does. But now she is standing still on one leg. So he orders her to stand straight. She puts her feet together, beginning a slight shuffling little dance from foot to foot almost as if to keep her balance. At the same time she is looking Russell dead in the eye. He says, "Stop that dancing." Though her feet become still, her body sways ever so slightly. He has had enough. "Okay, you can spend the day in my office. Go and tell Mrs. Tyler [the class she is going to] that you're going to be with me today."

Adults not only regulate the passage through the time and space of the school day of individual children but, as we see in the case of Keisha, police their bodies and presentation of self. The right to this policing is hidden behind the bland, reasonable facade expressed by another school rule: "Children will be courteous, cooperative, and show respect for self, others and their surroundings."

Getting in Trouble: Regulating the Self

Body Trouble

Adults constantly monitor what the body of the child is saying to them, using the grammar of demeanor, posture, proper gesture. A certain humbling of the body, a certain expression of submission, a certain

obedience toward power must be displayed in order to get off without a penalty or, next best, to get the minimum. Movements of eyes, head, placement of arms, hands, and feet can be the cause of the escalation of trouble. Face to face with adult power, children's bodies should not jiggle, jounce, rock back and forth, twist, slouch, shrug shoulders, or turn away. In interactions with school adults, children are expected to make and maintain eye contact. Looking away, down at the ground, or off in the distance is considered a sign of insubordination. Hands must be held at the side hanging down loosely, limply, not on hips (an expression of aggression) or in pockets (a sign of insolence and disrespect). A certain fearfulness is desirable, but must be displayed with sincerity, without any cockiness. Bodies have to actively express respect for adult authority: if they are too rigid they give off a sign rebelliousness or insincerity. Any one or any combination of those movements could violate the "Be courteous, cooperative" rule.

In the classroom, teachers demand bodies be arranged in certain positions before work can begin: sit up straight, both feet on the floor, hands off the desk, eyes in front toward teacher, or down on the desk. Bodies must be properly arranged both individually and as a group before they can erupt from the classroom to play. They must organize themselves into neat lines before they can enter or exit from classrooms, though lines become raggedy as soon as teachers move ahead or lag behind.

Bodies can move too fast or too slow. Running in the hallway is forbidden. Moving too slowly in the classroom from task to task can get you in trouble, so can opening one's desk and getting out the required textbook in slow motion, or going over to the pencil sharpener and taking too long to sharpen the pencil. These things in themselves do not call for disciplinary action, but become the occasion for an intervention by the teacher that can escalate into real trouble.

Adult bodies physically symbolize power in the school. For one, difference in body size between adults and most elementary school kids is still enormous. Adult bodies loom over children in moments of trouble. Most disturbing, however, is the way that this embodiment of fearsome power is specifically signaled by the presence of the adult black men in the school; their size and appearance speak volumes in punishment. The bodies of the adult black men come to stand in for the physical power that lies behind the verbal reprimands to which school authority is limited. Three of the five African American men working

with children in the school are responsible for discipline. Each has impressive physiques, as if body size is a part of the job description. The figure whose job it is to strike fear in the hearts of children in school is epitomized by the intimidating physical presence of the African American male. Yet, these same men, guardians of law and order in the school, may become suspicious, dangerous characters in the eyes of ordinary citizens on the streets outside. The constant here is the fixing of meaning in the connection between black male bodies and fear.

Trouble and Emotion: "Attitude"

Whether the emotional expressions of children are proper displays of feeling or punishable acts is a matter of adult interpretation. Expressions of anger, outbursts of temper, tears of disappointment, while not against the rules, are potential moments of trouble. Many of the infractions coded as disruption, defiance, or disrespect—or sometimes as all three—seemed to emanate from the display of emotions by children, the performance of self in this relation of power described by the popular expression *attitude*. These generally involved interactions where children are seen as challenging adult authority and power. Girls committed approximately 40 percent of these infractions to boys' 60 percent; the vast majority were African American.

Adult descriptions of infractions on the referrals often invoked their reading of the tone of the exchange as expressed through children's body language and nonverbal forms of communication. Here is how a teacher documented one incident of defiance: "James was doing math, so I asked him to return Lashawn's geography book. The third time I asked he did it, but gave me a look that said, 'you bitch . . .' I cannot let this sort of action pass unnoticed." James's punishment was a cooling-off period in the Punishing Room. This was also the consequence for a girl who "responded very disrespectfully. Tone of voice, words used, body language, unwilling to acknowledge misbehavior, shoves blame back on teacher." Another girl got detention because, as the student specialist wrote, "She was 'moving' her mouth while P.E. teacher was talking." Another girl received after-school detention for a "sassy mouth, standing with attitude, walking away when I called to her in the 6th grade line at lunch." The same girl got two days of in-house detention for "disruption in class. disrespectful [*sic*] and defiant when spoken to. Mouthy and had an attitude." A white girl was sent to cool

off in the Punishing Room after she was charged with “defiance; flapping & pouting; slamming drawers, called Sharon a bitch.”

