

BEYOND THE DRESS CODE: TEACHING THE HIDDEN CURRICULUM THROUGH  
REGULATING STUDENTS' BODIES

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A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department

of Sociology

University of Houston

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In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree of

Masters

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By

Yvonne Chen

April, 2017

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Yvonne Chen

**APPROVED:**

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Samantha Kwan, Ph.D.  
Committee Chair

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Jessica A. Brown, Ph.D.

---

Jennifer B. Arney, Ph.D.

---

Antonio D. Tillis, Ph.D.  
Dean, College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences  
Department of Hispanic Studies

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## **ABSTRACT**

Recently, there have been a string of cases where students abide by the dress code yet school officials still deem them as dress code violators. To address this issue, I use theories on the hidden curriculum and cultural capital to examine how teachers enforce the dress code and what informs their decisions. Interviews with 19 teachers at two different high schools in a racially diverse school district revealed that teachers perform the roles of both the educator and the disciplinarian. However, their ability to regulate students are limited by the administration. Teachers rationalize their actions under the frameworks of respectability and professionalism. These frameworks draw upon dominant understandings of race, gender, class, sexuality, and embodiment. When teachers regulate students as a result of a dress code violation, female students and students of color are given lessons on respectability and professionalism. This study shows that teachers' practices of regulation help reify the continuation of racial, gendered, and classed lines in high schools. Teachers adhere to anti-black middle class heteronormative values and attempt to instill those values in their students through the enforcement of said dress code. This is particularly harmful to marginalized groups in the educational system as these messages replicate androcentric, anti-black, middle class values.

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To try out my grade-school Chinese, 我想對我的嫲嫲、爺爺、媽媽、爸爸和陳美芝說「多謝」。 Without my family's love and unconditional support, even from 778 miles away, I would not be where I am today.

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## Teaching the Hidden Curriculum Through Regulating Students' Bodies

Problematic situations arise when school officials regulate dress based on a student's race, gender, class, sexuality, and/or embodiment. There have been several incidents in recent news where students abide by the dress code yet school officials still deem them as dress code violators. For example, officials removed a female student from a school dance because her dress was considered too short (Haettinger 2014). However, photographic evidence showed that her dress did not violate the dress code rule. The article further disclosed that fathers who were chaperoning the dance thought that she was dancing provocatively. If the consequence for that student was not based on the rules, then it must be based on something else. Thus, it is possible that school officials regulated her sexuality under the premise of violating the dress code.

One particular article of clothing that has been the center of attention are tight pants, specifically yoga pants and leggings. Schools across the nation have participated in banning these articles of clothing (Mazziotta 2016; Sorto 2016). Some school officials have pointed out that these bans are necessary because it promotes fewer distractions in the classroom (Lestch 2014; Penokie 2014). They suggest that these articles of clothing do not convey the respectability of one's body (namely a girl's body) and does not promote professionalism in a business setting. Protests have sprung up, denouncing schools for enforcing such tight restrictions as these rules shames a girl's body (Volsky 2014).

Other recent incidents covered in the news point to the possibility of discriminatory practices based on race. For example, in some schools, school officials ban certain black hairstyles such as dreadlocks, cornrows, and Afros (The Associated Press 2013; CBC News 2014; Gettys 2014). From these examples, these news reports suggest that regulation of student bodies are biased against certain groups of people, especially against women and people of color.

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So, what do these regulations mean for students? Looking at the socialization process, schools play a crucial part in a student's intellectual (Steele 1997) and psychological development (Doan 2006). Because school experiences may leave a lasting impression on students, it is important to examine all aspects of school experiences, including teacher-student interactions. One specific aspect of the teacher-student dynamic is how teachers teach students societal values. Teachers teach students about dominant cultural ideas and what is or is not valued (Jackson 1968).

To examine these interactions, I look at how teachers regulate students' bodies and how teachers potentially reproduce hegemonic ideas of race, gender, class, sexuality, and embodiment. One of the ways teachers regulate students' bodies and their appearance is through the school dress code. This regulation eventually teaches students what types of dress are appropriate. In addition, dominant understandings about status characteristics play a factor in determining how teachers regulate, which students teachers regulate, and to what extent teachers regulate students. Seeing students' statuses characteristics as "bad" can affect their future prospects in academics and future careers.

Based on 19 in-depth interviews with high school teachers who work in Houston, Texas, I examine how teachers regulate students' bodies and what informs their decisions. I find that there are several factors that influence teacher's ability to regulate. In addition, teachers abide by dominant cultural ideas on race, gender, class, sexuality, and embodiment when interacting with students who break the school dress code. This is particularly harmful to marginalized groups in the educational system. In part, the messages teachers send to students replicate androcentric, anti-black, middle class values.



## Teaching the Hidden Curriculum Through Regulating Students' Bodies

Previous studies centers on students' perception of dress regulations and not the teachers' (e.g., see Raby 2010; Smith 2010). In addition, literature on the dress code focuses on why school dress codes exist (e.g., see Freeburg, Workman, and Lentz-Hees 2004). By looking at teachers' perspective, one can understand how teachers potentially reproduce these dominant understandings. This reproduction reflects the "hidden curriculum." First coined by Jackson (1968) in *Life in the Classroom*, the hidden curriculum is an agenda within the school that is apart from the official curriculum, thus making it "hidden."

### BACKGROUND

Since the 1960s, there have been several changes to the law that have influenced school dress codes. These laws have established boundaries for freedom of speech and student safety. The first school dress code was established in 1969 by the United States Supreme Court, by the case of *Tinker vs. Des Moines Independent School District*. This case involved several students who wore black armbands to school as a sign of protest against the Vietnam War. This Supreme court case ruled that, under the first amendment guarantee of free speech, the students' armbands were constitutional as (1) the students were quiet and passive, (2) the students did not disrupt or impinge upon the rights of others. Since then, other cases of school dress code have been brought to court. For example, the 1972 case of *Gardner v. Cumberland School Committee* ruled that restrictions on school dress must present a clear and present danger to the student's health and safety and causes an interference with school work or creates school disruption, such as gang-related apparel. Discourses surrounding school dress code, such as the ones presented in the court cases, show the tension between student's free speech and student's safety, and a more general discourse about autonomy and conformity in dress (Thompson and Haytko 1997). Public discourses about dress code reflect the changes laws, such the rationalization of dress code.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Using theories about the hidden curriculum, cultural capital, and intersectionality as my theoretical framework, I assess how teachers regulate student's bodies through the dress code and what informs their decision. The perception of an individual's appearance can signal various meanings about race, gender, sexuality, class, and embodiment, potentially contributing to the differences in teachers' methods of regulation. Thus, teachers' regulations of students' dress can contribute a hidden curriculum that reproduce these hegemonic ideas. However, teachers' contributions to the hidden curriculum can be unintended or intended but not openly acknowledged (Martin 1976). Studies have shown that teachers' implicit biases contribute to different expectations for their students based on gender and race (Van Den Bergh et al. 2010).

### *The Hidden Curriculum*

Schools are a place where students can expand their intellectual horizons. In classes, teachers base their lessons on the official school curriculum. Students learn from this curriculum so that they are academically better equipped to progress to the next grade level. However, schools do not solely focus on the official, or academic, curriculum. Schools also utilize another curriculum—the hidden curriculum (Jackson 1968). This particular curriculum is not part of the official curriculum but is rather the subtle, unwritten, and often hidden part of the educational experience. The hidden curriculum consists of norms, values, beliefs, and attitudes that schools reinforce (Jackson 1968; Pascoe 2011), which influence a student's school experience and perspective on life (Cubukcu 2012). According to Apple (2004), schools can use both curricula to replicate a sameness of those who are already in the dominant group.

Teachers who regulate student bodies may perpetuate the hidden curriculum by teaching students characteristics of the dominant group. Through this interaction between teachers and

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students, cultural reproduction takes place. According to Bourdieu and Passeron (1990), cultural reproduction helps maintain the dominant group's power and sustains inequality. The dominant group engages in many ways to keep those who do not (or cannot) conform from entering the group, and those who do not conform risk facing consequences.

### *Cultural Capital Theory*

A student's cultural capital has been shown to contribute to their degree of success in school (Lareau 2015). Bourdieu (1986) defines cultural capital as the manifestation of values in materialistic objects that can translate into some kind of profit that can enable one to eventually enter the dominant group. This includes learned social graces, mannerisms, and vocabulary use, all of which contributes to one's cultural knowledge (Kenny 1996). This cultural knowledge reflects the dominant group's "tastes" (Bourdieu 1984). The dominant group defines what they consider good taste or bad taste, defining a world that revolves around those dominant or good tastes (Bourdieu 1984). Therefore, the dominant group is able to determine who has high cultural capital and low cultural capital. Individuals with lower cultural capital are placed at a disadvantage, which then bars them from entering into the dominant group. Since the dominant group's tastes tend to dominate the tastes of the other groups, individuals must conform if they wish to gain access into the dominant group or their resources (Bourdieu 1984). Those who do not conform increase the probability of experiencing societal disapproval (Bourdieu 1984). For an individual's cultural capital to be recognized, it must be recognized and essentially approved by a large group of people, especially to the gatekeepers (Lamont and Lareau 1988; Farkas et al. 1990). In schools, teachers may send messages of what has higher capital in a white, middle class society.

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Clothing can function as a form of nonverbal communication and can serve to project a certain type of image (Kalisch and Kalisch 1985). Studies that focus on nursing uniforms show that clothing not only indicate a role identification but also competency (Lehna et al. 1999). In the context of the classroom, clothing styles can also function as visible aspects of cultural capital (Morris 2005). Morris (2005) argues that students whose dress reproduces the cultural style preferred by those in power (i.e., teachers) are viewed as successful students. In this regard, students who understand the rules and are more attuned to the dominant culture are able to experience advantages (Rahman 2012). For example, teachers view successful students as ones who dress conservatively, wear clean clothes, and dress appropriately for their respective gender as prescribed by a heteronormative society. Therefore, when students dress according to these norms, teachers impose fewer regulations. Students' dress and the regulation of students' bodies are based on gender, sexuality, race, class, and embodiment. Students who know how to dress accordingly and do dress accordingly exhibit a form of cultural capital. However, this is not always the case, especially for women and people of color.

### *Intersectionality*

Drawing on the framework of intersectionality, I analyze teacher's regulations through the combined lens of gender, race, class, and other statuses, instead of in isolation (Crenshaw 1991; Collins 2000). In doing so, one can have a more complete picture of the situation and how the reproduction of inequality, dominance, and oppression can occur as a result of these combined statuses. For example, Morris and Brea (2017) argue that when examining the discipline of students, it should be done through an intersectional lens. In their study, they found that female students had lower odds of being referred to the office than male students. However, applying an intersectional lens, black female students were three times more likely

than white female students to be referred to the office for the same rule violation (Morris and Brea 2017). The application of this framework usually draws upon qualitative methods (McCall 2006). Therefore in this study, I conducted in-depth interviews with teachers.

### *The Role of Teachers*

In addition to being educators, teachers are also disciplinarians (Toshalis 2010). Teachers constantly make decisions and evaluate students based on their performance and behavior. In this evaluation, there is also the regulation of students' bodies via the dress code. Many students receive messages about how to dress on a daily basis. Whether students comply with the standard of dress or not, they receive these messages nonetheless. The hidden curriculum is revealed when teachers evaluate students on a daily basis and make remarks about their dress (Kentili 2009). And so, if teachers are continuously regulating student bodies, then students themselves are under constant surveillance. Foucault (1995) posits that surveillance is vital to the practice of teaching and discipline. Teachers judge and discipline student bodies which reinforces their power over students. They discipline students by delivering consequences. For instance, if a student breaks the dress code, the teacher is likely to correct that violation. The teacher can verbally tell the student to correct their attire, such as, "pull up your pants," send them out of the classroom, or have them suspended from school.

Through the hidden curriculum, teachers teach students what they consider mainstream (i.e., white middle class values) and how students may potentially achieve success (Rahman 2012). Students who know how to "play the rules of the game" may experience more success (Kenny 1996; Rahman 2012; Lareau 2015). Kenny (1996) suggests that by following the rules, knowing when to break them, and how to get away with them, are all part of the middle class "game." And in knowing how to play the game, students accumulate cultural capital, which

potentially helps them advance economically and professionally in later life (Kenny 1996).

These forms of cultural capital are based on dominant understandings of gender, sexuality, race, class, and embodiment.

### GENDER

Studies have shown that teachers regulate students' bodily practices based on traditional gender roles (Martin 1998; Morris 2007). As early as preschool, teachers are already attempting to control how young children should act according to their gender (Martin 1998). In the study, teachers often told girls to be quiet and restrict their bodies. This reinforces the idea of femininity and how females are socialized to behave in a more restrictive manner (Bartky 1997). Boys, on the other hand, were allowed to be aggressive and dominate other's spaces (Martin 1998), which reinforces masculinity (Connell 2005). Skeggs (2000) uses the theories of capital to understand the expression of femininity. Cultural capital relates to the knowledge and taste that is expressed through the body, signals the various forms of cultural belonging, and is accumulated through training and qualifications. As such, clothing and other forms of embodiment not only contribute to the ability to express femininity, but a "natural" form of femininity (Bourdieu 1987, Skeggs 2000). In these cases, the teacher regulated the student based on their perceptions of traditional gender norms. These gendered regulations reveal the teacher's hidden curriculum, which are lessons in femininity and masculinity.

Turning toward the dress code, there are gendered regulations as well. To have gender-based dress codes, school officials must show that there is a "legitimate and important" basis for them (Smith 2012:255). Reasons include reducing gang related activities, preventing distractions, teaching students "community values," and administering school discipline (Smith 2012:255–256). However, these "community values" can pose potential problems. What are

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these “community values” that schools instill in students? As noted by Pascoe (2011), these community values could be part of a hidden curriculum that reinforces heteronormativity, among other societal norms. For example, schools regulate the presentation and performance of gender (Morris 2007; Pascoe 2011). In gender performance, individuals are accountable for meeting the standards of their sex category (West and Zimmerman 1987). When the individual fails to meet the standards, others attribute blame to the individual instead of to a problematic society that enforces a gender dichotomy (West and Zimmerman 1987). An individual's gender performance must match up to their sex category or else they will risk facing consequences. There have been studies that show how queer students and LGBT studies were not welcomed in an educational setting (Lipkin 2002). For example, one case study showed that students who did not conform to the expected presentation and performance of gender was barred from school activities (Smith 2012). This is problematic for certain students as they are missing out on a part of school life that is shared by many students. Previous studies have shown how sexuality is a means to control students (Wolpe 1988; Pascoe 2011). In particular, a girl's sexuality is constantly policed. While a boy's masculinity is rooted in sexual prowess, a girl's femininity is rooted in her abstinence from sexual intercourse (Tolman 1991). Misogynistic terms such as “slut” not only diminishes a girl's body into a sexual object but polices women into remaining chaste.

