VERBUM SAP SAT: THE ENTANGLEMENT OF ADMISSIONS POLICY AND STUDENT EXPERIENCE IN AN ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL

by

LISA MARIE TROUTMAN

(Under the Direction of Donna Alvermann)

ABSTRACT

In the face of a rapidly diversifying United States, schools have had to make decisions regarding how best to approach diversity. In particular, schools of choice (schools which have more applicants than can be accepted) have been forced to continually re-examine their admissions practices in accordance with changing public opinion, political climate, and relevant research. Much of the existing literature on admissions policies deals with post-secondary schools, such as college, law or medical school admissions policies. What is not known is how alternative schools of choice have responded to this call for diversification, nor how admissions and outreach policies affect the identity of the school and the experience of its students. This study was conducted in an agential realist framework. Documents were analyzed to examine the relationship between admissions policy and student experience in an alternative high school. The findings suggest that admissions policy and student experience are interrelated, particularly with respect to diversity and the school's position within the larger community.

INDEX WORDS: Alternative education, admissions policy, admission lottery, student experience, educational philosophy, diversity, agential realism, document analysis, new materialism, diffractive cuts

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B.A., University of Mary Washington, 2005

A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of The University of Georgia in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF ARTS

ATHENS, GEORGIA

2015

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DEDICATION

GT

LT

JG

HB

Big science

Hallelujah

Big science

Yo de lay hee hoo

-Laurie Anderson

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I thank my thesis advisor, Dr. Donna Alvermann, for the generous encouragement and advice that she offered throughout this process. Her guidance both as a teacher and as an advisor has been one of my most significant educational experiences. This would have been an entirely different endeavor without her support. I thank Dr. Kathy Roulston for her valuable feedback in getting this project off the ground, particularly in helping me believe that this paper was possible. I thank Dr. Talmadge Guy for his suggestions and support. His input was instrumental in some of the most difficult sections of this work. I am so grateful for the guidance provided by the entire committee.

I want to acknowledge the hard work that Ray Anderson put into creating and sustaining H-B Woodlawn, and to thank him for shaping the student and person that have become and am continually (re)becoming. My gratitude also goes to Frank Haltiwanger for carrying on the work of advocating for HB and for his significant support throughout the planning and data collection process. Furthermore, I thank the entire HB community for nurturing students so beautifully over the years. In more ways than one, this paper would not have been possible without you.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

"...the beginning will never arrive. This beginning, like all beginnings, is already threaded through with anticipation of where it is going, but will never simply reach."

(Barad, 2014)

A student walks into middle school for the first time. The walls of the hallways, all painted in colorful murals and quotes by previous graduating classes, remind her of tie dye. When she opens her new locker for the first time (which has no lock on it), she finds that the inside door has been painted by a previous owner. Backpacks have been strewn along the floor by students who didn't bother to go through the motion of actually opening their own locker door. Students line the hallways, standing in clumps around someone's locker or piled on a couch outside a classroom. The gym squeaks with the sounds of students who are sneaking in a quick game of basketball before classes start. A pop song pours out of the school loudspeakers. No bell rings, but clocks show it's time for the first class period of the day, and eventually most of the students trickle into one classroom or another.

The first class for our heroine is French. Though most middle school classes are on the first floor, the French classroom is on the third floor, mostly populated by high school students. As she nervously makes her way down the third floor hallway, an exuberant senior bounds over and introduces himself to her, for no discernable reason.

By the time she arrives in her classroom, the previous song has come to a close and another song is playing. She wonders if there will be music over the loudspeakers all day. She has a very limited idea of what to expect from this new school, but knows enough to expect the unexpected.

But no, the music stops after a few minutes and two older kids, seniors, read the morning's announcements. The school's Black Box Theater play for the fall will be The House of Yes, and auditions will be held in two weeks; due to concerns about mature content, 6th and 7th graders will need to bring a permission slip from their parents in order to be able to attend. Students who still need to make changes to their schedule should plan to meet with their TA before the end of the week, and submit all finalized changes to Marianne. The first Town Meeting of the school year will be held next Tuesday. After the announcements end, students and teachers settle down into class.

That's me, on my first day of school at HB Woodlawn, an alternative public school in Arlington, VA. The Town Meeting they talk about in those announcements? That's where students, teachers, and administrators convene in the school library to make decisions about school policies and practices. The TAs are Teacher-Advisors, something like a homeroom teacher but with more of an eye towards building a strong relationship between student and teacher, probably over several years. At the end of the previous school year, students had worked with their TA to design their own schedules for this year, choosing which classes to take and leaving spaces for precious "free blocks," where they could study or socialize at will. And Marianne was the registrar. She, like all the teachers and staff at the school, is called by her first name.

I attended HB Woodlawn for 7 years — both middle and high school. Near the end of my senior year, I had a dream that I could fly — almost. In this dream, on the last day of school I and my fellow seniors would be granted the ability to bounce around almost weightless, like Aldrin and Armstrong walking on the moon. This new power was granted in a special ceremony, and the graduating class went billowing voluminously around the hallways, bouncing and deflecting and altering one another's trajectories as if we were ripples diffracting across the surface of a pond.

The education I received at HB Woodlawn, and the ideals built into it, have stayed with me. The tenets held by its founder and teachers are working for a lot of students, and this is why I have chosen to investigate the processes by which this is all made possible. Not every student is well suited for this type of education, which the school clearly states in its outreach materials to potential students and parents. Compared to typical public schools, HB Woodlawn is both remarkably permissive and places a much higher burden of responsibility on the student. Students are free to make choices regarding their academic and social behaviors with limited interference from school staff.

Furthermore, because the school limits its class size, not every student who is a good fit is able to attend. HB Woodlawn has changed its admissions practices a number of times since its founding in 1972, and these practices have had a marked impact on the school population, its reputation within the community, and the lives and practices of the students and teachers within its walls. The issue of diversity has been continually re-evaluated over the course of the school's history. The series of events that come together

in creating an HB Woodlawn student is detailed, a concoction of serendipity, personality, choice, and determination.

Tracing the history of an institution's policies and practices traditionally necessitates a careful analysis of the factors that influenced and nudged its trajectory. And yet it is misleading to insinuate that HB Woodlawn is the focus of this study and that external factors have exerted their distinct influences on it over time. As Barad (2007) explains, "agencies are only distinct in relation to their mutual entanglements, they don't exist as individual elements" (p. 33). In order to explore the process by which HB Woodlawn is (constantly) created, and its students are created, and the community in which it exists is created, it is necessary to understand the entangled nature of these elements, rather than viewing them as individual components moving with or against one another.

Included in this entanglement is myself, the researcher. The fact that I am an alumna of the school is not a necessary condition for my entanglement (any researcher inevitably becomes part of the web of notions s/he seeks to examine), but it means that I am entangled on multiple levels, as student and as researcher, in my history and in my present (insofar as such lines can be drawn). The idea that HB Woodlawn comprises a sizeable chunk of my education, the education that has enabled me to do this research, is further evidence. The specifically student-identity component of this entanglement, however, does help to illustrate the idea that this research comes from within, rather than from an outside vantage point. Indeed, it will become clear throughout this paper that this research is not situated in a reflexive methodology, but a diffractive one (Barad,

2007). Barad's methodology (and its related terminology) are relatively new and unfamiliar, and I explain the differences later on, but for now it will suffice to let the words seep up from the core of the project, releasing themselves as soft bubbles in this first chapter.

CHAPTER 2

METHODOLOGY

Space, time, and matter do not exist prior to the intra-actions that reconstitute entanglements. (Barad, 2007, p. 74)

We find ourselves at the section where I discuss the components of my research: the theoretical gaze, site of research, participants, data generation, analysis, researcher, and so on. Describing a methodology in these discrete units is somewhat incompatible with a theoretical context of agential realism and vital materialism (which I describe in detail below). These discrete units are what we might call the "moving parts" of research, but as I will explain, these moving parts cannot be accurately described in strict isolation from one another.