What is most significant for us here is that readings of “defiant attitude” are often deciphered through a racialized key. Gilmore’s study of literacy achievement in predominately low-income, urban black elementary school students corroborates this point.¹³ He found that many of the most crucial social interactions in school settings were highly charged with emotion and regularly interpreted by teachers in terms of students’ “attitude.”¹⁴ He documents how African American pupils’ expression of feeling in confrontations with authority figures in school often involved a bodily display of “stylized sulking” as a face-saving device. For girls, this included a sound such as “humpf” followed by chin held high, closed eyelids, and movement of the head upward and to the side. For boys, the display involved hands crossed at the chest, legs spread wide, head down, and gestures such as a desk pushed away. Both black and white teachers perceive these displays as threatening, as denoting a specifically black communicative style that they interpreted as showing a “bad attitude” by demonstrating the child’s refusal to align himself with the school’s standards, choosing instead to identify with what they considered a black lower-class style. Gilmore found that teachers used these displays as a measure of students’ academic potential and that teacher judgments about this kind of “attitude” weighed heavily when decisions about placement in special honors classes were being made, even outweighing more “objective” measures such as demonstrated academic achievement.¹⁵

Whether these ways of displaying emotion do or do not conform to the acceptable rules for comportment in school is not the main issue here. What I want to foreground with this example is the exercise of symbolic violence and the relationship between a hidden or noncognitive form of assessment and an official one. Cultural modes of emotional display by kids become significant factors in decisions by adults about their academic potential and influence decisions teachers make about the kinds of academic programs in which they will be placed. These are the kind of emotional displays, for example, that can also be the basis for placement in Special Day Classes or for denying access to enrichment classes.

13. Gilmore, “Gimme Room.”

14. *Ibid.*, 114.

15. *Ibid.*, 112.

Moments of discipline are also occasions when adults act emotionally, when the appearance of distance and control slips. I observed the way the adults' need to act the part of outrage or shock with the body seemed to stir up real expressions of feeling in them. This performance is something slightly shameful that must be guarded, kept private, protected from too much outside observation. Later, I was especially aware of how these displays entered into early considerations about allowing me to observe in the relatively private, hidden, space of the Punishing Room.

The Troublemakers almost by definition were characterized by school adults as defiant and disrespectful. At the same time, the boys are conscious of how adults often let go and lose control in moments of discipline. They charged that the teachers treated kids rudely, with no respect. They expressed strong feelings of resentment of the asymmetrical power relations that existed between the adults and themselves. They pointed to the different rules of demeanor and "attitude" that apply to the teachers.

TREY: You see the teachers talk about us having an attitude problem, but then they do have one too.

ANN: The teachers do? How?

TREY: They think that just because we're younger than them, they're older—they can have attitude with us or something. They think it's all right to treat us anyway they want.

ANN: An example?

TREY: The way they talk to us. Like they yelling up in your face and pointing at you—and you want to do that back and you get in trouble. But they don't want that done to them. *No!* They think they're *it*.

Horace told a story that for him exemplified the one-sidedness of the respect exchange:

The math teacher kept calling me by my last name but everybody else by their first name. He was getting on my nerves. [Horace's last name is Budd, so calling him by his last name did have a special twist.] I asked him about five times to stop doing it but he just kept on. He also called people names like *retard*. Then he was writing on the board—we was all laughing because he had a "murphy" [his

pants were caught in the back of his crotch]. Everyone was laughing but the teacher said, "Budd, you're going to be the first one out of this class. Get out right now." Then I just stayed out of the classroom till the whole second period was over.

Trey's observation that adults are rude to kids in school and Horace's example are not a distortion of reality in order to cast their own behavior in a good light. I witnessed the discourteous, harassing treatment of pupils by some of the school adults. This verbal disparagement and the harsh dressing-down of kids was carried out in the name of school discipline required by certain kinds of children; it was seen as an essential weapon, given the circumstances, in the creation and maintenance of order. It was typically unleashed against children who were black, poor, and already labeled as trouble; students whose parents had little power or credibility, who would come in and complain about how their kids were being treated.

For Troublemakers, this lack of reciprocity of respect and display of "attitude" on the part of the teachers is an important structuring element of the conditions of schoolwork that has consequences both for their interactions with adults as well as with their peers. I discovered that other research investigating teacher-student relations documented the way that pupils' feelings about disrespectful behavior on the part of teachers prompted reciprocation on their part: teachers who were uncivil were treated in kind.¹⁶

While the relations of power and the lack of respect for pupils by school adults was articulated as a source of real anger and emotion by the Troublemakers, the sense of resentment was not echoed by the Schoolboys, who generally did not engage in power struggles with the teachers. The Schoolboys, however, were conscious of the "work" they do to produce an identity that was unimpeachable. Though they

16. P. Marsh, E. Rosser, and R. Harre, *The Rules of Disorder* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978). This disregard on the part of adults also had an effect on interaction between peers. Ray Rist observed that kindergarten children identified by the teacher as high achievers began to model their own relationship with the children identified as lows after that of the teacher. He recorded a number of interchanges in the classroom in which the highs belittled the lows. For example: "When I asked Lilly [low group] what it was she was drawing, she replied, 'A parachute.' Frank [high group] interrupted and said, 'Lilly can't draw nothin'.'" Ray C. Rist, *The Urban School: A Factory for Failure, a Study of Education in American Society* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1973), 174.