## RACE

In addition to the influence of gender on teacher's interactions with students, race also influences teachers' decisions about when and how to regulate students. For example, in the context of language use, some languages, accents, and linguistic usage denote a higher status than others (Cobas and Feagin 2008). Language is closely tied to race. For example, one study revealed that those who speak standard American English rate those who speak African-

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American Vernacular English as unfavorable (Rodriguez, Cargile, and Rich 2004). Qualitative studies show that educators display racist assumptions when interacting with students. For example, Cobas and Feagin (2008) found that professors exhibited blatant racism towards the student, as they did not think that Mexican Americans could demonstrate English proficiency. These racialized examples show that not only do teachers discipline students on the volume of their voice, but as well as how they speak.

Turning toward teachers' regulation based on student's dress, in Morris's (2005) ethnographic study, he observed that teachers imposed fewer regulations upon white students than students of color. For example, when black males, Latinos, and white males wear a "street style," only black males and Latinos were met with censure because they were seen as "dangerous" compared to whites (Morris 2005). In this case study, teachers' biased perceptions led to differences in the regulation of black, Latino, and white males. This plays on the stereotypes that pertain to each group—the perception of blacks and Latino as threatening and whites as non-threatening.

Privilege contributes to a teacher's unequal treatment of students as well. Privileges are inherent characteristics, such as whiteness, which enable one to navigate through life easier (hooks 1982; McIntosh 1988; Collins 2000). These unearned privileges benefit whites in ways that people of color do not experience in certain circumstances. In the above example, white students are able to escape the teacher's negative perceptions of their street style while students of color are not. These biased regulations contribute to the differences in teachers regulating student's dress. In a school's dress code, there are rules pertaining to how a student's hair should be worn. However, discrimination can occur based on certain hairstyles. Certain black hairstyles are not considered acceptable and even banned in educational settings. For example, Tamon



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George, a black male student, was banned from an academic conference because he wore dreadlocks (CBC News 2014). For some black women, wearing their hair in braids or afros has led to job loss because their hair was considered “too ethnic” (Patton 2006). Patton (2006) highlights the many ways in which white beauty standards are not only considered beautiful by the majority of the population, but also viewed as the norm. Those who do not or cannot adhere to those standards are likely to face harsh consequences, such as exclusion from educational and employment opportunities.

However, race (and other status characteristics) do not solely account for the differences in teachers' regulation of students. Rather, it is the interlocking workings of these status characteristic that contribute to the differences in teachers' regulation. For example, although women's bodies have been subjected to sexualization, different groups experience various degrees of sexualization. Case in point, society perceives black bodies, especially black girls, as hypersexualized (hooks 1982). Hypersexuality refers to the accentuation of black females' sexuality. Referring to Morris's (2007) study, some teachers perceive black female students as too sexually mature and sexually provocative. In order to curb these unacceptable characteristics, the schools in the study had clubs for students that teaches them “proper manners,” such as how to be “ladylike” (Morris 2007). Even when black females exhibit traditional forms of femininity, some teachers still perceive black female students as overly assertive, an achievement that is not considered traditionally feminine (i.e., white femininity), and so these students are subject to constant reprimands more so than other groups of females (Morris 2007). This form of harsher discipline is similar to Ferguson's (2000) findings about black males in school; teachers perceive black males as more mature and think they should be subject to harsher or adult like punishments. In both cases, black females and black males are subject to “adultification” in

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which teachers perceive black students as adults rather than children (Ferguson 2000). Although being treated as an adult may be positive, in this case, being treated as an adult brought about negative consequences. Not only can the race of the student impact a teacher's decision on regulation, but also their skin color. In a study by Hannon, DeFina, and Bruch (2013), young African American women with the darkest skin tone had a higher chance of being suspended in comparison to those with the lightest skin tone.

Racism is detrimental to students' of color education. For example, students of color are more likely to be sent to the office or to be held after school than white students (Wallace, Goodkind, Wallace, and Bachman 2008). On average, black students are disproportionately suspended and expelled three times more than white students (Losen et al. 2015; U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights 2014). This is a cause for concern as out-of-school suspension is one of the primary indicators of high school dropouts, which stands as a direct link to the school-to-prison pipeline (Balfanz, Brynes, and Fox 2012; Fenning and Rose 2007). Morris (2007) claims teachers' restriction of black girls' body is detrimental to their education as these regulations mold them into less active and more passive learners. By constantly telling black female students to act "ladylike," it sheds light on what the standard for femininity is.

### CLASS

Another interlocking factor that contributes to the differences in teachers' regulation of students' bodies is class. For instance, some teachers may view poor children as undeserving and inferior (Adair 2001). They may view these children as "dirty," and having poor hygiene (Adair 2001), leading teachers to stigmatize those who exhibit these characteristics. Those who exhibit these characteristics are often seen as not being in control of their bodies, thus pinning them as

essentially “uncivilized” (Mason 2013). “Civilized” bodies require finesse and strict self-discipline (Elias 2000). However, these so called uncivilized bodies do not reflect poor bodily control but rather a range of factors, such as stress, unsafe living environments, and poor nutrition, all of which contribute to stratified health outcomes (Mason 2013). As people of color are often associated with the working class, students of color may tend to keep up with appearances (Pascoe 2011). Therefore, dress is not always a constant, visible, and accurate indicator of class. However, certain styles of dress associated with the working class and the perception of poor bodily display play a role in the inequality of treatment (Adair 2001; Morris 2005).

Those in power can reproduce a sameness by selecting and maintaining a shared sense of style and taste by excluding people who seem to be different from the group (Essed and Goldberg 2002). According to Freeburg, Workman, and Lentz-Hees (2004), one of the rationales for a school dress code is that students should exhibit cleanliness because it promotes the general health and welfare of the student. Terms such as “well-groomed” and “neat” signal a preferred uniformed look for students. This emphasis on a uniformed sameness reflects middle class values. At the same time, this marginalizes working class students as they may not have the necessary means to “dress nicely.”

### EMBODIMENT

Different forms of embodiment, such as bodily adornment, can contribute to differences in perception as well. For example, girls and women who exhibit hairlessness, have smooth skin, and demonstrate the expert use of makeup embody femininity (Bartky 1990). However, not all can achieve this, as “looking good” requires the investment of money (buying the necessary products), time (application of the products), and specialized knowledge (knowing what products

to buy and how to apply the products) (Bartky 1990). Moreover, many cosmetic products are made for lighter skin and not darker skin. Women with darker skin who want to look good will have to invest more time searching for the products that specifically match their needs.

In addition to gender, race, and class biases, teachers can also be biased against students with certain body types. Although research on this phenomenon is mixed, with some studies showing little effect (Wang, Treat, and Brownell 2008; Shackleton and Campbell 2014), some studies have indicated a tendency among educators to discipline differently based on students' body type. For example, students recognize that teachers treat other students unfairly based on body types (Raby 2010). Looking at female students, school officials tend to enforce fewer regulations on thin females than physically developed females (Raby 2010), providing evidence that students of different builds are subject to more regulations. Teachers and school officials who perceive students who are more physically mature enforce harsher regulations (Ferguson 2000; Morris 2007). These students may experience a higher frequency and harsher regulation because they do not fit into the dominant group's cultural preference in body shape. Regulating bodies and showing preference to thinness can result in harmful consequences. For example, stigma toward overweight bodies are linked with psychological consequences such as depression, lower self-esteem, and body dissatisfaction (Puhl and Heuer 2009).

Gender, sexuality, race, class, and embodiment have the potential to influence teachers' regulation of student bodies and dress. For my study, I ask, how do teachers in public high schools enforce the dress code? What values do teachers attempt to instill in students when they enforce the dress code? And when enforcing the dress code, how do teachers' regulations of student's dress challenge and/or reinforce dominant understandings of race, gender, class, sexuality, and embodiment?

### METHODS

To answer my research questions, I conducted 19 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with teachers in two public high schools. I conducted interviews as they allow me to gather in-depth information and examine the thought processes teachers have when deciding how and when to regulate students. Using this method, I was able to understand the context of their actions and how they interpret their actions (Maxwell 2013). Following grounded theory, using a semi-structured interview allows for flexibility and enables me to follow emerging themes during the interview (Charmaz 2014).

#### *Setting*

Originally, my study focused on one school. However, due to recruitment difficulties, my study took place in two public high schools in the same suburban district located in Houston, Texas. The student body in this district is comprised of: Asian/Pacific Islander (21.9 percent), black (31.3 percent), Latino (24.1 percent), and white (22.5 percent). About half of the student body (51.5 percent) are male students, and half (48.5 percent) are female students. In this district, I chose two schools that did not require a school uniform. A school with no uniform dress code policy allows students to have more options in what they wear. This gives teachers more options in regulating students' bodies than teachers who work at a school that requires a school uniform for students. To gather data on teachers' regulation of both female and male bodies, I did not examine any all-boys or all-girls school. These schools also have a racially diverse student population. Although racial diversity may be framed as a positive factor in an educational setting (Chang 1999), it is important to study how students are treated in racially diverse schools. One recent study showed that youths of color perceived greater discrimination in more racially

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heterogeneous schools (Benner and Graham 2013). As the literature has shown, teachers can sometimes unknowingly engage in discriminatory acts (Lundeberg 1997).

Woodcreek High School<sup>1</sup> has a racially diverse group of students. The student demographics are as follows: Asian/Pacific Islander (39.2 percent), black (17.9 percent), Latino (15.2 percent), and white (24.3 percent). About half of the student body (49 percent) are male students, and half (51 percent) are female students. At Woodcreek High School, about 20 percent of the students are economically disadvantaged. Students are recorded as economically disadvantaged if they are eligible for free or reduced-price meals under the National School Lunch and Child Nutrition Program (Texas Education Agency 2015).

Glendale High School has the following student demographics: Asian/Pacific Islanders (12.7 percent), blacks (37.3 percent), Latino (43.8 percent), and whites (4.1 percent). Like Woodcreek High School, Glendale High School, 52.5 percent are male students and 47.5 percent are female students. According to Glendale High School's Texas Education Agency Report Card, 57 percent of students are economically disadvantaged.

### *Participants*

At Woodcreek High School and Glendale High School, 2.5 percent of teachers are Asian Americans, 29.7 percent are black, and 62.8 percent classified as white. The district did not provide racial demographics of Hispanic teachers. For sex demographics, 57.7 percent are female teachers and 42.3 percent are male teachers.

As previously mentioned, I interviewed 19 high school teachers, asking them about the ways they discipline students for dress and physical display. Table 1 summarizes the teachers' demographic characteristics. In total, I interviewed 9 female teachers and 10 male teachers. One teacher identifies as Asian American, 7 as black, 2 as Latina, and 9 as white. Twelve teachers do

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not teach a single grade level, but rather teach classes that are catered to all high school students.

The average number of years they have been working at their respective schools is about 6.5 years, with shortest at half a year and the longest at 21 years. Overall, the average number of years they have been in a teaching position in their lifetime is approximately 16.3 years, with shortest at two years and the longest at 41 years. The average age of teachers is 43 years old, with the youngest at 25 and the oldest at 65. Fourteen out of 19 teachers obtained a bachelor's degree, and 5 also have a master's degree.

**TABLE 1. Teacher Demographics**

<b>Demographic</b>	<b>Mean/Count</b>	<b>Range</b>
<i>Gender</i>		
Female	9	—
Male	10	—
<i>Race</i>		
Asian American	1	—
Black	7	—
Latinx	2	—
White	9	—
<i>Age</i>	43	25–65
<i>Marital Status</i>		
Single	8	—
Married	9	—
Divorced/Widowed	2	—
<i>Estimated Income</i>	\$77,428	\$51,000-\$110,000
<i>Highest Educational Attainment</i>		
Bachelors	14	—
Masters	5	—
<i>Years Taught</i>		
Current School	6.5	.5–21
Overall	16.3	2–41

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### *Access*

Before interviewing teachers, I gained permission to access both schools to conduct my interviews with teachers. I obtained consent from the University of Houston's Institutional Review Board (IRB), the district's accountability research department, and the school's principal (This is the principal of the entire school. This should not be confused with assistant principals.) to conduct my interviews. When I visited the schools, I obtained a visitor's pass before meeting with the teacher. This gave me access to move around the school and increased the chances that I was taken seriously. When presenting myself to teachers, I referred to myself as a sociology master's student at the University of Houston. This established my credibility and status with teachers. Although having the pass decreased the chance that I was not mistaken as a high school student, this did not prevent teachers from stopping me in the hallway. Teachers who were on patrol would question my presence. Only when I pointed out my visitor's pass would they let me continue on my way. This happened on five separate occasions at both schools.

### *Recruitment*

I first contacted one teacher from Glendale High School and one teacher from Woodcreek High School asking them if they would be interested in participating in my study. These teachers would serve as my informants as they were a well-known in the school and had connections to other teachers. Participants were mostly recruited through snowball sampling (Berg 1995). As I was having recruitment difficulties, I reached out to a teacher whom I interviewed during a pilot study at Woodcreek High School.<sup>2</sup> This teacher served as another gateway for other teachers at that school. Because I needed to recruit teachers more quickly due to time constraints, I engaged in other recruitment strategies.



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Using the district website, I located the teacher's emails for both high schools. Each week, I sent out 15 recruitment emails (as opposed to emailing all teachers) because I wanted to recruit teachers through referrals. I preferred referrals as this would establish some trust with potential participants. Additionally, sending out 15 emails per week would ensure that I have contacted every teacher within one month. This recruitment strategy resulted in 5 interviews. In total, I interviewed 11 teachers from Woodcreek High School and 8 teachers from Glendale High School.