Nonetheless, the fact that existing accepted research vocabulary is misleading in some sense doesn't mean that this vocabulary doesn't retain its usefulness in helping the reader understand how the study was conducted. As long as the reader keeps the concepts of entanglement and intra-action in mind, the vocabulary will allow me to explain the way this research was constructed without losing sight of the fact that each component is necessarily interrelated. Thus, with the stated caveat that the section divisions created here are something of a narrative conceit, I present in the following pages all the pieces that one might expect in a methodology chapter.

Traditionally, the literature review would come before the methodology chapter. I trust that my reasons for reversing this order will become clear after both chapters have been read. To state it briefly, the methodology informs the literature review. The literature review, like the findings, is rooted in agential realism, so an understanding of this theoretical framework will be helpful.

Theoretical Context

One of the things many people hate about theories is that they often use technical terms. And we will do just that. (Gee, 2012)

H-B Woodlawn (HBW) makes explicit its dedication to the idea that student opinions and actions can and should influence institutional decisions. This concept is central to the organization of the school and, as I discuss in Chapter 4, I have found it to be echoed throughout all its documentation, ranging from founding documents to more recent publications. The school has created several institutional structures to elicit and respond to student feedback. In order to investigate the success of these structures, it is important to see all the moving parts as pieces of a whole. For example, the students, parents, teachers, and administrators are all parts of this whole. But importantly, and perhaps unexpectedly, what we may consider "material" or "inanimate" aspects have equal impact and are equally parts of the whole. I am speaking of the impact of nonhuman elements, such as the building, location, classrooms, policies, and documentation of the school, to name a few.

I have used the theoretical framework of new materialism in this research. It provides useful tools for examining this whole, which is comprised of both human and

non-human elements, as well as elements that fall somewhere between these two poles. In particular, two new materialist ideas are at play in this research: agential realism and vital materialism.

Agential Realism

Agential realism is the theoretical framework that Karen Barad developed as a means of conducting research in the face of relatively new understandings in the realm of quantum physics. Diffraction (further discussed below) is an associated methodology. Specifically, Barad is drawing from physicist Niels Bohr's indeterminacy principle, the idea that "the values of complementary variables... are not simultaneously determinate" (Barad, 2007, p. 118). This point is ontological rather than epistemological. Barad continues, "The issue is not one of *unknowability* per se; rather, it is a question of what can be said to simultaneously *exist*" (Barad, 2007, p. 118, emphasis mine). Compare this to the colloquial understanding of Heisenberg's uncertainty principle, which is epistemological. According to this understanding, the object under investigation does indeed have independent characteristics and the difficulty arises because measurement interferes with, and alters, those characteristics. That is, the act of measurement causes the independent characteristics of the object to change, making their original characteristics unknowable.

By contrast, Bohr's indeterminacy principle holds that the object under investigation does not have independent (that is, pre-measurement) characteristics at all. The significance for this study is that my goal was not to find and lay bare an HBW that exists when no one is looking. In the framework of agential realism, the idea of an object

possessing independent characteristics is a fiction. Instead, "the primary ontological unit is not independent objects with inherent boundaries and properties but rather phenomena" (Barad, 2007, p. 139). A phenomenon includes both parts of a Cartesian dichotomy, the observer and the observed. A description of a phenomenon is entirely inaccurate without a description of the circumstances that produced it. A phenomenon is the entire entanglement: the object, the measurement apparatus, and the interaction between the two.

Thus, an experiment does not provide answers about objective, pre-measurement characteristics. Barad explains, "Bohr suggests that 'by an experiment we simply understand an event about which we are able in an unambiguous way to state the conditions necessary for the reproduction of the phenomena' (quoted in Folse, 1985, 24)" (Barad, 2007, p. 114). Those necessary conditions (the methodology) are a part of the phenomenon itself. Rather than examining individual entities with inherent qualities, agential realism holds that "concepts are defined by the circumstances required for their measurement" (Barad, 2007, p. 109). Therefore, what I need to impart here are the circumstances that were required for a concept to be evaluated by me in this study. These are as follows:

- The concept must be related in some way to the object of study (i.e., HBW)
- The concept must have been written about.
- That writing must have been preserved in some form (on paper or electronically).

- That writing must have been archived in such a way that I could retrieve it through the methods of data collection described in this paper.

These circumstances define what I was and was not able to ascertain about the school through this research. They are the circumstances required for the measurement of HBW in this study. In other words, they define HBW, in terms of this research.

Agential realism requires us to think of causality in a different way. Because agential realism does not allow for the concept of fixed, individual entities, there is no way that one individual identity can cause some sort of effect on another individual entity. Rather, "cause and effect emerge through intra-actions" (Barad, 2007, p. 176). My research question is framed to express this idea of intra-action: How does the admissions strategy of HBW *reflect and create* the student experience? In other words, the admissions strategy does not cause the student experience, nor the other way around. Rather, in this research, I explored the way the admission policy and the student experience intra-acted. Agential realism holds that agency is not a characteristic that can be possessed by an entity. In this case, neither the admissions policy nor the student experience can be assigned agency, a position of dominance, the ability to *cause* something in the other. Instead, agency arises in the continuous intra-actions between the two.

The idea that entities do not have inherent, pre-existing individual identities does not mean that meaningful description is impossible. It does, however, require an acknowledgement of responsibility on the part of the describer. Barad (2007) writes that a research apparatus is responsible for making agential "cuts," decisions which create

temporary boundaries separating object from observer. In Barad's words, a cut "enacts a local causal structure in the marking of the measuring instrument (effect) by the measured object (cause)" (Barad, 2007, p. 175). This "local causal structure" means that we can still talk about causality, as long as we understand that what we describe is specific to the particular instance we are looking at, rather than global or continuous in any sense. The descriptions provided in this account, therefore, are a product of the research apparatus and the cuts that I made in order to examine the necessarily-entangled components of what I am calling HBW's admissions strategies and student experience.

Vital Materialism

Vital materialism (Bennett, 2009) investigates the vitality of matter and its interaction with other forms of both animate and inanimate matter. In the introduction to *Vibrant Matter*, Bennett states that her goal "is to articulate a vibrant materiality that runs alongside and inside humans to see how analyses of political events might change if we gave the force of things more due" (2009, p. viii). My aim in this project was to enfold this intention in my own work. School policies certainly qualify as "political events" and I intended to give credence to "the force of things" in my analysis.

To engage with the world from a vital materialist standpoint, it is crucial to develop "the cultivated talent for remembering" that "the human is not exclusively human" (Bennett, 2009, p. 113). By this, Bennett is referring to the fact that it is very difficult to discern, even within our own bodies, where the human begins and ends. For example, we like to think of our brain as the center of our agency. And yet we know that at the atomic level, our brain runs on electricity, which we commonly conceive of as

inanimate. How can we justify the privileging of human thought over inanimate energy when it is in fact that inanimate energy that makes human thought possible? In other words, "the human body is itself a composite of many different it-bodies, including bacteria, viruses, metals, etc. and that when we recognize a resemblance between a human form and a nonhuman one, sometimes the connecting link is a shared *inorganicism*" (Bennett, quoted in Gratton, 2010, emphasis original). In the context of this study, this means developing the understanding that an HBW student is not individually constructed, but is instead created, sustained, and altered through the intra-actions of other agents. It is not possible to examine a given student's enrollment and experience as an independent action, because "an act can only take place in a field crowded with other endeavors and their consequences" (Bennett, 2009, p. 101). Individual events and entities do not exist as such; intra-actions are the driving creative force.