described behavior that they engaged in that was technically rule breaking, they conform to the teacher's description of the ideal pupil who follows orders without argument or questions. They talked about the work they do to stay out of trouble. The performance of obedience and management of impression is a key element in this work. Martin, one of the Schoolboys, talked about the enactment of obedience. When I asked him how he managed to stay away from the Punishing Room, he replied: "Just kinda like what the teacher says—I just do it real quick." Martin knows that it is more than merely following orders. Keisha, after all, was following orders when she got in trouble in the hallway. Orders must be followed "real quick" without hesitation and sincerely played. It is not just doing what one is told but the visible commitment to the idea of following orders that is important. Martin understands that the speed of compliance demonstrates the unthinking impulse to obey; hesitation implies that perhaps a decision is being taken about whether to obey or not and is seen as a clear challenge to relations of power.

Clothes, Language, and Identities

The school has unwritten rules about clothing that remain informal so that they can deal as required with the coming and going of youth style. The policing of clothing at Rosa Parks is most vigilant around boys' style of dress. Certain articles of clothing have become identified by school as signals of rebellion, uncontrollability, of gang membership. The school reads male expression through clothing as the harbinger of more dangerous expressions, as if the representation of the thing is the thing itself.

Baseball caps, especially worn back to front and slightly angled, are a particularly powerful object in the contest of power between adults and children in the school. The unwritten rule is that caps are allowed before and after school and during the recesses. Many teachers ignore the rule as petty but call it into action at some point as an instrument of asserting dominance. This illustration from my field notes is an example of what I mean.

I have come to talk to Jamal's teacher at recess. He is going out the door, football in hand as I enter, but the teacher calls him back because I am there. He is wearing his cap pulled low on his fore-

head. He looks dismayed at the delay and asks how long it will be. The teacher seems furious at this question. "Don't you ever dare ask me how long I'm going to keep you or you'll be in here for the whole lunch period." He slouches into a seat. She continues to harangue: "Take that hat off! I want to see your eyes." He pulls it off slowly.

Some of the fundamental aspects of presentation and performance of self, such as language, as well as some of the more changeable and passing, such as style, can get a child in trouble. Language, like bodies, is important in conveying sincerity and deference. Style of address is a signal for adults to either escalate the demand for obedience or permit safe passage. For example, a "yeah" rather than "Yes, Mr. or Mrs. —" is considered cheeky. Mumbling in response to something an adult asks is also taken as possible insubordination and is usually followed with further interrogation to ascertain the intention.

The use of Black English, the mother's tongue, rather than "standard" English will get an African American child in trouble. This is true at the level of the formal curriculum as well as in terms of more subjective judgments about how its usage reflects on individual intelligence and cultural deficiency. All the reading, all tests, all communications with and of power are supposed to take place in Standard English. The whole lexicon of home and street, the way the children tell their lives to themselves and others must be squeezed into this standard. When you create yourself through words, the official language of power must be used in order to be rewarded directly or indirectly.

A defiant, challenging, oppositional body; dramatic, emotional expressions; a rich, complex nonstandard vocabulary establish the "outer limits" in a field of comparison in which the desired norm is a docile bodily presence and the intonation and homogeneous syntax of Standard English. This outer limit is exemplified by the black child: the closer to whiteness, to the norm of bodies, language, emotion, the more these children *are* self-disciplined and acceptable members of the institution.

I have been looking at relations of power in this discussion of school rules as if the only axis along which these operate is that of adult and child: adult policing of the boundaries and children's incursions into the territory and privileges of being "grown up." It is easy to run afoul of the rules, to get in trouble. The rules govern not just the sur-

faces of the time and spaces of school but also deep, personal structures: self-expression and the proper display of feeling. It is clear that there is an enormous amount of interpretation, of reading of the meaning of personal, as well as cultural, forms of communication, that takes place in exchanges between adults and children.

I have only briefly mentioned how race might make a difference in the exercise of rules. Yet the statistics that I have presented suggest that though all children may be up to their eyeballs in this sea of adult rules, the overwhelming majority of those who get in trouble in school are African American males.

How race is used as a filter in the interpretive work of making judgments about the implications of children's behavior is the subject of chapter 4. I will examine the racialized images, beliefs, and expectations that frame teacher appraisals of black children, in general, and African American boys, in particular. It is crucial to emphasize here that I am not concerned with investigating *individual* teacher's racial attitudes, but institutional discourses and practices. As a whole, teachers at Rosa Parks School seemed genuinely convinced of the racially blind, impartial nature of their practices. Schoolwide there were efforts made to infuse assemblies, classroom, and curriculum with "multicultural" programs. This is one reason why it seems imperative to lay out the processes by which well-intentioned individuals actually and actively reproduce systems of oppression through institutional practices and symbolic forms of violence.