The contents of the recruitment email explained the contents of the study (i.e., I am interested in their experiences with students), that the interview will be audio recorded, the duration of the interview, and compensation (a \$25 gift card)<sup>3</sup> upon completing the interview. See Appendix A for an example of an email script. I also attached an ad to the email so that teachers may print it out for their convenience or forward the ad to other teachers (see Appendix B for the ad). At the end of each interview, I asked teachers if they knew other teachers who would be interested in participating in my study. If they did, I asked if they would be willing to introduce me to them in person so that potential teachers were familiar with me. I used this meeting to explain my study, the interview process, and setting up a meeting time. Afterwards, I sent them an email recapping the information presented at the brief meeting. This recruitment strategy resulted in 8 interviews (3 teachers from Glendale High School and 5 teachers from Woodcreek High School).

When a teacher agreed to the interview, I worked with them to see what meeting times and locations were best suited for the both of us. I suggested to teachers that I am able to arrange an interview when they are on campus and around school hours so that it was more convenient for them. Having the location and time centered around the school could help teachers better

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recall situations that happened during school hours. As teachers may partake in other activities such as fundraisers, preparing students for competitions, or other school related activities, interviewing them on campus before or after school hours was ideal time and location. The classroom may be the most convenient place for the interview as each teacher is assigned a room. I made sure that the interview took place in a quiet classroom. I sent teachers a reminder via email about the interview a week before, two days before, and then the day of the interview to confirm the time and location of our meeting.

### *Interview*

Before starting the interview, I provided teachers with a consent form. The consent form stated that participation is on a voluntary basis and they may decide to refrain from answering any questions they want or withdraw from the interview. This information was repeated during the interview when necessary. I paraphrased what was covered in the consent form as they read it over. I then asked if they had any questions before starting the interview. After their questions were answered, I asked them to sign the form if they agree to the interview. Then, I started the audio recorder and began the interview. The average length of the interviews lasted 45 minutes, with the shortest interview at 28 minutes and the longest interview at an hour and 13 minutes.

In the interview, I covered a number of areas. Because this is a semi-structured interview, I did not strictly follow my interview guide word for word. Instead, I used my interview guide as a guide, allowing me to be flexible and follow salient themes. However, I still covered the topics from my interview guide. My interview essentially consisted of six parts. For the full interview guide, see Appendix C. First, I asked about their background information, such as the number of years they have taught at the school. Second, I asked them about their goals as a teacher and goals for their students. In the pilot study, this section helped me gain rapport with teachers.

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They became more open to me as they saw that I was interested in their experiences as a teacher. In the next section, I asked about the dress code issue at their school. I also ask them about their image of an ideal student, focusing on physical attributes. This is to gauge their expectations for their students and students in general. Then, I asked questions specifically relating to the dress code, such as what is the dress code at their school, and what is the protocol if a student breaks the dress code. Next, I asked teachers to recall specific examples and various situations of when a student broke the dress code. If teachers had difficulty recalling examples, I asked them to focus on a situation that happened recently and to take me through the account step by step. Asking about specific details, including what actions they took, the student's reactions, and the student's physical attributes helped the teachers recall more details about the situation. Lastly, I asked a few demographic questions and if they would like to include any other information that can better help me understand their experiences. After the interview was complete, I stopped the recording.

During my data collection process, I experienced several delays. These delays ranged from a few minutes to a few weeks. During the interviews, students would come in and talk to teachers, so I paused the interview until the students left. Similar situations occurred throughout the process. At other times, an administrator interrupted the interview. For example, I had to reschedule Sharron's interview on three separate occasions because an administrator called her down for unplanned meetings. Delays occurred with several teachers, and I had to reschedule interviews with a total of five teachers. Due to these delays and time restrictions, I was only about to interview 19 teachers.

During each interview, I paid close attention to the teacher's non-verbal behavior, such as gestures, tonal changes, and prolonged or out of place pauses as this may indicate something

significant. I also asked questions that related to missing data, contradictory information, and clarity. At the end of the interview, I debriefed them on my study, thanked them for their time, and offered them the gift card. I bought these gift cards. Because of snowball sampling, I also asked them for any recommendations for participants. I was able to meet some teachers in person, but they declined to participate. For the teachers I was not able to meet in person, I emailed them, stating that the current teacher had suggested that they may be interested in participating in my study.

After the interview was over, I spent about ten minutes writing and reflecting on the interview, such as the setting, the teacher's appearance, their behavior before, during, and after the interview, and any other thoughts that comes to mind. I reflected on the potential questions I wanted to ask for the next participants to gain a deeper understanding on emerging themes. In addition, I also documented any analytic ideas that occurred to me so that I could revisit them later. Later, I inputted all written memos in ATLAS.ti. ATLAS.ti is a program that aids researchers in creating and organizing codes and memos. Memoing and reflecting on the interview occurred after every interview.

### *Transcription*

Transcription was a multiphase process. Throughout the entire transcribing process, I used Express Scribe Transcription Software from NCH Software to help me transcribe my interviews. The Express Scribe Transcription Software allowed me to sufficiently slow down the audio recording thus enabling me to transcribe the interview with accuracy, precision, and speed. First, I transcribed audio recording into a Word Document with the recording slowed down. Then, I checked my transcription for accuracy and made any corrections when necessary with the audio at normal speed. Lastly, I added extra commentary from my notes or the audio

recording that captures the essence of the interview, such as tonal changes, prolonged pauses, and non-verbal communication.

After the first interview, I reread the transcription of the previous interview and memos before the next interview. If I had not transcribed and coded the interview before my next scheduled interview, I listened to the recording and read my memos before conducting the next interview to refresh my memory on what I needed to ask in light of emerging data and the revised interview guide. To make sure I allowed enough time to review my interviews, I attempted to schedule each interview a day or two apart. I also memoed any analytical ideas during transcription that comes to mind. I inputted memos from the interview, transcripts, and coding into ATLAS.ti. Throughout all of my interviews, I continuously followed themes that were salient, repetitive, or contradictory.

### *Data Analysis*

To code my data, I followed grounded theory as expressed by Charmaz (2014). First, I coded to define, categorize, summarize, and interpret each piece of data (Charmaz 2014). Then, I used focused coding, meaning that I coded my initial codes. Using grounded theory, I looked for concepts and processes that emerge from the data. Although I used information that participants share with me, because I am using a constructivist approach, the interpretations will be from my point of view. I realize that coding is interactive, so my questions and codes changed in light of new data. When any emerging themes are salient, I further explored those areas in future interviews. To achieve theoretical saturation, I continued sampling until no new themes emerged. And to examine the consistency of the codes, I included cases that not only occur at these two suburban schools, but also cases from other schools.

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In initial coding, I was mindful of new, missing, salient, repetitive, or contradictory data. Initial coding allowed me to condense and synthesize my interviews. I also coded incident by incident, since part of my interview asks teachers to recall specific situations. Coding closely to the data helped me refrain from coloring the data from biases I may have. In focused coding, I analyzed the most significant and salient codes, and focused on those codes. These were the codes that best addressed my research questions. In this regard, I again refined and focused my data. Throughout the coding process, I created analytical memos in ATLAS.ti. I used these memos to provide insight to what was happening in the data, explore teacher's processes, and reflect on analytical codes.

### VALIDITY AND RESEARCH IDENTITY

When addressing validity, one must address how "accurate" the information from teachers are. Although I strongly encouraged teachers not to discuss the content of the interview outside of the interview, I could not guarantee that the information did not slip out. If information about the interview slipped out or if teachers talk amongst themselves about the interview, it could steer some participants to give superficial or ready-made answers for my interview. Speaking to social desirability, teachers may want to come across as a fair or a non-discriminating teacher and may already have a formulated answer before the interview. Because I adjusted my interview guide in light of emerging themes, teachers could not have anticipated all my questions and have ready-made answers. I also encouraged teachers to speak freely as I would not be using any name identifiers my paper. Because interviews usually took place in a closed classroom, teachers could candidly speak about the problems they faced with students, other teachers, and administrators. As a young social researcher, older teachers often referred me

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to younger teachers, so that I could get a “fresh” perspective. A little less than half of the participants that I was able to interview were under at or below the age of 35.

As previously mentioned, my appearance can potentially lessen my credibility with these teachers, and ultimately affect the relationship I establish with them. I am a young, petite, Asian American woman, and teachers have perceived me as a high school student, thus lessening my credibility. To combat this issue, I compensated by wearing a blazer and slacks to schools so teachers will be less likely to question my presence at the school and take me seriously.

However, I was still stopped in the hallways and teachers questioned my presence in the high school. And as a woman, participants, especially males, may be more attuned to the gendered aspect of the school dress code. This may prompt them to give me generic answers as they try to present themselves as neutral enforcers and being fair when it comes to disciplining student bodies. At the end of one interview, a teacher expressed how he hoped he had not offended me.

As an intersectional feminist researcher, I also realize that I may focus more on how different intersections of social statuses affect different aspects of the teachers' interactions with students.

In the interviews, I focused on asking teachers for specific incidents related to the regulation of student's dress and details regarding the event, instead of just asking for the student's

characteristics I attempted not to ask leading or loaded questions that might prompt a specific type of response, which could bias the results. During data analysis, I did not dismiss negative cases. Instead, I addressed them to see what factors may have contributed to that specific case.

These cases could highlight significant factors that I may not have addressed before and can contribute to new and emerging themes. As I was not able to conduct a member check, I conducted peer checks with other graduate students and faculty members at various universities

to check the interpretation of my results.

### ETHICS

As previously mentioned, I obtained consent from the school district, the schools that I conducted interviews at, and the teachers being interviewed. Not only did I follow the guidelines according to the University of Houston's guideline on ethics and the Belmont Report, but I also complied with the school's district guidelines on research projects. This includes protecting the identity of the teachers and the schools. To protect the identity and privacy of people and the school, I used pseudonyms in my analysis.

### FINDINGS

With this study, I aim to analyze the ways teachers regulate students' bodies through the dress code and the values they try to instill in students. In this section, I present the results of my data. Appendix D shows the dress code rules for both of these schools. These rules are taken from the student handbook. The dress code rules will be explained in more detail in the next section. I divided my results into three categories. Three main themes contributed to the differences in teacher's enforcement of the dress code. First, several factors influence which teacher can regulate students. Secondly, teacher's ideas on traditional gender norms influence which students are regulated. Third, teacher's racialized ideas influence which students are regulated. Together, these three themes inform how and why students' bodies are regulated.

#### *Ability to Regulate*

While one can assume that teachers can regulate students at any time, there are several factors that influence a teacher's ability to regulate student's bodies. The first factor centers how the perceived support or nonsupport of the administration affects the extent to which teachers discipline their students and how they feel about enforcing the dress code. The second factor



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focuses on what teachers prioritize when it comes to the dress code, whether it is the student's education or punishing the students. Lastly, the third factor centers on how gender affects teacher's delegation of dress code enforcement.

### *Supportive v. Unsupportive Administration*

Teachers cited assistant principals as one group of people that also have the power to discipline students. Sometimes teachers simply referred to them as "the administration," "administrators," or "principals." While teachers can regulate a student's dress, the assistant principals can enforce the dress code as well. However, some teachers cited that they themselves cannot actually deliver dress code punishments, such as writing students up for detention, suspending them, or putting them in in-school suspension (ISS). Assistant principals are the ones who can perform these tasks. Teachers perceive support from the administration when administrators consistently enforce the dress code.

A supportive administration is characterized as an administration that supports and backs up teachers. Support comes in the form of enforcement, particularly when the administration hands out punishment to students who break the dress code. For example, some teachers at Glendale High School favor assistant principals' dress code sweeps. During these sweeps, an assistant principal will enter the classroom in the beginning of class time, evaluate students, and pick out the students they think broke the dress code. Students who are not in compliance with the dress code will be asked to comply. Depending on what the infraction is, assistant principals will deliver what they think is appropriate consequence. For example, male students who are not shaved will be sent to the nurse's office to shave their facial hair unless they can provide a note that they cannot shave due to religious or health reasons. Other students may be given in-school suspension (ISS) where they are suspended for the remainder of the school day, away from the

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classroom. ISS, a form of isolation punishment strategy, may be problematic. As Stoughton's (2005) study show, pre-service teachers begin to normalize isolation punishment for "hard to control" students.

At Glendale High School, many teachers express their gratitude for dress code sweeps. Emily, a white female teacher who works at Glendale High School, thinks that dress code sweeps are "really awesome because [the sweeps that are enforced by the assistant principals] put a school accountability, and it backs up what I do as a teacher." She also acknowledges it is impossible to catch all the students who break the dress code. When I was walking through the halls to interview teachers in their classrooms, I saw some teachers stationed outside their classroom, monitoring students as they went to their next class. In a span of five minutes where students are moving to and from classrooms, Emily notes that it is difficult notice and catch all violations. She also says that in general, assistant principals would confront a student if they noticed a dress code violation, but the task is difficult when "a thousand kids walk by you in five minutes, you're not going to notice what all one thousand kids are wearing." Instead of the between-class monitoring style, she likes how the assistant principals collectively evaluate and hand out punishment to students. This is so that administration can catch dress code violators not only between classes but during classes.

Because the assistant principals also enforce the dress code, teachers claim that this can help maintain a positive bond with their students. For example, Brian, a white male teacher at Glendale High School, says that this method of enforcement is preferable: "That way, *we're* not the bad guy. *They're* the bad guys. And then it helps with the kids that I'm the good guy. They can come talk to me and then I can influence them and make a difference." Leaving the task of dress code regulation to others (Brian has also noted that he leaves dress code regulations to

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other teachers as well) helps maintain a working relationship with their students. When teachers are in good standing with the student, students may be more comfortable with approaching the teacher and asking them questions. While teachers at Woodcreek High School did not bring up any instances where assistant principals perform classroom sweep, teachers at both schools have brought up instances where they felt the administration was unsupportive.