The vital materialist framework exerted its own agency on my examination of the effects of inanimate influences on admission and attendance patterns. For example, I examined the way that admissions outreach is conducted at HBW, because I suspected that material aspects (such as language and vocabulary choice, locations where the outreach is conducted, and whether the methods are paper or electronic) would impact who decides to apply for admission. In other words, that non-human entities have as much control as human entities (insofar as the two categories can be considered separate). In taking this approach, it is important to note that HBW as an institution does not have complete control over its policies. Therefore, no individual element of HBW's identity

(whether positive or negative) can be attributed solely to HBW as an individual actor. As Bennett explains, "no one body owns its supposedly own initiatives" (Bennett, 2009, p. 101). HBW operates in an environment alongside many other influences. For example, its decisions are precipitated, evaluated, and altered by the school board and the larger community in which it is situated. This provided the impetus for a study looking at the intra-actions between HBW and the other occupants of its "crowded field", as Bennett put it.

The combination of these two new materialist frameworks enabled an analysis of HBW from many angles. We might compare them as human and non-human, internal and external, student and teacher/staff, present and past, positive and negative, personal and impersonal. Under the framework of new materialism, these categories and dichotomies do not exist on their own. We can only understand them through the examination of specific entanglements, and with the understanding that the results are not fixed, but represent the *observation apparatus* as much as they represent the *objects of observation*. Barad's technique of diffractive analysis provided a means of pinpointing these influences and intra-actions.

Methodology: Diffractive Document Analysis

Diffraction

Diffraction (Barad, 2007; Haraway, 1997) is a method of analysis that attempts to analyze intra-action and interference. As stated above, it is the methodology that corresponds to the theoretical framework of agential realism. Diffraction is the word that describes the behavior of waves. As an example, think of the pattern of waves that is

created when a rock is dropped into a pond. Now, imagine that you have dropped 2 rocks into the pond. Where the ripples overlap, they will affect one another, by either amplifying or cancelling out the wave. Crucially, a diffractive methodology aims to look at these intersections. It looks at patterns of amplification (or resonance) and at patterns of interference (or dissonance).

In an interview conducted by Dolphijn & van der Tuin (2012), Barad explains that "[i]ndependent objects are abstract notions. This is the wrong objective referent. The actual objective referent is the phenomenon — the intra-action." Keep in mind that Barad is referring to "phenomena" as Bohr used the term, that is, "to designate particular instances of wholeness" (Barad, 2007, p. 119). According to Bohr, the word phenomenon refers the observations gathered under certain circumstances, *including a description of those circumstances themselves*. There is no such thing as a phenomenon existing independently of observation; observation is one of the necessary and defining characteristics of a phenomenon. In the case of this study, I am actually observing observations, namely, the observations made by individuals about HBW and published in various forms.

Diffractive reading entails looking for those patterns of resonance and dissonance, which "are attuned to differences — differences that our knowledge-making practices make and the effects they have on the world" (Barad, 2007, p. 72). In reading the documents for this study, a diffractive approach was integral. It is important to distinguish the concept of diffraction from the concept of difference. Haraway explains that "a diffraction pattern does not map where differences appear, but rather maps where

the *effects* of differences appear" (1992, p. 299). With this in mind, my document analysis did not focus solely on finding differences, such as discrepancies between documents, or on pinpointing changes over time. Instead, my intent was to find the effects of those differences, as Haraway advocates.

Certain intra-actions are of particular note in this study, including student influence on the admission policy (e.g. student proposals for changing the policy), community influence on the admission policy (e.g. the reputation of the school and the "kinds of people" who would attend, or send their child to, HBW), school outreach (the way the school portrays itself to prospective parents and students, as well as to the community at large), and the school building and its effect on school climate, population size, and reputation.

Document Analysis

I chose document analysis in order to examine the way that texts construct and are constructed by the student experience at HBW. Founding documents lay out the intention and philosophy of the school, whereas student-produced documents (such as a school paper) are demonstrations of the student experience. Indeed, it can be argued that schools exist primarily inside their documentation. Prior (2003) explains the significance of documentation in terms of institutional formation:

> [A] university (any university) is in its documents rather than in its buildings. In the UK, for example, universities are established by a charter. The charter — together with other documents — names the university, provides warrant to award degrees, legitimizes the officers of the university and so on. Naturally, a

> university has buildings and equipment and lecturers and students, but none of those things are sufficient for the award of university status. Only the charter can define the organization as a university, and in that sense provide the one necessary condition for its existence. More importantly, it is documentation that invariable forms the basis for what Atkinson and Coffey (1997) refer to as 'documentary realities' — organizational features that are created and sustained almost entirely in and through the documentation. (p. 60)

The idea that schools are housed in their documentation is evident in the process by which a child becomes an HBW student. By virtue of other texts in the public school sphere (mandatory-enrollment laws, for example), most children in the U.S. are students. (Indeed, the concept of schooling our young people is so ingrained that we have the term "school-aged," and that term applies to nearly the entire length of what we consider childhood.) That an American child will be a student is somewhat of a given. However, it is clearly not a given that a child will attend an alternative school of choice. By definition, the designation "alternative" means that something different must happen in order for the student to enroll at that institution. For instance, for a certain child to become a student at HBW, a specific confluence of textual events must take place, namely:

1. Certain people, information, and documents must reach the student and/or family in order to make them aware of HBW.
2. The student and/or family must be convinced of some benefit(s) to attending HBW.

3. The family must submit the student's information to be entered in the HBW attendance lottery.
4. The student must be selected through whatever lottery process is in place that year.
5. The student and family must accept the offer and enroll in HBW.

In other words, a specific series of events, choices, and documentation is required to create an HBW student. The child, of course, exists already — but the transformation into HBW student is a result of this confluence, this intra-action, of child, documentation, and decision. Since students at HBW exist because of this document trail, then they can be seen as what Prior (2003) calls "a network of text and action" (100); a human-nonhuman hybrid. This co-constitutive network is an example of what Barad describes as intra-action. The process by which this network or intra-action is formed necessitated a close, diffractive reading of the documentation in which HBW lives. I engaged in this process with texts related to HBW's admissions practices in order to examine the authors, audiences, messages, and intents of each text.

An integral part of the meaning- or knowledge-making process is deciding what does and doesn't matter. Research or measurement "apparatuses are the practices of mattering through which intelligibility and materiality are constituted (along with an excluded realm of what doesn't matter)" (Barad, 2007, p. 170). The use of the terms child, document, student, and so on are examples of what Barad calls agential cuts. The knowledge-making process required me to make temporary cuts into the enmeshed web of intra-action. I made these demarcations to enable the examination of the phenomenon

at hand. These cuts include certain things as part of the realm of this investigation and exclude others. For instance, I am not examining the process by which the child comes to be viewed as a child; the line of inquiry here is focused on how an HBW student is created.

Methods

Participants

HBW is an alternative school for 'typical' students (i.e. it is not for students with special needs or behavior problems). The institutional identity of HBW is specifically designed to elicit and respond to student feedback and opinion. Since my study is based on document analysis, my participants are not individual students, teachers, administrators, parents, or community members, but rather the discourses written by, about, and for them. There is a sufficiently large and varied archive of documents related to the school to provide data about HBW's institutional identity and philosophy, to provide data about the experience of its students, and to provide data about admissions and outreach strategies specifically. Furthermore, this field of documents spans the school's decades-long history, enabling an investigation into diffraction patterns over time.

When I say that I engaged these documents as participants, I am not being strictly metaphorical. I have explained the importance that nonhuman elements hold in this research. Prior (2003) describes how documents can "guide readers to perform in specific ways" (p. 101), demonstrating how texts exert influence over us. Each document is an active participant, then, rather than merely an inert log of what a human was

thinking at a given time in the past. Bennett (2009) exhorts us not to shy away from this agency in what we call inanimate objects: “A touch of anthropomorphism... can catalyze a sensibility that finds a world filled not with ontologically distinct categories of beings [subjects and objects] but with variously composed materialities that form confederations” (p. 99). Documents are active, meaning-making elements within an intra-action.

