

Public Abstract

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This dissertation endeavors to explore the ways in which policies of safety in the public school order the everyday lives of student-children. Using varying feminist methodologies, I explore the experiences that children have with the safety curricula, and the implications on their daily lives as a result of these policies. Children are exposed to a variety of rules and regulations as a way to teach them how to be "productive citizens and employees," by this particular school district. I use this intention as a premise to talk about how rules against "public displays of affection," and interests in "behavior management" intersect with the determining factors of gender and violence, respectively. This research also explores the larger implications of police in public schools, control over the bodies of children, and the problematics of popular conceptions of pre-adolescent and teenage bullying.

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