Teachers perceive an administration to be unsupportive when there is a lack of consistency in enforcing the dress code amongst the assistant principals. Teachers at both schools have cited this inconsistency. Earlier, Emily notes that she appreciates the dress code sweeps by administration because now the administration has a hand of accountability in regulating students. However, Christina, a black female teacher who also works at Glendale High School, points out that there are still some inconsistencies in the enforcement of dress code:

The Dean of Instruction said he doesn't allow kids to put tights under their jeans [with holes], but then the other [assistant] principal, sometimes she'll just make the kids tape a piece of paper over the hole . . . [T]hen somebody else would say. 'Well it's okay for today' so I said well where's the consistency? It's either no rips or you allow the rips . . . That confuses the child and then it confuses me because I'm like, oh you want me to enforce it? You don't want me to enforce it? I did my part. You do your part. If you don't do anything then that makes me not want to do anything.

Christina notes the inconsistent enforcement between administrators. While the dress code rule does not allow students to wear jeans with holes, not all assistant principals enforce the rule.

According to Christina, the inconsistent enforcement sends mixed signals to the students and the teachers. Moreover, the inconsistency could lead her not to regulate student's dress anymore.

Carmen, a Latina teacher who works at Woodcreek High school, also notes the inconsistency. In the quote below, she describes a dress code violation during Homecoming week, where students were encouraged to dress according to the theme of the day:

This young lady had on the shortest spandex that I could possible think she had, and she had this little skirt that covered [her bottom] . . . I sent her to the office for dress code and

she goes, 'Why do I need to go if I was in the principal's office last class period for student worker, and they just told me how cute I was?' You know, well because you're out of dress code. And I said, 'So you go down there, and if they write me a pass that says you're cleared for the day, then I have to honor it. But you are out of dress code.' But again, if you have principles that think, oh how cute, you're just in the theme, it's ok, then you're not backing your teachers when it comes to dress code . . . So, I think we have to remember we are a business, we are a school, we're here to educate, and fun is ok, but that's not my goal of the day.

Because Carmen thought that the student broke the dress code, she wanted to send her down to the assistant principal's office. However, from the assistant principal's point of view, either no rules were broken or the student was passed over for dress code violation. In addition, Carmen notes that when assistant principals do not back up teachers, she feels that students have more powers than teachers. When discussing her perception of the current head principal, Carmen says,

She's not going to want to stand up for you. She feels that there are other things that I need to worry about, and [the dress code] is not one. Um, I think if you have any parent complaints, if a student has a complaint and talks to their parents and comes up to the office, the administration will do *anything* to make that parent happy, whether they're truly right or wrong . . . so they don't really back their teachers when it comes to stuff.

Carmen feels that the administrator's support for students and their parents comes at a cost, which is the perception of non-support for teachers. Monty, a white male teacher, expresses that teachers get "fed up in dealing with [the dress code] because even if [they] send [students] down [to the office], it still doesn't get taken care of." Another reason why teachers are frustrated is because they cannot issue any official discipline consequences. Monty says, "All we can do is write them up. It's not like in the old days where teacher can give you detention. [In this district], all discipline is enforced and written up and given by the [assistant] principal." Here, Monty is reminiscent of the "old days" where teachers had more power over students, in terms of giving them detention. In today's time, assistant principals are the ones who have that power. Sharron, a black female teacher who works at Glendale High School, notes, "[The school] is student

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centered, really. Students have a lot of power, and so I guess certain things like the dress code could just be like disregarded or overlooked because teachers like to think that students have way too much power.” Because this teacher perceives that the administration supports the students more than teachers, this can lead to inconsistent enforcement of the dress code. In terms of dress code regulations, inconsistent enforcement from administration can also undermine a teacher’s authority over students. Ruth, a white female teacher who also works at Glendale High School, cites the inconsistent enforcement.

One thing that bugs me more than anything is when . . . [the administration] don’t follow through on things. Don’t make threats you’re not going to fall through on! That bugs the heck outta me . . . [T]he most annoying experience is when you send a kid out for a dress code violation, and they send them back. They don’t do anything, and it’s like okay, why bother, you know? As soon as that happens, you just stop sending them.

Ruth notes that the administration does not enforce the dress code. Because of the lack of consistency, she feels that it is useless to send a student to the principal for punishment.

However, an ineffective administration might not deter other teachers from regulating students and sending them out of the classroom for dress code violations. In these accounts, the way the administration mishandles dress code regulations, other than the dress code sweeps, made teachers to want to stop sending students down to the office for dress code infractions. While teachers may feel disempowered due to the different enforcement strategies from the administration, this can lead students to stay in the classroom because teachers are not sending them out.

It is also worth noting that to teachers, non-support comes in many ways other than the dress code. At Woodcreek High School, one teacher, Aaron, an Asian male, says that the basic necessities for student success are not even addressed. Because of this, he and other teachers in his department find innovative ways to fix what administrators cannot or would not fix. For

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example, he says, "My room was 84 degrees at one point and I, I email them . . . And it wasn't until they actually stepped into my room to pull out a kid but they went, 'Oh! It's really warm in here,' and I'm like, 'Yeah, I've sent you 2 emails about it.'" Later on, he explained how fixed the problem by putting an object that stays warm next to the thermostat so that if the thermostat reads that the room at a certain temperature, the AC is turned on. In another situation, he explained how he maximized education time when he felt the administration is impeding educational success: "If we're testing and she talks too long over the announcements I will flip that switch right there. Turning off the speaker, 'cause they needed to take the test." These are only a few of the many examples where administrators come up short. Unfortunately, because of these situations, Aaron will be quitting in the next year. In 2014, Texas experienced a 16.2 percent teacher turnover (Texas Education Agency 2014). Aaron's case shows how the administration can be a burden on teachers. This example also highlights how the added-up inefficiencies of an administration contribute to a teacher's decision to leave their position. Inefficiencies, especially when there are discipline issues, are among one of the top factors that lead to teacher burnout and stress (Lewis, Romi, Qui, and Katz 2005). Aaron's situation also highlights how he places his student's education as his priority. However, this is not always the case for teachers and administrators. Sometimes, punishment is prioritized over a student's education.

### *Education v. Punishment*

Many teachers claim that dress code can take the back seat because teachers are here to teach. They will try to employ strategies to correct the student's dress and keep them in the class at the same time. Brian, a white male, says,

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[The dress code violation] is really not where I have to send the kid down. And even if it is, I ask, 'Do you have a shirt you can put on? Do you have a jacket you can put on?' I have safety pins for holes in their pants so they can safety pin them.

Brian comes up with several ways to balance correcting dress code violations and education, he also hints that only minor dress code violations are passable. Similarly, Ruth says,

I don't really want to send kids out of my room for [dress code violations], you know, if there are behavior problems and [the student is] causing a disruption. . . then fine, I don't have a problem sending somebody out. But your skirt is half an inch too short, it's like I don't really want to send you out for that.

To this teacher, a skirt that is a little too short falls in her definition of a minor infraction.

Nonetheless, Ruth's approach to the dress code enforcement depends on whenever the student is causing a distraction. However, what is considered a distraction can have multiple meanings.

These meanings and the consequences of these meanings will be explored in later sections.

Relatedly, Lucia, a Latina teacher, says, "I would prefer to keep the student in class and learning than to send them away and they miss an entire class just to come back with the same clothes on." This quote highlights both the effects of the non-enforcement of the dress code from the administration and her preference to make sure students are learning.

However, teachers sometimes make an exception to this stay-in-the-classroom rule by sending a student out for a dress code violation. This exception is made when the teacher perceives the student to be a distraction. For example, Emily, a white female teacher, states, "My view is if it distracts my eye, and I notice it, then it's probably inappropriate." She then goes on to provide an example:

So it was a young lady that came, and she had her midriff showing, and so I told her she either has to find a jacket to put on or I'm going to have to send you for dress code . . . A few minutes later when she hadn't fixed the situation, I told her that she needed to go see her principal, and get her stuff taken care of, and she did. I think that was time that a student didn't come back to class . . . I had to write her up for skipping. [chuckles] You know, the simple situations can sometimes turn into bigger ones. I want to keep them here because really what I want is for them to learn.

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Female bodies are often perceived as a “distraction” to both students and teachers. Because the female student did not cover up, she was sent to the office for a dress code violation. And instead of minimizing disciplinary action, this teacher chose to remove the student for a dress code violation, even if she claims she wants to keep students in her classroom to learn. Sometimes, teachers do not even know what happens to the student after they are sent out of the classroom. Eve, a black female teacher, who works at the same school as Emily, reflects, “We send [students] to the administrator and the administrator determines what happens from that point. No, we don’t make the decision, we’re just-you are out of dress code, you need to go see your administrator.” Monty says, “I send them down [to the office], and I don't know if they put them in ISS for the rest of the day or not.” Teachers have a computer system that logs student’s disciplinary actions. While I do not know if Emily followed up the situation to check if the student ever arrived at the office, complying with the teacher’s request to go to the principal’s office may have resulted in further disciplinary action.

If a student is given ISS, teachers will send them some work, perhaps their classwork and homework for the day. In other cases, students can return to class if the administrator chooses to “correct” their outfit and deem the correction as acceptable. There is also another step to minimizing consequences so that the infraction will not go on their student record. While dress code infractions may not directly affect the student’s academic success, it may affect how teachers perceive students. Teachers may label students with more dress code violation as a “bad” student. For example, Logan, a white male teacher, says, “I found that students who are not willing to work at their own personal appearance and dress and things like that, are also not willing to work towards earning good grades being successful in general.” Not only will they be viewed as a “bad” student but also as unsuccessful in all aspect of life.



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At both high schools, some teachers explained that there is a closet or a box of old clothes that students can change into. Emily notes that the “teachers have generously donated [their] old items.” This way, students who are sent to the assistant principal’s office can change into clothes that fall within the dress code regulations and return to class. According to Emily, this is so that students have “no excuse” not to be in compliance with the dress code. She also hopes that this is one way to get students to come to school with the appropriate attire. This punishment strategy is similar to Stoughton’s (2006) study where students were publicly punished in hope of deterring other students from misbehaving.

This form of minimizing consequences does not happen at every school. One teacher, Christina, recalled an example from an urban school she used to work at. The female head principal at that school wanted to suspend all of the students who were out of dress code that day. Christina explained how head principal ordered one of the assistant principal to put all of the students who were in dress code violation in the auditorium so that they could be written up. However, when the head principal received over 100 students, she said that they could not suspend that many students. As a result, Christina said, not only did this action make the principal look bad, but it made the teachers look like “idiots.” In addition, this action wasted the student’s time because they had spent the day sitting in the auditorium and not in class learning. According to Christina, the students said, “‘Well you know, if you’re not going to do anything, can’t we just go to class? Why do we have to sit here for you to yell at us? We’re not going to get suspended, you’re not going to put us all in ISS. Why are we sitting here?’” In this case, the head principal took an extreme measure against dress code regulation. Even the students recognized that mass call for dress code violation was illogical, impossible, and impractical. While she recognized that she made a mistake, lost educational time cannot be

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made up. Christina and her students were in a separate building and rarely enters the main part of campus. Because of this, her students suggested if they could just wear a black t-shirt to avoid being suspended. Christina asked the head principal if she could allow her students to wear black t-shirt so that they would be in compliance with the dress code and remain in class.

Unfortunately, the principal wanted to be “consistent across the board” and denied the request. However, being “consistent across the board” does not happen all the time. This inconsistency occurs so often that Christina starts to question the point of sending students who are out of dress code to the principal’s office. When Christina tries to get out of the dress code punishment because she and her students want to stay in the classroom, the principal was determined to have everyone punished. This is a case where the principal attempts to be consistent when enforcing the dress code, but the teacher framed this as an extreme punishment. Christina notes that this form of extreme punishment has not occurred during her years at her current school. These examples show that while some teachers and administrators claim that education is their priority, as the later sections will show, some will not hesitate to enforce the dress code so that they may teach them lessons apart from the official curriculum.

### *Female v. Male Teachers*

Gender also plays a role in determining which teachers regulate students’ bodies. For instance, male teachers often delegate the task of regulating female bodies to female teachers. Darius, a black male teacher, states that he would rather let a female teacher regulate female students.

If I did [have to regulate a female student], I would just get one of the lady teachers and get them to correct that issue instead of me. You know, if I was gonna do it, I would make it in a general statement, “Hey, we know what the policy is,” instead of you know, personally calling out the student.

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By choosing not to “personally call out” female students who are breaking the dress code, Darius is able to avoid an unwanted situation. This strategy also puts distance between Darius and the student. This particular situation highlights the possibility of being pinned a sexual deviant. Bill, white male teacher says that it is difficult for male teachers to enforce the girl’s dress codes.

Obviously you’re dealing with teenage girls . . . things that a female teacher could probably say to a young teenager girl would be appropriate. Whereas if I were to address an issue it might look like ‘Oh, what are you looking at, Mr. \_\_\_? Why are you looking at that, Mr. \_\_\_?’ that kind of thing. So if there is an issue . . . I’ll ask like Mrs. \_\_\_ . . . I think she’s the only female teacher on the hall. I’ll ask her, you know, to help out. Bill notes the difficulties that male teachers have to deal with when enforcing the dress code for females. He is concerned about how student might react. If a student accuses him, it might lead to negative consequences. These two examples also highlight how male teachers usually ask female teachers in their hallway to regulate female students. However, even when female teachers are not in proximity, male teachers still attempt to delegate the task to female employees. For example, Monty’s classroom is located in a t-shack behind the school. T-shacks hold two classrooms and are individual buildings separate from the main building. A male works in the classroom next to Monty, so for him, there are no female teachers nearby. Monty tells me that if needs to send a student to the principal’s office (e.g., because a student broke the dress code), he will email the assistant principal according to the alpha split. For example, students whose last name start with A-G is assigned to assistant principal A, students whose last name start with H-L is assigned to assistant principal B, and so on and so forth. However, when it comes to female dress regulations, Monty says he will email a female assistant principal. This is because he does not want to create a “female hostility” where female students and parents can accuse him of looking at a girl “wrong.” After he emails the female assistant principal, she will call Monty to have the student brought down to the office. Monty says that he is not obligated to tell the student why they are called into the office. By pretending to be ignorant, he can distance

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himself from the situation and be less likely to be blamed for inappropriate conduct. Monty notes that as “male teacher today, it’s like walking on eggshells almost, especially when it comes to dress code and dress code violations because you hear in the paper everyday about inappropriate interaction between teachers and students.” Due to the many stories about inappropriate interactions, Monty and other male teachers engage in distancing strategies so there is less of a chance for accusation.