The participants for this study were documents written about the school from varying perspectives. These documents include:

- Administrative documents:
    - Memos (for example, from administration to teachers, from administration to the school board, from HBW to parents of prospective students)
    - The Arlington Public Schools website
    - The Merge Report from the merger of two schools, forming HBW
- Texts produced by students:
    - HBW newsletters and literary journals
    - The online student newsletter, *Verbum Sap Sat*
    - The Underground Student Handbook
- Documents written about the school by unaffiliated people
    - Newspaper articles written about the school, both locally and nationally
    - Journal articles about the school

Sites of Research

Some of the documents were reviewed on site at HBW, but photographs, scans, and notes were made to allow for further detailed analysis later. Other documents are available online and were reviewed in that context. The means by which document collection and analysis took place are discussed in greater detail in the Procedures section below. What is important to note about the sites of research is that they were both physical (data collection at the school) and virtual (data collection online). The format of the data gives information about the author as well as the intended and actual audience of the text. While both sets of data (i.e. in print and online) are publicly available, it is physically more difficult to access the hard copies of documents that are stored in the school building (that is, one must make arrangements to view the documents and then travel to the school). Documents that are available online have a wider potential audience. The materiality of the document is integral to its identity.

Having made that distinction, others arise. The phrase "sites of research" is a happy coincidence when dealing with web*sites*, of course, but the point is more than just an apt homonym. Websites are web places; places that I visited during the course of this research and places that are visited by others as well. Certain websites have a higher number of views than others, meaning that documents on those websites have the potential of a larger audience. The author, appearance, accessibility, and age of the website were also important factors to consider when evaluating its impact. In examining patterns of diffraction, questions of authorship and audience were key. Thus, it was

important to consider throughout the study the other readers who visited my "sites of research."

Data Generation

To generate data to answer the research questions, I examined various school documents across its 40-year history. Documents related to the school's founding provided insight into the school's intentions. Documents written by students provided insight into the way students react to (and enact) institutional policies. Documents related to ongoing school governance provided insight into how institutional identity is affected by student opinion.

There are several documents that provide lengthy and detailed descriptions of the HBW philosophy in intent and in practice. These include the Report of the Hoffman-Boston-Woodlawn Merger Committee (Anderson, 1977), the various editions of the Underground Student Handbook, and the information provided about HBW by Arlington Public Schools. Note that the authorship of these major documents is varied — written by HBW students, HBW staff, or county employees unaffiliated with HBW. In other words, I did not define them as major because they were written by a certain person or group. Rather, these are major (for lack of a better word) documents or sets of documents in that they are relatively long, go into specific detail, and — most importantly — each has as its specific and explicit intent a description of the purpose or nature of the school. Thus, they were my starting points. Other documents, representing other authors, also play their role. These include:

- newspaper articles

- school newsletter articles
- administrative memos
- event flyers and promotional materials
- Town Meeting minutes

In total, 556 individual pages were collected and tagged for this research.

It is important to keep in mind the circumstances required, discussed previously, for documents to have been included in this study. The document must have been preserved and archived, meaning that data collection relied on documents that office staff and administrators deemed worthy of keeping throughout the years, or documents that have been published and maintained online. While it seems obvious to note that data collection can't occur where data doesn't exist, I bring this up to highlight the way small enactments of agency (a staff member tossing out old documents considered unnecessary, a leaking pipe causing water damage, a web domain being shut down) constantly alter the landscape of documents and information available.

Certain technologies were agential in allowing me to generate data in the way that I did. These include tools directly involved in the data collection, such as a smartphone camera and the internet. Also agential were the transportation technologies (airplane and car) that allowed me to travel to the site, which is hundreds of miles from where I currently live. These technologies are part of the measurement apparatus and as such are part of the phenomenon described.

Procedures

Two different procedures enabled me to gather data from the variety of sources that I wanted to include. The first procedure, site visits, allowed me to gather data from hard copies of documents that are in storage at the school, as well as to collect information about the physical space of the school. The second procedure, online data collection, allowed me to gather further data regarding the school, both from internal and external sources. From the planning stages to finished product, the study took about seven months to complete.

Site visits. I gathered documents during two site visits to HBW, over the course of three months. I coordinated with the current principal to review documents that are in storage at HBW. These documents include texts from all stages within the school's history, both from administrative and student perspectives. I also took site notes and photographs during my visits to the school, documenting salient aspects of the school's physicality and appearance.

During the data collection process for this research, I visited the school to review documents. These documents are stored in the school building. In total, nine large boxes were gathered for my use and brought to a teacher conference room, where I was able to review the materials. I arrived each day around 9:00am, just before the school day began at 9:20. As such, I arrived at the same time as many students, and was able to hear the morning songs and announcements, just like in the story I recounted about my own first day of school at HBW in Chapter 1. The atmosphere of a newly beginning school day was the physical context in which much of the data collection took place.

I took a clear photo of each page of each document so that I could maximize the use of my time in the school. The photos allowed me to do my in-depth document analysis at a later time. After the document collection period, I used a photo-organizing computer program (Picasa and Picasa Web Albums) to assign tags to each page (here, I will use the word page to signify the photo of a single page). Using tags, rather than folders, allowed me to assign more than one tag to a given page. A folder system would have forced me to give each page one single identifier, whereas the tag system is much more flexible and better suited to diffractive analysis.

After reading each page, I assigned tags for each of the salient elements discussed in the page (for example, diversity, Town Meeting, gender, or community). I assigned tags based on the type of document, such as proposal or memo. I also assigned a tag for the year of the document, where available. The tags I used were not determined in advance. This progressive tagging system enabled me to notice patterns among the documents, without specifically looking for certain themes. The tagging system allowed me to see what topics were the most prevalent, thereby guiding my investigation into the research question. The tagging process was an enactment of agential cuts, segmenting documents into various categories while maintaining their overlapping, intra-acting nature.

Online data collection. The process of collecting data online was diffractive in itself. A few documents which have been archived online stood out as being particularly significant in the history of the school (such as the Merge Report, which essentially serves as the charter of the school). It was critical to ascertain the characteristics and

themes that were prominent among these keystone documents. One way of determining which themes are the most salient within a document is to count the number of times in which they appear. Immediately, I echo a caveat issued by Prior:

> "Naturally, enumeration of words and themes has its place, but only within a well-considered theoretical frame. For whilst simple counting strategies can reveal much about the focus of a documents and what its dominant concerns appear to be, they only add up to anything insightful once the function of the document has been identified. In other words, the enumeration process must always rest on an informed analysis concerning the nature of the 'facts' and categories' to be counted." (Prior, 2003, p. 21)

A word count, of course, is not enough. However, understanding which words surfaced the most in some documents provided points of entry into the document and served as flags around which I could start gathering context. It allowed me to find out which topics were heavily discussed in a given text, without an overreliance on cues given by the author, such as title. It is worth pointing out that the use of a word count demonstrates that digital text and a computer program (non-human elements) have enacted agency in directing my focus within certain documents.

While some of these keystone documents that are archived online are of considerable length, a website format typically dictates shorter documents. Having ascertained key philosophical themes of HBW from its critical founding documents, I turned to texts produced by students and others which demonstrated patterns of resonance

and dissonance with those avowed philosophies and values. The data generation process overall was diffractive and designed to attend to these patterns.

Data Analysis

As with the data generation, data analysis was conducted with the intent to attend to the intra-actions between and within documents. Some analysis took place during the site visits, in the form of my subjective judgments regarding what information was scanned, photographed, noted or otherwise documented for further review. However, the bulk of the analysis took place off-site, through close, diffractive readings of the texts. These close readings enabled me to begin to evaluate the multiple concepts, agents, authors, and audiences which enacted agency in each document.

The process of data analysis cannot be meaningfully separated from the process of data collection or from the process of writing this paper. Data collection was not temporally separated from data analysis; writing and analysis took place interspersed with the reading and tagging of documents. The majority of the agential cuts were made during the process of writing. That is, the different intra-actions under investigation were not pre-determined. The writing process was one of cutting-together. Components of one piece of what I am referring to as admission policies and student experience would resonate (or clash) with other components, creating patterns of amplification and interference that powered the analysis. Remember that agential realism holds that objects do not have pre-existing characteristics before their encounter with a measurement apparatus. In the phenomenon of this research, the data and my analysis of the data play

an equally large role. My analysis cannot be separated out, nor is it possible to somehow compensate for its effects, as a classical understanding would require.

I want to be clear that the very concept of answering a question (in this case, the research question regarding the intra-action of admission policy and student experience) is problematic in an agential realist framework. The idea of fixing a concept once and for all is impossible here. What my findings represent is an account of the intra-actions that I observed, using the diffractive cuts and the observation apparatus that I have detailed above. They cannot serve to fix the answer to the question for all time. This does not mean that the results are "purely artifactual values created by the act of measurement" (Barad, 2007, p. 197), but instead simply that these results represent the entire phenomenon, which includes myself as the researcher and should not be taken as a representation of observation-independent entities.

Subjectivity

It is clear by now that the question of subjectivity and researcher influence is somewhat different in an agential realist framework. We have unburdened ourselves of the impression that there exists anywhere an objective, observation-independent entity. In a tradition of objectivism, in this space I would apologize for disturbing this natural image and assure the reader that I have minimized the effects inflicted by my observation and analysis. Plainly, that is inappropriate in this theoretical context in which the condition of observation is a critical part of what brings a phenomenon into being. My observation, and the conditions under which it was conducted, are an inextricable part of the phenomenon described in this work.

I have explained that a diffractive methodology looks for amplification and interference; places where differences make a difference. As the researcher, one of the waves creating the diffraction pattern is myself. As a former student of HBW, my disturbance in the field is different from that of an outsider. I submit that this disturbance, while different, is not greater, but that does not mean it is negligible or not worth discussing. (After all, my measurement is an integral part of the phenomenon.) I found patterns of amplification and interference between and within documents, but I also found diffraction patterns between the documents and my own theories, recollections and experiences with the school. Patterns of amplification occurred when a document reinforced my own thoughts or experience. Patterns of interference occurred when a document conflicted with my personal experiences or recollections. In either case, the diffraction pattern incited me to look deeper into the concept being discussed.

In closing, I reiterate that I offer this research as one way of investigating the intra-action between admissions policies and student experience at a Type I alternative school (a school of choice). This research does not fix this intra-action for all time; it is impossible to do so. The phenomenon that I describe here necessarily includes myself as a researcher and I make no assertion that the qualities of HBW, its admissions, and its student experience that I describe here are inherent and fixed. There is relatively limited research on Type I alternative schools and the specific ways their student bodies are constructed and in turn, construct the schools over time. This research is a starting point for the investigation of the intra-actions of admissions policies and student experience at

the secondary level, with respect specifically to diversity. It is a temporary, temporal illumination of this entanglement.

CHAPTER 3

LITERATURE DIFFRACTION

As I explained in Chapter 2, Barad's diffractive methodology does not permit a reflective approach, wherein I could hold a text at a distance for evaluation. It does not permit me to position two texts as separate entities, nor does it allow me to position myself and a given text as separate entities. Nor can this chapter be viewed as a thing entirely separate from the texts it discusses, from the other chapters in this paper, from myself as the writer, or from you as the reader.

In both the reading and the writing of this chapter, the use of diffractive methodology meant that no text could be positioned as either superior or neutral. Thus, I didn't read one text and then hold up others in its light for comparison. The strategy in reading and writing was layered. Having laid down insights from one text, I layered in ideas from the next, and the next. At times, entire "sections" of reading or writing were folded over on themselves, creating a fan structure with a rapidly increasing number of layers. Pastry dough, as for croissants, is constructed in exactly this way; layers of dough and butter are folded onto themselves repeatedly. Traditional croissant dough has 81 layers created in this fashion, through only a handful of folds. Yet unlike pastry dough, the literature includes far more than two distinct ingredients. Given that articles and books tend to include literature reviews of their own, it follows that the body of knowledge contained here comes from innumerable sources.

Due to the methodology at play here, this chapter is not quite a literature review in the traditional sense, which is why I have called it a "literature diffraction." (The ideas of re-view and re-flection are rooted in similar etymological and colloquial conceptions, the pitfalls of which were discussed in Chapter 2.) This is also why I have chosen to invert the traditional order, placing the methodology section before the literature review. The methodology informs not only the research and findings, but also the texts, and the reading of those texts, included in this section. Because of this, it was important to get the methodology situated first. Now that we are familiar with Barad's methodology and the way I have set out to use it, we can proceed with the following section, a diffractive reading of the texts surrounding alternative education and diversity in schools.

Alternative Education

Alternative education is broadly defined as an educational approach that differs from the mainstream. It is posited in binary opposition, in other words, to the traditional school experience. In practice, however, this term refers to a wide variety of educational practices, designed for many different types of students (Sliwka, 2008; Lange & Sletten, 2002, Raywid, 1994). A great deal of the literature on alternative schools focuses on those schools that are designed for students with special needs or with severe behavior problems (Gold & Mann, 1984; Lange & Lehr, 1999; Lange & Sletten, 2002; Raywid, 1994, Wehlage et al., 1989).

Classification of Alternative Schools

The wide range of educational approaches under the umbrella of alternative education enables categorization. There exist many ways to think about categories of

alternative approaches. One of the most salient is that several networks of alternative schools exist, in which many schools across the globe all participate in a particular pedagogy and philosophy, such as Montessori or Waldorf schools. However, many alternative schools exist independently of any network, developing their own intents and methodology. As one method of categorization, Lange and Sletten (2002) group alternative schools into two sections: those internal to the public school system, and those outside it.

Raywid (1994) creates a more detailed taxonomy for classifying alternative schools. In this system, there are three major types of alternative schooling. Type I signifies what Raywid calls "popular innovations", which are schools that students and parents choose to be involved with. These schools represent a departure from mainstream education in terms of their organization, administration, and programs. Type I schools include magnet schools and other schools of choice. These schools do not seek to return their students to mainstream education after certain skills have been developed (as a remedial school would), but rather seek to provide a complete education for the student within their purview. Additionally, Type I schools often are based on a specific theme or emphasis in terms of either curriculum content or instructional procedures.

Type II schools are what Raywid refers to as "soft jails." Students do not attend a Type II school by choice, but are instead sent there as a last resort option. In-school suspension is classified as a Type II, as are schools that are designed as long-term programs for students who continually struggle in mainstream schools. The emphasis on a Type II school is behavior modification. Curriculum in a Type II school does not show

any signs of innovation in terms of content or pedagogy. Instead, students either continue with the same content matter as in their previous school, or learn basic skills (often through rote memorization).

Type III schools have an emphasis on remediation. This can refer to academic, social, or emotional needs of the student, or a combination. A Type III school has as its goal the return of its students to their previous school. These schools are "the clearest example we have of what a restructured school might look like" and tend to focus on building a sense of community (Raywid, 1994).

Prevalence of Alternative Schools in the United States

Lange and Sletten (2002) provide a sense of the prevalence of alternative schools in several states. However, they caution that coming up with precise numbers and lists of alternatives is not easily done. It is clear from the classification systems previously discussed that there is a wide variety of schools that may or may not be considered alternative depending on the definition used. Again, we see that concepts (in this case, the classification of alternative schools) are defined by the circumstances required for their measurement, as Bohr argues. In Lange and Sletten's (2002) survey of the prevalence of alternative education in selected states, the state of Washington had the greatest number at over 400 schools. Michigan had 369. Most of the other states included had a range of 100-200 alternative schools (Minnesota, North Carolina, Ohio, and South Carolina).

The variety of classification is clear from Lange and Sletten's (2002) discussion of each state's definition of alternative schools. For instance, the alternative schools in

all states except for Washington are designed for at-risk students, students with behavioral/social difficulties, or students who have extenuating circumstances which affect their education (for instance, pregnancy or motherhood). Therefore, these schools fall under Type II or Type III under Raywid's (1999) classification. Washington appeared to have the largest representation of alternative schools that could be classified as Type I.