Similarly, Cole, a white male teacher, explains how it is a “safer bet” for a female teacher to approach a female student. Cole mentions that there are no “malintentions” exhibited by either students or teachers, but at the “end of the day, it doesn’t take a whole lot for someone to cry wolf and others to believe you.” Additionally, Cole tells that there are “fool proof plans” on YouTube on how to get teachers fired. Due to the fear of losing their jobs (and perhaps risking their reputation as a teacher), male teachers tend to delegate the task of enforcing female dress code to female teachers.

The unintended consequence of delegating the tasks places extra burden upon female teachers. For Bill, he does not consider the extra burden placed upon female teachers and administrators. Bill reflects,

If [students] are already in the classroom and it is not in the hallway, then I would probably send an email to the principal . . . If it is a female, then I know that the male principles don’t really . . . [laughs] What do you call it? [Male principals] said some of them really don’t address the dress code for the girls as much as the female principles do . . . I guess my thought process was that more likely that that principle, if it’s a male principal, would send me over to a female principle.

Bill automatically assumes that if he emails a male principal about a dress code violation for a female student, a female principal will be sent to his classroom to deal with the student. This impression could perpetuate the normalization of men delegating women dress code issues. This gives the impression that female teachers and administrators enforce the dress code the most and

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are more consistent with the regulation. Many times, a male teacher will refer to another female teacher or assistant principal when dealing with female dress code violation. Continuing on, Bill says,

You know, there are things that I, you know, I wouldn't say, can't say . . . [U]m it's really hard; it's a hard topic, because you have inappropriate relationships that happen . . . At \_\_\_\_ High School, there was actually two female teachers who were having inappropriate relationships with their students. But there is, kind of, I don't want to say barrier but some sort of like thing where male teachers just, we are not totally comfortable talking to female students about certain dress code violations.

The uncomfortableness and barrier that Bill experiences can be best explained by a ban on anything that can be sexualized. Bill thinks he cannot deal with anything that can be remotely sexualized because this may affect his job. Because of this, Bill experiences a "barrier" to where he cannot regulate a female student's outfit. Similarly, Aaron explains,

I remember when I was in high school that one teacher who was a, a, a pretty good guy just trying to enforce the rules. Made a comment and the girl was like, 'Well you be lookin.' And it was kinda just like no, it's my job. But at the same time, it's kind of like, well why is it a concern, you know? It just didn't make sense to me logically and then also it could get him in hot water. I didn't want to have that placed upon me.

Already, Aaron pins his high school teacher as a "good guy." This puts the teacher in the right and the student in the wrong. While Aaron comments how the enforcement of the dress code for females is irrational, he is still wary of the possible repercussion of enforcing the dress code on female students. Male teachers try to avoid any situation that can possibly pin them as a sexual deviant. They also assume that in general, there will be no repercussion for female teachers when they regulate students' dress.

As male teachers draw back on the fear of sexual harassment, female teachers also talk about these same situations. Female teachers use these narratives in order to rationalize their behavior. Being called over to do extra work and regulating more students is considered normative for both male and female teachers. For example, Carmen explains that there are

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difficulties male teachers experience when addressing female dress code. She provides an example.

The guy who taught next to me . . . We had a code. Like he would look at me- 'Go!' He'd point his thumb out, like, 'This girl here!' And I'll go 'Oh! Come here girl, I have a question for you.' And then I'll say, 'You might want to cover those things up because he felt that he could not.'

Carmen complies with the "code" that the male teacher established because of an injustice she had observed.

I did see him one time comment to a girl. The girl was very, very disrespectful back. And that's when I kinda stepped in and kinda calmed the situation because it wasn't fair to him. The comment that he had told her was, 'Hey can you pick your shirt up for me please?' You know, raise it so he didn't see her cleavage and such. And she got offended and started making comments like, 'Why are you even looking at me?' And so that's when I realized how hard it has to be for a guy . . . [T]hey're just trying to do their job.

However, details such as "the girl was disrespectful" and "it wasn't fair to him" and "trying to do their job" places the blame solely on the student. By following the male teacher's code, she legitimated male teacher's actions to delegate the task of discipline to female teachers.

Based on the evidence provided, three factors play into determining who regulates students' bodies. The perception of a supportive administration helps teachers maintain a positive relationship with students. On the other hand, the perception of no administrative support leads teachers to feel disempowered and are less likely to regulate dress code infractions. In addition, many teachers claim that student's education takes priority, but if the student's dress is a large enough infraction, they will be removed from the classroom. Finally, male teachers delegate the task of enforcing the dress code for female students to female teachers and administrators. While gender affects who enforces the dress code, gender also plays a role in who gets regulated.

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### *Gendered Ideas- How Not to Get Raped*

Not only does gender play a role in the delegation of dress code enforcement, but it also affects how teachers regulate students' bodies. Many of the teacher's ideas fall under traditional ideas gender norms, such as teaching female students how not to get raped. First I review the student dress code and the assumptions it is based on in terms of gender norms. Then, I examine the gendered differences between male and female students. Next, I explore how teachers view female students and how teachers think female students should behave. Finally, I examine how female students of color are policed by teachers.

### *Dress Code Rules*

In the student handbook for the district (Appendix D), the dress code rules essentially fall under three categories: female students, male students, or gender neutral. Paraphrasing teachers, rules that apply to both sexes are: (1) their clothes cannot have profanity, vulgar sayings or images, alcohol, and/or drugs, (2) their pants cannot have holes in them, and (3) they cannot wear pajamas. All schools have to abide by the dress code set by the district. In the district's student handbook, it notes several reasons for the dress code, including teaching grooming and hygiene, preventing disruptions, and minimizing safety hazards. According to the district, the school mimics a work place and it should promote a "productive" and "businesslike" environment for learning. In addition, clothing should be neat, appropriate, and modest for the gender of the student. The district's dress code policy encompasses five areas: (1) shirts, blouses, sweatshirt, sweater, and vest, (2) dresses, jumpers, skirts, shorts, skorts, capris, pants, and jeans, (3) shoes, (4) hair, and (5) miscellaneous. Out of 30 rules, only three directly mention a regulation on male's attire (e.g., length of boy's hair, length of sideburn, and facial hair), and only three explicitly refer to female attire (e.g., dress, tunic, and covering cleavage). All other

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rules can be attributed to either female students or both female and male students. At first glance, these rules may seem gender neutral. However, these rules are particularly applicable to only female students. For example, one general rule states that students cannot reveal their midriff while standing or sitting. Another general rule states that revealing clothing of any type may not be worn. When teachers talk about these dress code rules, they usually attribute them to female students. This shows that even though the rules are framed as gender neutral, these rules are disproportionality biased toward female bodies. For example, when Lucia describes the dress code for a female student, she states:

. . . dresses need to reach where they can reach down and they're covered . . . They have to be able to wear a garment that has, if they take the leggings off, the garment is still considered acceptable for dress code . . . [T]hey're supposed to be covered, cleavage wise, but they're able to wear, you know, shirts . . . Again no midriff clothes.

This example highlights how female students should be covered at all times, no matter what she does. Not only does her outerwear have to comply with the dress code, but according to this teacher, her undergarments have to comply as well. Even before females are being regulated in person, there are already many rules in the student handbook that pertains to the regulation of female bodies.

When teachers discuss the female dress code, many teachers recognize that there are more rules in place for females than males. Jackie, a white female teacher, states, "Most of the dress code falls on the girls except for the boys' shaving, it's all on the girls." Similarly, Brian says,

Unfortunately, there's a lot more for females. [They] can't show their midriff, 3 inches above the knee, those tight, black tights they like wearing, they're excessively tight. I know they're not supposed to wear those . . . Um, strapless, or the, the spaghetti straps, I think they're an inch or something, I don't know.

While the teacher can rattle off a few dress code rules for males, there seems to be many more rules that are applied to female students. In addition, there seems to be more specific rules for



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females (e.g., the three inches above the knee rule). Some teachers see the extra rules as the result of having a variety of clothing options. Christina says, "I mean, boys, let's be honest, you can only wear a shirt and pants or a shirt and shorts. For girls, it's skirts, it's jumpsuits, it's this, you know, they got more options than they did." These rules are one of many instances where female bodies are placed under heavy scrutiny. Another is the differences between teacher's regulation of female and male bodies.

### *Regulations for Male v. Female Students*

During the interviews, I asked teachers to provide at least one example where they (or another person) enforced the dress code for a female student and a male student. I found that teachers gave more examples where they policed or saw someone else police female students than male students. In the interviews, teachers were given the opportunity to present an example of where a student broke the dress code. I ask teachers to provide an example of when a female student broke the dress code and an example of when a male student broke the dress code. Many teachers recognized that there is a gender difference when it comes to the dress code itself and the enforcement of dress code. They recognized that male students "have it pretty easy" as far as the dress code goes when comparing with dress code for females. Sharron, a black female teacher, says, "Male [dress codes] are pretty easy, right? Because what they wear, I mean, jeans and a shirt or pants and a shirt. You know they deviate by having the holes in the pants,...another dress code thing is facial hair." Lucia notes that males do not have "extreme violations."

I haven't seen a lot of really bad dress code violations for males . . . There just isn't. I just haven't seen any. . . Facial hair's also considered a violation and they do them a lot but again, I wouldn't consider them extreme violations.

According to teachers, the general dress code rules applied to male students are: (1) they cannot have facial hair unless it is required by their religion and can provide a letter of documentation

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from their religious leader or doctor, and (2) pants must be worn at the waist and cannot sag.

From these two examples, both teachers explain that a typical outfit for males consists of pants or shorts, and a shirt. Even when it comes to dress code violations, male violations are not considered extreme.

Teachers do not usually provide gendered messages when it comes to the male dress code. However, one teacher does infuse a lesson on sexuality and gender when he sees a male student sagging his pants. Seeing the regulation of sagging pants as a teachable moment, one teacher reinforces homophobia. Alfred, a white male teacher, tells the origin of sagging pants for the students to comply with the dress code and pull up their pants.

I just like to remind them what sagging means . . . It comes from prisons . . . I've heard this story and this is me connecting the dots and making my assumptions as needed . . . They kind of sell their bodies in prison . . . A universal sign that says, "Hey, I'm open for business, I'm sort of selling my body," is [long pause] let your pants sag.

Alfred tells students the story of how sagging pants meant an invitation to intercourse for men who are in prison. Similar to the usage of fag discourse (Pascoe 2011), he uses same-sex acts as a scare tactic to get his students to comply with the rules. He successfully marginalizes the LGBTQ community and deters students from sagging their pants. Not only does this rhetoric get male students to pull up their pants, but it also enforces homophobia and further marginalizes the LGBTQ community by playing into fag discourse.

### *How Female Students Should Act*

According to teachers and the district policy, females must convey modesty in their dress. This means they should not reveal what is considered excessive skin, should not wear clothes that are too short, nor reveal their undergarments. Meanings that they attach to dress code rules for female students are lessons in modesty and a need to protect her body from men. Teachers, both male and female, buy into the narrative that female students should dress "appropriately" to

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reflect modesty and appear non-sexual. The emphasis for female students to be modest is not only reflected in the written policy, but also teachers' own personal policy toward the dress code.

For example, Jackie, a white female teacher, prefers female students to be modest.

I like modesty because . . . I don't want for her to portray a certain sexiness in order to get attention . . . [T]he girls should look nice because I want them to be ready for the professional world. . . I think when you are well groomed, you feel good about yourself . . . In this hall, what I see, to be honest, I don't want to see all your breasts, I don't want to see your belly button, I don't want to see your rear end, and just cover your body parts, you know . . . But some of the girls dress very, very suggestively. And I don't think that they mean for it to be what it appears to young men, you know what I mean? Young men look at young women differently than young women. A girl does it 'cause she feels cute, and she feels stylish. A young man sees an advertisement, because they are very hormonal and sometimes their hormones work before their brain checks in.

School are sites of learning, and as evidenced above, teachers will try to teach students lessons which are not included in the school's official curriculum. Jackie, in particular, blames females who dresses "suggestively" will invite attention from young men. In the interview, she associates "looking nice" with feeling good. However, feeling good about oneself should only stay within the boundaries that teachers set (i.e., being modest). This goes back to the idea that women should be pure and virtuous (Connell 1987). Else, the student will be deemed unprofessional and is inviting young men to look at their bodies. This quote also point to how the teacher thinks women need to protect themselves from men, who cannot control themselves. These lessons are also framed around heterosexual norms.

Similarly, Christina states,

I think when ladies dress too provocatively and you're in a bad neighborhood, that is a problem because I've had a few students raped. I'm not saying because of how they dressed but just in general, you know? You have to be careful when you're in certain areas because it doesn't matter if you dress a certain way or not, you're still a target, but I think when you walk around in the short skirt and the stilettos, well you're inviting a certain amount of attention that you might not want.

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Although Christina states that a female's clothing should not be a reason why rape happens, she still equated these certain clothes with being a target. By telling female students not to wear these types of clothing, she is engaging in discourse that enables victim blaming. To these teachers, not only will a female student be dehumanized, but will be, even partly, at fault if she is raped.

Again, the blame is placed on females to protect themselves instead of teaching males and other people not to rape. Moreover, she believes that being in a "bad neighborhood" will increase the chance that a woman might be raped. In the interview, Christina cites this particular neighborhood as predominately African American. She assumes that men of color, especially working class men of color, are more likely to be rapists. This falls into the narrative that working class men of color are "dangerous" and the black rapist narrative. Unfortunately, the cases where her students were raped reinforced her belief about bad neighborhoods. For Christina, these cases serve as a cautionary tale for girls and women.

Male teachers also buy into this narrative of feminine modesty and engage in discourse that contributes to victim blaming. When asked to describe a situation where a female student broke the dress code, Monty said,

She left very little to the imagination . . . The top part was very low cut, showed a lot of cleavage. It looked like she was advertising that she was a business looking to be bought. . . She was very curvy. She's an attractive young lady. She has, I guess what would appeal to a lot of young men, I've got on way beyond that as I got older, so I see them as students and people, I don't see them as this this and that, but she was turning some boys' heads, so the hormones were running them up.