A History of Alternative Schools

Alternative education has existed as long as there has been a public school system to provide alternatives to (Sliwka, 2008). The 19th century found many opponents to standardized public school, asserting that education was not the purview of the state and that the state's main interest in taking on education was the development of a uniform society for industrial purposes (Sliwka, 2008) or the development of a school system in which only a rarefied few truly succeeded (Lange & Sletten, 2002).

Alternative education enjoyed a boom in the 1960s and 1970s (Sliwka, 2008). During this time, "Freedom" or "Free" schools were developed, based on a community-oriented model. These schools existed outside the public school system and returned much educational control to the student. They eschewed formal teaching, evaluation, and discipline, trusting that the student would develop on his or her own, in his or her own way, if given a conducive environment (Lange & Sletten, 2002). Free and Freedom schools gave rise to other alternatives within the public school system, which shared similar approaches to autonomy, evaluation, and student choice (Lange & Sletten, 2002).

Many of the alternative schools that flowered during the 1960s and 1970s did not endure. The 1980s saw the development of alternative schools that were focused more on remediating struggling students and less on the free and open pedagogical strategies of the previous two decades (Lange & Sletten, 2002).

In terms of contemporary alternative education, Sliwka discusses two modern schools that have a strong basis in constructivist pedagogy. The two schools, Institut Beatenberg (in Switzerland) and PROTIC (in Canada) focus on the development of meta-cognitive skills. They both are also characterized by small-group learning, self- and peer-evaluation, and portfolio development. These schools highlight their foundation in constructivism with an approach that encourages students to make connections between their lived experiences and their learning, as well as interdisciplinary connections (Sliwka, 2008).

The Intent of Alternative Schools

In addition to her taxonomy for classifying the schools, Raywid (1999) also suggests a framework for classifying the motivation of alternative schools. In this system, alternative schools typically have one of three motives: changing the student, changing the school, or changing the entire educational system. Discerning these motives not only gives us a way to understand the intent of a given alternative school, but also provides us with a way to measure its effectiveness.

Raywid argues that the common public perception of alternative schools is that they are designed to change the student. This corresponds primarily with her Type II and Type III schools. One of the salient aspects of these schools is that students are meant to

attend the school only temporarily. If the school is "successful" (by its standards) with a student, that means the student is able to return to his or her previous school. Raywid asserts that these schools are accorded low status by outsiders. Lange and Sletten (2002) discuss fears that have been expressed over time by those who felt that alternative education could serve to marginalize students who teachers felt were troublesome.

Schools that are focused on changing the school experience for students attempt to create a more challenging or engaging curriculum. Raywid discusses an example, Central Park East Secondary school, and its alternative approaches to many educational aspects, including curriculum, instructional approaches, evaluation, and school organization. The intent of such schools is to reinvent the school format and take an innovating approach towards the entire school environment.

Schools that are focused on changing the entire educational system work to create entirely new modes of education. This type of school characterized the boom of alternative education in the 1960s and 1970s (Raywid, 1999).

The Efficacy of Alternative Schools

The wide variety of strategies that fall under the umbrella label of alternative education make it difficult to assess the effectiveness overall. Lange and Sletten (2002) discuss criticisms that much of the evaluation done on alternative programs focuses too heavily on short-term results. Again, many assessments of alternative programs tend to focus on alternative education for at-risk students (e.g. Gold & Mann, 1984; Lange & Lehr, 1999).

In their study on Sudbury Valley School (SVS), a Type I school under Raywid's taxonomy, Gray and Chanoff (1986) found that the school was effective in that students who had attended SVS generally had a similar (or higher) success rate (in the job market and/or higher education) as students who attended a more typical school. In this study, SVS students self-reported that they felt they were significantly more prepared in some areas for life after high school than their peers who attended traditional schools. These areas included self-confidence, self-discipline, and comfort level in interacting with authority figures.

Within her own taxonomy, Raywid (1994) found that Type II schools are largely ineffective. Type III schools, while more effective, are costly to run, in large part because they often require low teacher-student ratio and other expensive resources. Type I schools are by far the most effective from a cost-benefit perspective. In contrast to Type III schools, for instance, the teacher-student ratio is often the same as at typical schools. And in contrast to Type II schools, Type I schools are effective in transforming a student's attitude towards education and improving student behavior, engagement, and performance. Raywid (1999) shows that schools focused on changing the student are considerably less effective than schools that are focused on changing the school experience for the student.

In terms of academic gains, Lange and Sletten (2002) found that research has produced evidence of mixed results from alternative schools. Additionally, some studies have found that much of the difference between student performance in alternative education for at-risk students depends more on the characteristics of the student than the

school (Gold & Mann, 1984; Lange & Lehr, 1999). Again, however, this research was conducted on alternative schools for at-risk students, and is not necessarily generalizable to alternative schools with other types of student populations.

Characteristics of Successful Alternative Schools

The literature suggests several characteristics of successful alternative programs. These include: small school size (Lange & Sletten, 2002; Raywid, 1994); sense of school membership (Bryk & Driscoll, 1988; Raywid, 1994; Wehlage et al. 1989); involvement of teachers and administrators in school design and program decisions (Raywid, 1994); choice on the part of students, parents, and teachers to be involved (Lange & Sletten, 2002; Raywid, 1994); emphasis on student choice and flexibility (Lange & Sletten, 2002); close teacher-student interaction (Bryk & Driscoll, 1988; Lange & Sletten, 2002); autonomy granted by the superintendent (Raywid, 1994); and continuity in leadership (Raywid, 1994). While many of these characteristics are necessary for the success of any school, some (such as support from the superintendent) are by no means a given when it comes to alternative education. Other characteristics are inherently specific to alternative schools, such as small size and having students who choose to attend. Here I focus on a few salient characteristics from the literature.

School size. Alternative schools tend to be small (Lange & Sletten, 2002). This aspect creates a conducive environment for many of the other important aspects of successful alternative education, including teacher-student connections and a strong sense of community. Smaller school size is often considered to be better for students, leading to more personal attention and higher school involvement. (Stewart, 2007). In a study

looking at 18 different school outcomes in secondary schools, Fowler and Walberg (1991) found that small school size was one of the top three variables most strongly associated with performance. The only variables that were more strongly associated with student performance were the socioeconomic status of the district and the percentage of students from low-income households.

The literature on small schools is not all rosy, however. For instance, Kafka (2008) discusses the pitfalls of small schools, asserting that proponents of small schools focus too much on the individual and do not address the needs of American society as a whole. Kafka argues that the small school movement appears to reject the idea that public schooling should be concerned with the common good, instead putting the individual student first. The literature supports the idea, however, that alternative schools are about much more than small size alone.

School climate. This characteristic is variously referred to as school climate (Frymier, 1987; Stevens & Sanchez, 1999, Stewart, 2007) or school membership (Bryk & Driscoll, 1988; Wehlage et al., 1989). School climate has a big impact on students, affecting their learning, behavior, sense of belonging, and academic achievement (Stewart, 2007). The development of a strong sense of membership within a school is aided in part by a small school size (Bryk & Driscoll, 1988). Bryk and Driscoll also argue that a sense of community enhances the school environment, provides intrinsic rewards to those involved, and has a positive effect on social and academic achievement. Bryk and Driscoll define school community as a composite of three overarching components:

shared value systems, a common agenda, and a sense of caring among teachers and students.

Shared value systems reflect the norms of instruction and learning that exist within the school. These norms are reflected in the behavior of students and teachers, and in turn those behaviors underpin the goals of the institution (Bryk & Driscoll, 1988). A *common agenda* means that everyone in the school community frequently participates in shared activities, helping them to form strong relationships. Through these shared activities, members of the school community become acculturated to the shared value system as well. Shared rituals give members a sense of belonging to the community (Bryk & Driscoll, 1988).

Bryk and Driscoll argue that *the sense of caring among teachers and students* is developed through two channels: friendliness among the teachers and a "diffuse" role of teachers. Collegial interaction among teachers fosters the sense of community as they build relationships, learn to collaborate, and create a personal, open atmosphere. A "diffuse" teacher's role means that the teacher is not only focused on specific academic duties, but on student social and emotional development (Bryk & Driscoll, 1988). This "diffuse" role is akin to what Frymier (1987) refers to as "ethical commitment" to student learning. Stevens and Sanchez (1999) argue that the input of parents and community members is also important in developing a positive school climate. Overall, the literature suggests that the involvement of all adults (teachers, administrators, parents, community) is an important factor in fostering a sense of school membership and thus student achievement.

The intra-actions between these characteristics. It is clear from this discussion that the various common aspects of alternative education work to support each other. For example, let's return to the characteristic of small school size. Semel and Sadovnik (2008), in their discussion of small schools and progressive education, demonstrate that school size is both supportive of and supported by other aspects of alternative education discussed here. They show small schools are supported by "strong and enduring leaders, well-articulated philosophies and accompanying pedagogic practice, and a neighborhood to supply their clientele" (p. 1672). In this way, no individual aspect of alternative education can be singled out as the magic bullet. Rather, the literature suggests that different aspects work with and through each other to form a support system for the school.

Diversity and Affirmative Action

The research presented here examines HBW's admission policies and student body. The question of who is admitted (and who applies in the first place) has political and social impact on HBW and the larger community in which it is situated. As my findings show, HBW has wrestled with a relative lack of diversity and has struggled through several different solutions, including affirmative action, in order to find a way to increase diversity within its student body. Here I will discuss the literature related to diversity and affirmative action.

Diversity and affirmative action are not synonymous, though they are inextricably related. In this section, I will discuss the legal and political history of affirmative action in education, arguments for and against affirmative action, and student activism regarding

the issue. I then move to a larger discussion of diversity within schools. I discuss the ways that diversity both defines and is defined, acts and is acted upon. This background demonstrates the larger historical context within which HBW has been acting over time, and the human and non-human elements that are agential in trying to increase diversity within an educational institution.

Affirmative Action: Legal Standards and History

In 1954, the Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* held that separate educational facilities and standards are by nature unequal. In the 1978 case *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke*, the Supreme Court held that race-based policy (such as affirmative action) is permissible when it passes what is known as strict scrutiny, showing that there is a compelling interest served by the policy in question, and that the policy is narrowly tailored to that compelling interest. The Supreme Court has recognized two such compelling interests. The first is the amelioration of negative effects of past discrimination. The second is the interest of increased diversity and its accompanying educational benefits (Palmer, 2001).

Other legal decisions have disagreed with the decision made in *Bakke*. In 1996, the Texas Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals overturned affirmative action at the University of Texas School of Law in *Hopwood v. Texas*, the first successful challenge to affirmative action since *Bakke* (though *Hopwood* was repealed in 2003). The *Hopwood* decision essentially rejected the idea that educational diversity is a compelling interest (Palmer, 2001).

Palmer (2001) contrasts *Hopwood* with another 1996 case, *Wittmer v. Peters*, which upheld affirmative action as an employment strategy at a "boot camp" for young offenders. The affirmative action was intended to promote the hiring of African American men as counselors for offenders at the camp, and defendants successfully made the case that the camp would not be effective without some African Americans as counselors. The Supreme Court further upheld the principles of the *Bakke* decision in their decision on the 2003 case *Grutter v. Bollinger*, holding that the University of Michigan's race-conscious admissions policy was permissible.

Another significant milestone in the history of affirmative action is Executive Order 11246. The order, which was signed into law by President Johnson in 1965, "prohibits federal contractors and federally assisted construction contractors and subcontractors, who do over $10,000 in Government business in one year from discriminating in employment decisions on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, or national origin." (Executive Order No. 11246). In addition, the order requires that government contractors engage in affirmative action to ensure equal employment opportunities.

Arguments Against Affirmative Action

In addition to legal decisions opposing affirmative action discussed above, it is important to consider public opinion and the individuals and groups who are against affirmative action. Perhaps surprisingly, detractors of affirmative action frequently cite Martin Luther King, Jr. as inspiration, stating that his ideals of a colorblind society are incompatible with affirmative action (Gaston, 2001; Yosso et al, 2004). Gaston argues

that King's words have been misused in arguments *against* affirmative action and integration over the decades since his death and that affirmative action "bears no generic, historic, analogous, or constitutional relationship to racial discrimination and the white supremacy myths that created it" (Gaston, 2001, p. 289).

Furthermore, Gaston (2001) argues that all admissions policies rely on some way to make distinctions between students, and that affirmative action does that in a logical way:

> To say that [a student] whose application for admission is not successful is a victim of 'discrimination' is to empty the word totally of its derogatory meaning - *making choices on the basis of class or race or category without regard for individual merit; to show prejudice* - and return it to its literal meaning - *to make clear distinctions; to make sensible decisions; to judge wisely; to show careful judgment* (p. 290, emphasis original).

Even among those who support affirmative action, there is an uncomfortable awareness that some will perceive affirmative action as granting undeserved rewards to certain groups - and extrapolate these benefits to individuals within a group, regardless of whether the individual benefited from affirmative action or not. In an article describing why she insists on being called by her title in her classroom, Berry (2014) states, "anti-affirmative-action ideologues have managed to not only demolish the legitimacy of that policy, but tar the reputation of anyone who might have benefited from it (even if, like me, they did not)." Bonilla-Silva and Forman (2000) found that even those white people

who identify as non-racist frequently speak out against affirmative action, sometimes referring to it as “reverse discrimination”.

Another argument leveled against affirmative action is what is known as the mismatch hypothesis, meaning that students will flounder in a school that they (the argument goes) would not have been able to attend if not for affirmative action. Recent studies have found this to be false (e.g. Cortes, 2010; Fischer & Massey, 2007).

Student Agency in Affirmative Action

In his history of affirmative action at the University of Virginia (UVA), Gaston (2001) describes student activists as “the first ‘affirmative action’ agents at their university” (p. 279). In 1963, UVA administration was hesitant to meaningfully engage in the process of bringing African-American students to its campus. The student activists Gaston describes took it upon themselves to visit African-American high schools, armed with application information, and encourage those high school students to apply to UVA.

Gaston (2001) also describes changes in discourse in the UVA student newspaper, the *Cavalier Daily*, during this time. The *Cavalier Daily* moved from decrying desegregation boycotts to, in 1967, denouncing the university’s lingering allegiance to segregation as the “furtherance of a sick heritage.” During the school year of 1968-1969, a student coalition was formed which worked towards the goal of racial integration on campus, and was successful in convincing UVA’s president to implement many of their demands. Student activists also played a role in *Grutter v. Bollinger*, in which they formed a third party (beyond plaintiff and defendant) of “student intervenors”. These student intervenors argued that the University of Michigan’s affirmative action policy

was a compelling interest because it served to remedy past effects of discrimination (Yosso, Parker, Solórzano & Lynn, 2004).

Intra-actions Within Diversity

There is considerable debate regarding whether or not affirmative action is actually beneficial for minority students (Cortes, 2010). The intra-actions between race, class, and academic performance are layered and complex. Admissions policies which attempt to focus on one element inevitably wind up incorporating others. For example, research shows that socioeconomic status cannot be divested from school performance. Epple, Newlon, and Romano (2002) found that tracking systems which are designed to sort students based on academic ability also end up dividing students along socioeconomic lines.

Söderström and Uusitalo (2005) report on school reforms enacted in Sweden in 2000. Prior to 2000, students attended whichever school was nearby, but after 2000, school admission was based on academic performance. Söderström and Uusitalo found that this policy resulted in increased segregation of students based on family backgrounds and native versus immigrant status. Therefore, admissions policies based on where students live appear to provide increased diversity within a school population.