This male teacher described his female student as a sex object who looked like a "business looking to be bought" even though he claims to see his students as people. If a student's purpose is to learn in school, they can be turned away from the classroom because of the way they are dressed. Female students who do not cover enough of their cleavage, butt, arms, legs, and stomach can be removed from the class. Not only will they be removed, but they will be

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diminished to an “advertisement” and can only be seen for her body and not as a person. Because she was “turning some boys’ heads,” Monty also perceived her to be a distraction. Ultimately, he sent for the administrator to give her in-school suspension for that day. In the student handbook, anything that is considered a distraction is in violation of the dress code.

The vague language used in the student handbook is problematic. It leaves room for interpretation and can lead to more severe consequences for female students. For example, the handbook states that dress code is there to prevent distractions. Almost anything can be distracting, yet mainly a female’s attire is framed as a distraction, whether it is a distraction to teachers or male students. For another teacher, Emily, the distraction premise is her criterion for dress code: “If it, and this is the district policy, but my view is if it distracts my eye, and I notice it, then it’s probably inappropriate.” In Monty’s case, it seems that the female student distracted him enough that she had to be taken out of the classroom.

Monty’s example highlights teacher’s unequal treatment that larger and more developed female bodies. Lucia recalled an example:

[Her outfit] was not appropriate because they shouldn’t be able to see her undergarments like that. . . I went up to her very quietly and I explained to her so nobody else could hear me tell her and said, ‘You need to button up. Being able to see your undergarments is not professional and I don’t want to see you wearing that shirt again.’ So she just looked at me and just buttoned up . . . She was tall, probably about 5’10”, very, more voluptuous. She was very voluptuous. It made it more obvious and she was about 5’10”. She has brown hair, long brown hair, Hispanic, and she’s heavier set.

According to this teacher, the student’s clothing made it more obvious that the female student had a curvy body. Out of 11 examples where a teacher described a student as thick or curvy, all of the students were sent out of the classroom except for one. Only the student described above was not removed from the classroom. It may be because Lucia has not seen her violate the dress code before. This is in line with Raby’s (2010) findings, in which more developed female bodies face more consequences with teachers when it comes to the dress code. Interestingly, descriptors

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such as “heavy”, “thick,” and “curvy” were used only to describe females. And not only were these descriptors used to describe females, but female students of color.

### *Policing Female Students of Color*

Women of color experience what Beal (2008) calls a double jeopardy. Female students of color have to face consequences as a female and as a person of color. As teachers often bring up examples where students of color and females students broke the dress code, female students of color were usually given harsher consequences. While I do not know the number of dress code violations that happen within a school in a given day or year, I can speak to how teachers treat female students of color that break the dress code.

Teachers viewed females of color as hypersexualized. In my interview, I ask my participants to describe the student who broke the dress code. When I ask teachers to describe female students of color, teachers often added a beauty remark. Teachers would describe the female student was “pretty,” “cute,” or “beautiful.” In every instance, these descriptors were attributed to female students of color. For example, Darius described a student as “Hispanic, slim, petite. Just a pretty girl.” In addition, they would attach a gendered lesson on sexuality. When I asked Eve to describe the student who broke the dress code, she said,

She was an African-American young lady . . . brown skin, cute little girl . . . She was hippy and had thighs, so that’s why it was kind of a problem because you’re showing too much . . . It causes a distraction to boys. You got to know boys’ hormones are out of control and nowadays, girls! That was too much.

Female students of color are sometimes perceived to be “too much,” and the way that they dress are just one avenue. In this example, these students are viewed as promiscuous.

Compared to her previous place of work, a predominately black school, Christina says,

I think a female student should look like she wants the respect of her peers. Not to say that you can’t be cute or sassy but in a way that’s respectable that’s not distracting, that’s not demeaning or disrespectful to her because if you wear something and it’s sheer or

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tight and fitted and got all these cut-outs, what kind of message does it send? And do you want people to stare at you like that all day? Let's be honest, they're teenage boys. That's what they do.

Christina thinks that female students can “look nice” but only to the extent to which it does not distract others, especially boys. Moreover, she perceives that female students at Glendale High School dress more appropriately than black female students in the inner city. Teachers emphasized that “young ladies” should be mindful of their bodies. This shows that the construction of respectability for teenage girls for is not only emphasized in sex education (Garcia 2012) but also outside of it. Another teacher, Jackie, talked about one example that particularly stood out to her:

The one that bothered me the most was a very large breasted [African American] young woman and almost her entire breasts were showing. Almost everything was showing. And she was very loud and obnoxious and attention gaining and making them bounce everywhere. The guys were making inappropriate comments. And I made the guys go on and I told her, you know, there is so much more to you than just this without saying what this was. She knew. She knew what she was doing . . . I said, ‘Please, value you, the whole you, please, honey. Please.’ That’s how I handle it. She said, “Well, you know, they always notice.” They notice because you are showing them, you know. I said, “You are beautiful other than just that one body part” . . . But it’s like she wanted male attention and that was the easiest way to get it. I told her your personality is stellar, don’t, you know – I tried to turn it into a positive.

In this case, Jackie regulated a female student because she was “showing everything.” Although it seemed the student indicated that she did not have control over how others view her, the teacher insisted that she dressed to gain male attention. The teacher’s assumption alludes to the Jezebel stereotype, the racialized stereotype of black women where they use their sexual appeal to lure in men (Collins 2000). As black bodies are viewed as promiscuous, this teacher took the extra step to inform the student that she does not need to use her body. This assumption has led some women of color to change their attributes in an attempt to be taken more seriously (Patton 2006).

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In sum, female students seen as sexualized beings by both male and female teachers. Teachers follow the school policy's stance on modesty and a distraction-free environment. When discussing their perception of female students, many said that female students need to dress "appropriately," meaning that they cannot show any sign of being a sexual being. If they do, they invite unwanted attention. This line of thinking falls into victim blaming, teaching female students who do not dress "properly" will encounter sexual violence. Unfortunately, this blaming extends beyond high schools and into a national problem. For example, college campuses have a longstanding reputation of silencing rape victims, blaming rape as the result of how the victim was dressed. The way teachers teach female students in how to "dress properly" not only reveals the gendered ideas that inform their decision when regulating students, but also racist ones.

### *Racialized Ideas- Creating an Anti-Black Space*

Racialized assumptions of professionalism affect which students teachers regulate as well as the level of consequence given to the student. Unsurprisingly, in my study, I found that the teachers mostly focused on students of color who broke the dress code. As teachers regulate students, they upheld policies and attitudes that can be considered anti-black. Due to racist assumptions of people of color being aggressive, teachers are cautious around students of color, and can sometimes lead to take extreme action.

### *Upholding Anti-Blackness*

After reviewing teacher's examples of when a student has broken a school dress code, the overwhelming majority of examples given point to a student of color. Out of 48 examples given by teachers, 35 examples were about students of color. Only four cases were about white students, and teachers did not disclose the student's race in the remaining nine cases. Even in Woodcreek High School, where the majority of students are Asian or white, most of the



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examples given by Woodcreek High School teachers were for blacks and Latinx. Again, while these numbers are not representative, these do speak how teachers focuses on students of color than white students.

When teachers talk about sagging pants, many deem it unprofessional and unfit for a classroom setting. Lucia remarks, "Appropriate dress for a student, I think is just something that is not revealing and not tattered or look like they just came off of a fight. That means, you know, no ripped jeans or the pants that are hanging below the butt, and but that's my outlook on professionalism." Aaron says, "Saggy pants are not even in fashion anymore . . . [It] looks ghetto and unprofessional." Some even goes as far as calling the style "trashy" and "sloppy." Christina states, "You know, I don't care for the sagging. I didn't like it when we started doing it back in the 80's, 90's, and I still don't like it now and it's 2016. I think that's just icky. It just looks sloppy and messy." Later on, Christina talks about other styles that should not excluded in a professional, office like setting: "I don't like to see gold teeth, grills. It just bugs me. It's like, it's a school not a club. You know, you're not a DJ. What's with that? Because I will make a kid take that out. Just, no." Sagging pants and grills are popular styles in black hip hop culture, which teachers deem are unfit in a professional work setting. By regulating certain cultural styles of clothing, these teachers are upholding students to professional norms. The reiteration of professionalism marginalizes popular depictions of black hip hop culture.

The emphasis on professionalism also points to the fixation on removing items that can be considered "ethnic" as they do not fit within the narrow hips of whiteness. Whiteness is held as the golden standard in which every student must adhere to or else they most like will be punished. For example, the student handbook states that doo-rags, wave caps, bandanas, and chains are not allowed. Cole explains why certain styles of dress should not be allowed:

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At the end of the day, we're supposed to be preparing these kids, to make them marketable in our world when they go out. And part of that marketability is their ability to present themselves right. I mean, you're not gonna into an office, a corporate office, by any means with messed up hair, untucked shirt, you know, baggy pants, or whatever it is that you wanna you're looking at doing . . . That's not what people want to see. People want professionalism in any career.

This quote highlights his role as a gatekeeper to a middle class world. He is teaching his students how to fit in a middle class world by "looking right" in a class and work environment. Looking right means not looking poor and not looking urban black. This shows that teachers do not prefer the tastes of the counterculture of black hip hop, thus barring anything that is related to it, such as sagging pants. Anything that is associated with black hip hop culture is minimized.

While teachers uphold professionalism as a standard in the dress code, this standard is not held for every student. In the four cases that depicted a white student breaking the dress code, teachers did not comment on how their dress should convey a sense of professionalism in the classroom. For example, Darnell, a black male teacher, recalls,

Well, the [white] kid's shirt design, a head was cut off with the blood dripping from the neck. . . . Somebody seeing that they could be totally turned off, you know? . . . People don't want to see that, especially if someone just lost a loved one then they see something like that then you don't know where their emotions is going.

According to this teacher, the image of a decapitated head is not appropriate for a classroom as it may elicit some negative emotions. While the student was sent to the office to change out of this shirt, there is no mention about professionalism. This suggests that white students can escape the lesson on professionalism, but students of color cannot. Teachers assume that students of color need to be taught a lesson in how to "dress right." In another example, Ruth even admires a white student from a previous school for breaking the dress code. She first explains how wearing a plaid shirt was in violation of the previous school's dress code.

I thought it was funny. . . . One student, he just wore a plaid shirt one day and spent the day in ISS catching up on all the assignments he needed to do [laughing], he planned it

and I just remember laughing. So he planned it, got it, and worked it . . . He told me he was going to do it the day before . . . So when he came back, and he delivered you know, 'Here's all my stuff, I'm finished,' I was like, okay cool, next. It wasn't a big enough deal to go make a federal case out of but it was playing the system and he definitely played the system.

Ruth thought that student was funny and cunning for breaking the dress code. When I asked what she thought about his plan, she said,

I didn't make a big deal out of it . . . It was one of those- let's see what happens. I wasn't going to be the one to rat them out. . . Because it wasn't a criminal offense, and he was bound and determined to do things that way, and I was like okay.

This example highlights how white privilege can protect white students from being viewed as a "criminal" and to a certain extent, viewed as successful, even if the student was a rule breaker. Unfortunately, students of color cannot enjoy such privileges. When students of color break the dress code, as shown in the last section, sometimes things can be taken to the extreme.

One way that teachers of color attempt to fit into a professional space can be found in the messages they are trying to instill in their students. Christina, a black female teacher, compares how students should present themselves with how their parents presents themselves. When talking about her previous place of employment, she says,

I've worked in an inner city, African American poor school and you look at the parents and you kind of see where kids get it because I've had parent conferences . . . [And] I'm not a man, not going to ask you on a date. You've got on this skimpy, flimsy dress or some tight pants and a low-cut blouse and stilettos and it's like, you're going to a parent-teacher conference, who wears that to a parent conference? So I can see sometimes where kids get that from because their parents aren't always appropriately dressed . . . And I get it but if we're in a position to teach them how to do better, don't we need to do that?

Christina disapproves of how the students and their parent looks because they do not fit her definition of professionalism. Their style of dress reflects her image of "inner city, African American, and poor." Her descriptions allude to the cycle of poverty. In this excerpt, she did not consider the background of these parents and the situations they and their children are in and

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how this might affect their dress. As shown in the next excerpt, one of the ways she distances herself from this image is to emphasize professionalism not only for herself but for her students as well.

I get kids all the time asking, 'I've got a job interview at such and such, what should I wear?' Well, what you got on not going to work, I can tell you that right now. . . I don't come to work dressed like that because I have respect for what I do and it would just be inappropriate. And that's what I'm trying to get across - to have respect for what you're doing or what you're here for and be appropriate. I'm not saying you can't be fashionable but be appropriate for school.

Not only does dress convey success but respectability as well. It sends a message that it is the individual's responsibility to fit within a professional narrative. While white males have an easier time fitting into the professional world, marginalized groups have to do extra. This "extra" comes in a form of distancing and impression management. On the other hand, blackness and their styles of dress are framed as not responsible, not professional, and having no respect for yourself and what you do.

When talking about how her student who worked at the front office broke the dress code, Christina says,

You know, that bugged me because I feel like if you're allowed to [work] in office aid, you should have the higher standard. I wouldn't allow somebody to work for me in my office [like that] . . . Your shirt is ripped, you've got rips in your jeans, you've got an earring in your nose, you've got nails with stars and diamonds hanging off and they look like claws. I just wouldn't do it because to me, that's the first impression . . . I'm an adult, I'm a teacher, and if I want kids to take me seriously then I need to look the part.

While Christina applies impression management to herself, in a similar situation, she would apply the same principles a student as well. To minimize things that can be considered "ethnic" (e.g., sagging pants), she regulates students' bodies on the basis of professionalism. This teaches students that if they want to be taken seriously and be respected, they have to minimize styles

that can be considered “ethnic.” While teacher’s perception of professionalism informs their decision to regulate student’s dress, another factor is their perceptions of the students.

### *Perceptions of Students*

Many teachers view students as compliant. According to teachers at both schools, most students adhere to the school dress code. At the same time, they will also note that students break the dress code all the time. For example, Logan, who works at Woodcreek High School notices that students break the dress code fairly often, but only “about 10 percent of them [do].” So while Logan says that he often encounters students who break the dress code, only a small percentage of the student body does. Over at Glendale High School, Christina says, “Because I stand at my door every day during the passing period, I mean, I can catch a violation almost every period . . . But for the most part, I don’t have too many issues so I can’t really complain too much about it.” Some teachers will stand outside of their class when students are transitioning to their next class. During this time, teachers monitor students, making sure they enter the classroom in a timely manner. This is also the time when teachers can check for dress code violations. For Christina, compared to her previous place of work, she does not have many “issues” with students at Glendale High School.

However, not all students are viewed the same. Students of color, particularly black students, are seen as dangerous, violent, and aggressive. This perception is particularly salient when some teachers noted their experience working in urban schools. Eve, a black female teacher, compares her experience working in an inner city school with the Glendale High School.

[Students at Glendale] are not going to fight you over [the dress code] . . . You never really have a push back about the dress code, hardly ever because the students already know. . . That’s not the environment of this school.

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In particular, Eve notes that teachers at the high school she works at, Glendale High School do not experience fights often. She notes that this is due to the “environment” of the school. She perceives that urban schools located in impoverished areas are more violent, while Glendale High School, which is located in a middle class neighborhood, as passive. This reflects how middle class spaces are framed as “safe.”

Another teacher, Christina, who has worked in a predominantly black school, tells the same,

The schools I've worked at before, the kids are far more violent and aggressive so a fight was almost like an everyday occurrence. It was just something kind of expected because you had gang issues, drug issues, just basic you step to me wrong, stepped on my new kicks and now I've going to have to beat your ass, that's what you dealt with because that was the nature of the beast. Here the kids are more passive, spoiled. 'Oh you know, my family have a house in France' so they're not really that aggressive because they have something whereas those kids didn't have anything.

These examples highlight that while Glendale High School have predominantly Latino and black students, students at Glendale High School have relatively less fights than urban schools. This shows how location and social class influence how teachers perceive students. Previously, I mentioned that Glendale High School consists of predominantly black and Latino students and over half of their students are at economic disadvantage. Because Glendale High School consists of predominantly students of color and economically disadvantaged students, teachers may perceive this school to be violent or susceptible to gang activity. However, because Glendale High School is located in a middle class neighborhood, this school is passed off as safe. Their students are even perceived as spoiled and upper class.

Alfred, who works at Woodcreek High School, mentions that there are less “problems” when compared to urban schools. When talking about the purpose of dress code, he claims, “There's no doubt that dress code prevents chaos and prevents problems. And it's not so bad in this area. But you know, you go to an inner city school, having a dress code is important because

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kids want to walk home with gangs.” These high schools in middle class neighborhoods stand in stark contrast with urban schools in the inner city. Whereas urban schools and the environment where they are located in are perceived as dangerous, these schools were not. However, this does not mean that teachers do not perceive students, particularly students of color, as dangerous. Alfred recalled a situation when the principal confronted an “overweight” black female student about her outfit.

The principal said [to her], “You gotta go to the office. You gotta to go get a change of clothes.” The student started arguing, [childishly mimicked student] “I don’t want to.” . . . [The principal] did it with a smile on his face. They weren’t rude . . . [T]here wasn’t blood.

When Alfred describes the interaction between the principal and the student, he notes that the principal was being polite, but the student was not. In a way, it seems that Alfred frames the principal as being in the right. When I asked Alfred which dress code rule the student was breaking, Alfred said he did not know. He also noted that he stopped to observe the interaction, “I stopped to see if there was going to be a problem and if I could help. But then I kept walking as soon as I realized that she was just arguing to save face and not to fight.” When I asked him about what kind of problems he might anticipate, he says, “The kids start, I mean, I’ve seen it before. It’s rare, but the kids start actually fighting . . . And uhm, you gotta help not let that happen . . . [O]dds are, it’s not going to happen. It rarely happens, but you know, better safe than sorry.” In this particular situation, the white male teacher stood by in case a physical fight broke out. He perceived an “overweight” black female student to be a potential danger to the principal. Even though the school and their students did not have a reputation for violence, the teacher still anticipated the student to start a fight.

This overreaction brought on a white male is exemplified in another case. Christina recalls a time when the white male principal at her previous school, a predominantly black

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school, overreacted when a student challenged him on a dress code issue. In response, the principal calls a school wide dress code sweep, and students who found to be in violation of the dress code were sent to the auditorium. A series of unfortunate events occurred, including a fight broke out that between some students as “[the principle] had all the kids in there rattling around,” the police being called to the school as a result, and a student calling a news station about the incident. Christina found the situation to be ridiculous because these events occurred during finals and the principal’s response to the student was inappropriate. In this example, the white male principal wanted to display his dominance over the student. This turned into a massive call for students who were out of dress code. Instead of prioritizing education, the white principal, who often absent from the high school, prioritized punishment for black bodies, which led to students missing class time and valuable testing time for one of most important tests of the year. Also, note the language that Christina uses, particularly the phrase, “[the principle] had all the kids in there rattling around.” In addition, she uses terms such as “nature of the beasts,” “violent,” and “aggressive,” all of which are racially coded. This was the rhetoric used to invoke racist images about how black people are-animal like and dangerous. This racist language is used against people of color, especially in poverty, further marginalizing black bodies (Katz 1990).

This section shows how racialized ideas about styles of dress and the presentation of self informs teacher’s decision on dress code regulations. These regulations send the message that their form of being and their culture is not valued.

## DISCUSSION

In this study, I examine the how teachers enforce the school dress code and how teachers try to instill middle class heteronormative values in their students through the enforcement of said dress code. Interviews with 19 teachers at two different high schools in a racially diverse



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school district revealed that although teachers generally follow similar set of rules, dominant understandings of race, gender, class, sexuality, and embodiment also inform their perceptions and interactions with students when it comes to dress code violations.

My findings show there is a set of social constraints that limit teachers' ability to regulate students. These constraints also impact teachers' negotiations between the role of an educator and the role of a disciplinarian (Toshalis 2010). The teacher's ability to play certain roles is impacted by the role of the administration and gendered dynamics.

In the context of the dress code, the accomplishment of the disciplinarian role is through the enforcement of student's dress and deliverance of punishment. This is one way teachers exert their power over students. However, the administration can thwart these accomplishments. While both teachers and administrators regulate student bodies, the administration has the power to make "official" regulations. Official regulations are characterized by permanence; the administration have the authority to put the infraction and consequence on student's records. The administration can be perceived as supportive or not support. These perceptions are not school specific, but rather action specific. For example, an administration that does not support its teachers is characterized by an inconsistency in enforcing the rules among the administration. This provides grounds for students to question the teacher's authority. Because the administration undermines the teacher's authority as a disciplinarian, teachers feel that they have less power than compared to students and the administration. As a result, some teachers felt discouraged to regulate students in the future, which places less emphasis on their role of a disciplinarian. On the other hand, an administration that support its teachers is characterized by the consistent enforcement by the administration. Administration still regulate students' bodies, but feelings of frustration and discouragement by teachers are absent since the teachers'

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authority is not questioned. This helps teachers focus more on their role as an educator, such as building a positive relationship with students. In sum, the administration regulates student's bodies, which lessens the teacher's role as a disciplinarian.

As a disciplinarian, teachers engage in different tactics to regulate their students. Many teachers express their wish to prioritize the student's education, even those who violate the dress code. But even in these cases, they engage in a delicate balancing act, balancing the role of an educator and a disciplinarian. This is evident when teachers engage in minimizing punishment tactics in an attempt to disrupt the student's education as little as possible. Minimization is only possible when teachers do not perceive the student as distracting. If students were deemed as distracting, then teachers will not engage in minimization. In retrospect, teachers who mentioned that they have previously worked at urban schools do not mention minimization strategies in that setting. While I cannot speak to the practices of regulation at other schools, it is interesting how these teachers used urban schools as a comparison point. This brings up questions about classed practices.

Another set of social constraints that limit teachers' ability to regulate students is gender ideology. Both male and female teachers engaged in minimalizing strategies. However, male teachers implemented an additional type of regulation that involves distancing. Males engage in distancing as they fear the retaliation from students or parents. The one exception is where a male teacher used homophobic discourse to make male students comply to the dress code (Pascoe 2011). Distancing occurs in two ways. First is the generalization of dress code statements. In other words, male teachers do not call out a specific female student for dress code violation but rather makes vague statements that allude to the presence of a dress code violation. The second is the relegation of dress code enforcement to female workers (both teachers and

administrators). In both ways, distancing only occurs when male teachers are confronted with female dress code violations. Distancing occurs because male teachers experience a certain type of discomfort when they are put in situation where they may regulate a female student's dress. This kind of discomfort that male teachers experience is similar to the discomfort that men experience in female dominated groups (Williams 1992). In these cases, male teachers are placed in a predicament. On one hand, they are generally expected to discipline students, whereas on the other hand, if they regulate female students, they can be accused of being a sexual deviant. This echoes Acker's (1990) theory on gendered organization and the minimalization of responsibility of sexuality for the abstract male worker. In this theory, female bodies were used as a means of control and exclusion. As male teachers relegated the task to female workers (including teachers and administrators), female workers took on part of the male teacher's work. This means that female teachers had to take on the role of the disciplinarian more often than male teachers. Females teachers who have to perform more disciplinarian tasks may run the risk of jeopardizing their relationship with students. This may also negatively affect how female teachers are seen as figures of authorities, by students, other teachers, parents, and the administration. For example, female teachers who enforce the dress code too often may be perceived as someone is a too tough or unyielding. This gendered division of labor reifies gender roles and a patriarchal space.

The patriarchal space is reproduced in several ways. First, the dress code creates conditions to allow for certain bodies to be targeted. Teachers recognize that there are more dress code rules that applies female students than male students. Many teachers cite that a criterion of a dress code infraction is when students' dress is perceived to be a distraction. This rational allows for discretion from the teacher and it is particularly evident with the regulation of female bodies. As a result of interpretability, female students may face more consequences than male

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students. Second, there are gendered consequences. Any student can break the dress code, but only female students receive extra lessons. Female students are expected to embody emphasized femininity that is geared towards subordination, obedience, and modesty. When teachers describe cases that involve a female student, they do so from a heteronormative lens. Some teachers objectify the female body and perceive that they are a sexual distraction to both male students and teachers. Because of this assumption, female students receive lessons on modesty and respectability while male students do not. This assumption also contributes to why male teachers engage in distancing tactics.

While teachers describe female students in an objectified manner, only certain bodies are perceived to be more sexualized. Female students of color, particularly if they have a more developed body, were hypersexualized. Female students of color also received other lessons on respectability, but it was respectability towards one self and from others. Particularly, black female bodies were viewed as promiscuous and disrespectful. In retrospect, the notion of a sexualized female body gives way to a subtle lesson for males. Males are treated with a “boys will be boys” attitude, giving social permission for male students to act however they want (Kimmel 1999; Pascoe 2011). Both male and female teachers perpetuate this narrative. The normalization of these types of rhetoric and regulation can foster a dangerous environment for teachers and their students. While teachers do not condone rape, their language surrounding the performance of female bodies implicitly implies victim blaming. In line with previous research (Martin 1998, Morris 2007), gendered regulations endure throughout the multiple levels of the educational institution. The perseverance of these practices help uphold hegemonic masculinity.

As teachers frame their actions and assumptions about gender around respectability, they also apply the frame of professionalism. Respectability contains judgements of gender, race,

class, and sexuality (Skeggs 1997). Teachers expect a certain display of respectability in the form of clothing. This is particularly evident when it came to female students, particularly female students of color. Teachers gave them lessons on respectability and ways to embody femininity if they were perceived as deviating from the white middle class norm. Professionalism is similar in this regard. Teachers expressed certain tastes in terms of dress styles. They can be thought of as implementers of a cloning culture (Essed and Goldberg 2002; Mattsson 2015), as they preferred similar styles. Some teachers rationalize that part of the education process is to make students marketable for a white-collar job, such as a corporate job. To funnel students into these middle class type jobs, and one of the ways to fit in is to “look nice” or to adhere to professional dress norms. In this process, teachers teach students the tastes of the dominant group and reproduce middle class values. Research has shown that these embodiment skills can translate into other types of jobs (Williams and Connell 2010, Sheane 2012). However, under the guise of professionalism, teachers uphold anti-blackness and marginalizes these types of dress. Teachers also expected their students to “look right.” For example, certain aspects of what is considered hip hop culture was devalued in terms of professionalism. Teachers of color held these expectations as well. While white students were not confronted about lessons on professionalism, students of color were. One teacher even praised a white student for breaking the dress code. When students of color, especially black students, broke the dress code, teachers turned it into a moment of opportunity and gave them a lesson on how to look professional. The art of “looking good” or “looking right” stems from Goffman’s (1959) presentation of self. However, as much as a student can “look right,” teacher’s implicit biases can outweigh their efforts, resulting in a lesson on professionalism. As educators, teachers try to teach students acceptable forms of aesthetics. For example, grounded in white, heterosexual, middle class norms, teachers thought

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that female students can experience success if emphasized femininity was achieved (Mattsson 2015). Teacher's practices can be thought of as a project that focuses on molding students. Their practices relate to middle class parents who tend to also see their children as a project (Lareau 2003). They seek to develop their talents and skills through a series of organized activities, through an intensive process of reasoning and close supervision of their experiences in school. For teachers, close supervision is apparent when they indicate that they regulate students on a daily basis. This supervision is more apparent for Latino and black students. When teachers recall situations where they encounter a Latinx or black student, their accounts hint at fear of violence and disrespect from them. Some teachers compared their experiences in their current, suburban schools to their past experience in poor urban schools, noting that suburban schools were safe and their students were non-threatening. This is problematic when poor and students of color has been perceived to "dangerous" and are removed primarily for non-violent infractions (Skiba et al. 2000)

In general, teachers did not perceive students at their current school to be threatening. However, they still perceived students of color in their current schools to be disrespectful and threatening. This finding mirrors Morris's (2005) study of teachers in middle schools where black and brown bodies were perceived to be threatening. This could lead to harsher forms of punishment, such as exclusionary discipline, which starts the chain reaction of the school to prison pipeline (Wald and Losen 2003). In 2013-2014, black students make up 67 percent of the out-of-school suspensions in this district. This is especially problematic because even in a racially diverse district, black students are being suspended at a disproportionate rate. In a report by Fowler (2010), the first phase in the school to prison pipeline are disciplinary referrals, which removes a student from the classroom. Compared to the overall percentage in the student

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population at the state level, black and Latinx students are significantly overrepresented in schools' discretionary referrals to in school suspension, out of school suspensions, or Disciplinary Alternative Education Programs (Fowler 2010). Disproportionate suspension is not only an issue of race, but of other intersections as well, such as gender, race, class, and disability status. For example, one study showed black special education students were over three times more likely to be expelled than other students, and Latinx special education students were over two times more likely to be expelled than other students (Fowler 2010). Different groups experience difference changes and different types of disciplinary action.

The teacher's practices of regulation help reify racial, gendered, and classed lines, creating an abstract image of a white, middle class male. These unwritten lessons about the acceptable forms of bodily displays contribute the hidden curriculum (Jackson 1968), which upholds hegemonic ideas about the dominant group. Teachers teach students that they must comply with the dress code, or else they must face the consequences. Teachers also teach students which forms of cultural capital are acceptable, and in turn, reinforces the values of the dominant group. In turn, teachers imply that students have to conform to their standards of dress to experiences some kind of success in life. This is problematic as teachers devalue a certain type of black culture and those who participate in it. In turn, this marginalizes a segment of students. While clothes do not indicate a person's worth, they do indicate some meaning, whether it is intended or not. Similar to Morris's (2005) findings, teachers associated dress with success not only in the classroom but beyond it. This study suggests that marginalized groups face more frequent and severe regulations.

## CONCLUSION

In this study, I examine the how high school teachers reinforce androcentric, anti-black, middle class norms through the enforcement of the school dress code. Teacher's understandings, regulations, and expectations mirror a certain set of capital that the dominant group endorses. This contributes to the different treatment of marginalized students. It is important to examine how teachers treat students as students who report more incidents of discrimination also reported a decline in grades and an increase in psychological distress (Wong, Eccles, and Sameroff 2003).

During this study, I did not anticipate the extent of the administrator's role in regulating student's bodies. Many teachers cite that only they can officially hand out punishment, in terms of having the punishment published in the student's school records. Future studies should examine how administrators contribute to the inefficiencies of student's education and impeded on a teacher's job to educate. Another limitation of this study is generalizability. While qualitative studies have strengths in examining processes, they are limited by sample characteristics. In my sample, these processes may only reflect those who are willing to talk about dress code issues. It is also worthwhile for future research to examine the reception of teachers' regulations. Further studies should explore if and how students interpret teacher's lessons.

In conclusion, while the dress code may not take priority in many educator's agendas, it is still important to examine. My study highlights how the dress code itself indicate the dominant group's preferences. Teachers take up anti-black, patriarchal, middle class values and instill them on student when regulating students' bodies. Gendered and racialized ideas (among others) inform how teachers regulate students. In doing so, marginalized youths are further marginalized within the educational system. To address dress code violations, policy makers can create and



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implement practices and disciplinary actions that do not require removal from class. These disciplinary actions implemented by teachers, administrators, and other members who can enforce disciplinary actions. In addition, having training sessions that focus on how disciplinary actions and teacher's attitudes can produce unintended consequences (e.g., the school to prison pipeline, discourse that enables rape culture, reifying dominant tastes, the marginalization of certain students) can benefit students, teachers, and administrators.

**Notes**

<sup>1</sup>Names used in this paper are pseudonyms.

<sup>2</sup>I conducted a pilot study as part of a class project. For the pilot, I interviewed three male teachers using a similar interview guide as this project. As their interviews were theoretically informative, I decided to include their interviews as part of my analysis. For example, their interviews were the first to highlight how male teachers referred of female students to female teachers.

<sup>3</sup>This project was not funded and the monetary incentives for the interviews came from personal funds.

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### Appendix A: Recruitment Email

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

Hello, my name is Yvonne Chen and I am a sociology master's student at the University of Houston. For my thesis, I am currently conducting interviews with teachers and would like to know more about your specific experiences with students. \_[Another teacher's name]\_ has expressed that you may be interested in participating!

The interview is approximately 1.25 hours and will be audio recorded. In my thesis, I will not reveal your identity, but instead use a pseudonym. In the interview, you may skip any question you are uncomfortable answering or withdraw from the interview at anytime. Upon completion of the interview, you will receive a \$25 VISA gift card.

If you are interested in participating, please list a few dates and times in which you are available, as well as where you would like to hold the interview. If it makes things more convenient for you, I can drive to your campus.

Let me know if you're interested. And if you think anyone else would be interested in this, please forward the ad that is attached. I would greatly appreciate it!

If you have any questions, you can reach me at (281) 813-9338 or [ychen60@uh.edu](mailto:ychen60@uh.edu).

*This study is conducted under the supervision of Samantha Kwan, Ph.D. She can be reached at (713) 743-3948 or [sskwan@uh.edu](mailto:sskwan@uh.edu). This project has been reviewed by the University of Houston Committees for the Protection of Human Subjects (713) 743-9204.*

Thank you,

Yvonne Chen  
Student Advisory Board Member | *Social Problems*  
Teaching Assistant | Department of Sociology  
University of Houston  
476 Philip G. Hoffman Hall  
Houston, TX 77204  
[ychen60@uh.edu](mailto:ychen60@uh.edu)

**Appendix B: Recruitment Advertisement**

# Calling all teachers!

What has been your experience with  
students and the dress code?

Earn \$25 for participating in an  
interview!

Interviews are conducted face to face at a time and location of your  
choosing. The information you provide will remain confidential.

Interviews will take approximately 1.25 hours.

Interested? Please contact Yvonne Chen, a sociology master's student  
at the University of Houston.

Email: [ychen60@uh.edu](mailto:ychen60@uh.edu) Phone: (281)-813-9338.

*This study is conducted under the supervision of Samantha Kwan, Ph.D. She can be reached at (713) 743-3948 or [sskwan@uh.edu](mailto:sskwan@uh.edu). This project has been reviewed by the University of Houston Committees for the Protection of Human Subjects (713) 743-9204.*

## Appendix C: Interview Guide

I will be asking you about your experiences as a teacher. This interview and anything you say here will strictly be kept confidential. You may also elect not to answer any questions or to withdraw from the interview at any point. In my write up, I will refer to you using an alternative name. Before we begin, do you have any questions?

### *Background Information*

First I'll start off with some background questions about your experiences as a teacher.

1. What grade level do you teach?
2. What subject(s) do you teach?
3. How long have you been teaching at this school?
  - a. How long have you been teaching in general?
4. How is your relationship with your students?
  - a. Probe: bonding, mentoring, educating, etc.
5. What are your goals as a teacher?
6. What are your goals for your students?
  - a. Probe: What do you do to prepare your students for success for life beyond high school?

### *Ideal Student*

So continuing on the conversation about students, I'm going to ask some questions about students and their **physical appearances**. Think about what an ideal student should look like when they come into class/school.

7. Can you please describe to me in detail what a female should look like when they come to school/enter the classroom?
  - a. Probe: Clothes, jewelry, hair, make up.
  - b. For males?

Now that we've hit on some points about how a student looks, let's focus more on student dress code.

### *Dress Code*

8. Do you think that a school dress code is important?
  - a. In what ways might it (not) be important?
  - b. Probe: How important is the dress code to you personally?
    - i. Probe: How important is it for you to enforce the dress code?
9. At this school, what is the dress code for males?
10. At this school, what is the dress code for females?
11. What are the protocols if a student breaks the school dress code?
  - a. Probe: Level of violations, first offense, second offense, etc.
12. Who enforces the dress code most often at this school? (Group of people, an individual, etc.)
13. In your experience, how often do students break the dress code?
14. Tell me about a time when a student broke the dress code this week.

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- a. When did this happen?
  - b. Where did it happen?
  - c. What rule(s) was the student breaking?
  - d. What were the consequences for that student?
  - e. How did you react?
  - f. How did the student react?
  - g. Not naming any names, who was the student? (Relational)
    - i. Probe: Please describe to me what the student looked like.
      1. Physical attributes
      2. What were they wearing?
      3. gender \_\_\_\_\_ race \_\_\_\_\_ body size \_\_\_\_\_
        - a. Probe: For demographic purposes
  - h. Have they violated the dress code previously?
    - i. What were the consequences for that student then?
    - ii. How did they react?
15. How typical is this dress code violation for... ☐ females ☐ males?
16. [Not very typical]: Can you describe to me a typical situation where ☐ female ☐ males violate the dress code?
- a. When does it typically happen? (Season/month)
  - b. Where does it happen? (Location/event)
  - c. What rule(s) do they typically break?
  - d. What are the typical consequences for breaking those rules?
  - e. How do you react in those situations?
  - f. How do the student react in those situations?
  - g. What kind of students typically break these dress codes?
    - i. Probe: Please describe to me what the student typically looks like.
      1. Physical attributes
      2. Tell me about their gender \_\_\_\_\_ race \_\_\_\_\_ body size \_\_\_\_\_
        - a. Probe: For demographic purposes
17. [Very typical]: What about for ... ☐ females ☐ males? Can you describe to me a typical situation where ☐ female ☐ males violate the dress code?
- a. When does it typically happen? (Season/month)
  - b. Where does it happen? (Location/event)
  - c. What rule(s) do they typically break?
  - d. What are the typical consequences for breaking those rules?
  - e. How do you react in those situations?
  - f. How do the student react in those situations?
  - g. What kind of students typically break these dress codes?
    - i. Probe: Please describe to me what the student typically looks like.
      1. Physical attributes
      2. Tell me about their gender \_\_\_\_\_ race \_\_\_\_\_ body size \_\_\_\_\_
        - a. Probe: For demographic purposes
18. What is the worst dress code violation you've seen at this school (or throughout your teaching career)?
- a. When did this happen?
  - b. Where did it happen?



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- c. What rule(s) was the student breaking?
  - d. What were the consequences for that student?
  - e. How did you react?
  - f. How did the student react?
  - g. Not naming any names, who was the student? (Relational)
    - i. Probe: Please describe to me what the student looked like.
      - 1. Physical attributes
      - 2. What were they wearing?
      - 3. Tell me about their gender \_\_\_\_\_ race \_\_\_\_\_ body size \_\_\_\_\_
19. What about for ... ☐ females ☐ males? What is the worst dress code violation you've seen at this school (or throughout teaching career) for ... ☐ females ☐ males?
- a. When did this happen?
  - b. Where did it happen?
  - c. What rule(s) was the student breaking?
  - d. What were the consequences for that student?
  - e. How did you react?
  - f. How did the student react?
  - g. Not naming any names, who was the student? (relational)
    - i. Probe: Please describe to me what the student looked like.
      - 1. Physical attributes
      - 2. What were they wearing?
      - 3. Tell me about their gender \_\_\_\_\_ race \_\_\_\_\_ body size \_\_\_\_\_

Ok, we're just about to finish up. Just a few more questions left about demographics.

### *Demographics*

- 20. Age:
- 21. Race/ethnicity:
- 22. Gender:
- 23. Highest degree obtained:
  - a. Major:
  - b. Minor:
- 24. Annual income before taxes:
- 25. Sexual orientation:
- 26. Marital status:
- 27. Number of children:

### *Ending question*

- 28. Is there anything else I should know to help me better understand teachers and their experiences with student dress code regulations?

## **Appendix D: Dress Code Rules**

This district takes pride in the appearance of our students. The District's dress code and grooming standards have been established to teach grooming and hygiene, to prevent disruption, and to minimize safety hazards at school and school-related functions. All students shall wear clothing that is neat, appropriate, and modest to the age of the student. Each campus, not unlike a work place, promotes a productive, business-like atmosphere conducive to learning. Students should be familiar with these standards, as the dictates of popular fashion may be inconsistent with these guidelines:

### **SHIRTS, BLOUSES, SWEATSHIRTS, SWEATERS, VESTS**

- Must touch the belt line with no revealing undergarments
- No oversized armholes, vented t-shirts, spaghetti straps, tank tops, sleeveless t-shirts, backless attire and off the shoulder tops
- No revealing midriff or undergarments while standing or sitting
- No revealing, low-cut, see-through, or too tight clothing such as spandex/lycra (no exposed cleavage)

### **DRESSES, JUMPERS, SKIRTS, SHORTS, SKORTS, CAPRIS, PANTS, AND JEANS**

- Dresses shall be worn modest in length (at or below middle of thigh)
- Shorts, jeans, and all pants shall be worn at the hip and must cover the undergarments\
- No tattered shorts, biker shorts, or wind shorts or clothing that has been ripped, torn, or cut in a way as to reveal undergarments
- Walking shorts may be worn provided they are no more than three inches above the knee
- Students in kindergarten through second grade may wear shorts slightly above mid-thigh
- No clothing that is excessively tight such as spandex/lycra unless worn with a dress, skirt, or tunic

### **SHOES**

- Shoes shall be worn, and if designed to be tied shall be properly tied
- Elementary students shall not wear flip-flops or shoes with no back/heel strap
- Unsafe footwear is not permitted (i.e.: house shoes, shower shoes, slippers, etc.)
- Appropriate shoes must be worn during P.E./gym classes as well as during lab activities in science, CTE, etc.

### **HAIR**

- Neat, clean and well-groomed; worn in a style and color that is not distractive
- Boys' hair length should not exceed touching the shoulders at full extension in the back unless required by the student's religion
- Boys' sideburns shall be no more than one-half inch below the ear lobes and shall not be flared
- Drawings, icons, and/or other markings cut into or colored into the hair, including eyebrows, and not associated with required religious markings or hairstyles are not permitted
- Mustaches, beards, or goatees are not allowed unless required to be worn by a student's religion or with physician's documentation

### **MISCELLANEOUS**

- All garments must be sized appropriately

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- Proper undergarments shall be worn at all times
- Revealing clothing of any type may not be worn
- Clothing with profanity, obscene patches, references to alcohol, drugs, weapons or tobacco, or anything that may be construed as provocative or offensive may not be worn
- Any attire that is distracting or causes a disturbance or identifies a student as part of an unauthorized group (i.e. bandanas, shoe laces, chains, t-shirts, etc.) may not be worn
- No clothing that has been ripped, torn, or cut in a way as to reveal undergarments, midriff, or cleavage
- No pajama wear of any type except on campus designated days
- No visible body piercing other than ears, including no tongue piercing; earring length – no more than one inch at elementary
- No hats, caps, doo-rags, wave caps, bandanas or hoods worn indoors (required religious head coverings not included)
- Prescription eyeglasses only
- No visible tattoos, icons, or markings on the body unless required by a student's religion