Schofield (2001) considers the pitfalls of substituting one-for-one a race-based affirmative action policy with a class-based one. Schofield argues that under such a policy, most of the minorities at the school would come from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Also to be considered is the diversity of the group that affirmative action seeks to benefit. Some researchers argue that diversity initiatives are not actually

designed to improve the lives of minority students. For example, Yosso et al. (2004) argue that the "diversity rationale" for affirmative action is itself racist in that it frames the issue in terms of enriching the lives of white students through the addition of diverse students to the traditionally-white environment:

> The unquestioned majoritarian story within this rationale is that students of color are admitted so that they can help White students become more racially tolerant, liven up class dialogue, and prepare White students for getting a job in a multicultural, global economy. (p.8)

The literature discussed here suggests that diversity and related initiatives must be viewed as a cross-section of many interrelated characteristics. The parameters, qualifications, and beneficiaries of affirmative action (as a concept or in any given instance) can't be extricated and viewed individually.

Pushback Against Diversity

In addition to the arguments against affirmative action discussed previously, there are those who struggle to accept diversity's existence in schools at all. Undeniably, diversity has been increasing and continues to increase in public schools in the United States. While this is welcomed by some, there are administrators, parents, and teachers who are unhappy with the influx of different types of students. One major issue is familiarity and experience.

Almost 87% of public school teachers in the United States are white and female (Griner & Stewart, 2013), and most of them come from middle-class homes and grew up speaking English (Howard, 2007). This means that many public school teachers have

limited experience dealing with racially, linguistically, or culturally diverse communities. Some teachers ascribe a lack of respect, interest, or potential to their diverse students. Other teachers, while not openly hostile to or dismissive of diverse students, simply struggle with understanding how to engage them (Howard, 2007). Howard describes a plan for helping teachers fully, honestly, and respectfully engage with their diverse classrooms. The plan has five phases: building trust, engaging personal culture, confronting social dominance and social justice, transforming instructional practices, and engaging the entire school community. Howard advocates collaboration with the wider local community, engaging religious and business leaders, community activists, and parents.

K-12 Diversity and its Impact on Higher Education

Diversity at the K-12 level meaningfully impacts achievement later in life. For example, Banks and Banks (2001) write that improved academic performance is a critical goal of multicultural education. For Banks and Banks, multicultural education is not simply a question of curriculum changes but of overall school climate. Schofield (2001) asserts that school desegregation at the primary and secondary levels results in higher occupational achievement among African Americans. Not only is this achievement realized through earnings, but these students show more powerful aspirations and are better equipped to realize them. Schofield (2001) also argues that "school desegregation at the precollegiate level appears to help break the cycle of racial isolation" (p. 100), meaning that students who attend racially mixed schools as children and adolescents are more likely to lead adult lives that involve and value diverse environments.

Schofield (2001) discusses four basic institutional approaches to desegregation in K-12 schools: “1) business as usual, 2) assimilation, 3) pluralistic coexistence, and 4) integrated pluralism” (p. 102). According to Schofield, integrated pluralism is ideal in that it is the most likely to reap the rewards of desegregation and the least likely to lead to resegregation. Integrated pluralism “explicitly affirms the educational value inherent in exposing all students to a diversity of perspectives and behavioral repertoires, and in that it is structured to achieve mutual information exchange, influence, and acceptance” (p. 102) - meaning that it, too, is in line with the idea that educational diversity is a compelling interest. Schofield then discusses factors that help to promote integrated pluralism in the school setting. First, authority figures should be on board, as enablers, models, supporters, and enforcers. Secondly, cooperative models are beneficial, which encourage collaboration between students of different backgrounds toward a mutual goal. Thirdly, procedures must be in place to guarantee equal status for everyone, meaning that measures must be taken to account for perceived higher status among some individuals or groups.

In an interview with Tucker, Banks (1998) describes five dimensions of multicultural education and diversity in school environments. The first is content integration, which refers to the simple inclusion of diverse groups in the curriculum content. The second dimension, knowledge construction, encourages teachers to examine the underlying assumptions in the content and curriculum they teach. Equity pedagogy, the third dimension, refers to educational methods used in the classroom that enable achievement from all types of students. In other words, the creation of academic

circumstances that do not privilege one ethnicity or gender over another. Banks' fourth dimension is prejudice reduction, and the fifth dimension is creating a school climate that is empowering for all students. These five dimensions resonate with Schofield's (2001) idea of integrated pluralism and the practices that help enable it.

Sleeter and Grant (2007) have created a taxonomy that describes five different approaches to multicultural education. The first, "teaching the exceptional and the culturally different", refers to an approach which seeks to equip othered students with skills needed to participate in mainstream society. The "human relations" approach is intended to encourage students to interact with others and appreciate differences. The third approach, "single group studies," refers to explicitly teaching students about specific cultures, resonating with Banks' (1998) dimension of content integration. The "multicultural education" approach is used to describe attempts to better integrate respect for diversity into school culture. The fifth approach in Sleeter and Grant's taxonomy, "education that is multicultural and social reconstructionist," is the one they advocate. This approach builds on multicultural education by providing students with tools to effectively engage with issues of inequality and prejudice outside of the classroom.

In a study of the impact of diversity on student ability to learn democratic principles, Hurtado et al. (2002) found that exposure to and interaction with diverse peers in high school had a positive impact on three measures of democratic outcomes: ability to see multiple perspectives, a belief that conflict enhances democracy, and a belief in the importance of social engagement. Although the study was conducted on first-year college students, the intent was to determine which aspects of the high school experience

helped to develop these democratic outcomes. They found that environmental or demographic factors did not explain divergence in student commitment to these democratic outcomes. Rather, it was the degree to which students engaged with diverse classmates that explained these differences.

Consequently, Hurtado et. al argue that multicultural education at the high school level is only indirectly responsible for student belief in democratic values and the importance of diversity. That is, it is not the multicultural curriculum itself that is the active cause, but instead the interactions between diverse students within the curriculum. This resonates with Banks' (1998) ideas, particularly his fifth dimension of multicultural education, which refers to the social culture of the school. It also supports the assertion of others, for example Gaston (2001), that the sheer presence of diversity is in fact agentive (though, as Schofield (2001) argues, diversity doesn't automatically lead to positive outcomes). It also is in agreement with the 1996 *Wittmer v. Peters* decision, which held that educational diversity is a compelling interest worth protecting.

Admissions Policies at Schools of Choice

There is increased public and legal support for the idea that parents should be able to select a school for their children. Open-enrollment laws exist in 22 states, ensuring that parents can send their children to a school in a different district if they choose to do so (Education Commission of the States, 2014). The concept of schools of choice is necessarily entwined with questions of diversity and access. School choice advocates argue that wealthy parents already have plenty of means to choose which schools their children attend. Through being able to afford homes in the areas that are known for good

schools, these parents are able to ensure that their children attend schools that are up to their standards (Jellison Holme, 2002).

In contrast with schools of choice, public schools are required to accept all students within their jurisdiction, and, where open-enrollment laws exist, even some who are not. Therefore, admissions policies are not discussed. At schools of choice, the admissions policy must be actively constructed. The majority of the literature surrounding admissions policies for schools of choice focuses on higher education (e.g. Fisher & Massey, 2007; Hurtado et al., 1998; Palmer, 2001; Smith & McArdle, 2004, Yosso et al., 2004). Palmer (2001) offers three principles for how affirmative action may legally be used in university admissions policies:

> First, a university cannot take affirmative action to remedy the effects of general societal discrimination. Second, a university can take affirmative action to remedy the present effects of its own past discrimination if it has a sufficient basis in evidence for the belief that such action is warranted. Third, a university or other state entity can take affirmative action to remedy prior discrimination by other actors to avoid serving as a "passive participant" in a pattern of discrimination, specifically where affirmative action is taken by a government entity seeking to ameliorate the effects of discrimination within its jurisdiction. (p. 85)

I have explained that most of the literature regarding admissions policies at schools of choice relates to higher education. While the literature regarding higher education admission policies is in some ways generalizable to high school, and does indeed involve high school students (insofar as they are college applicants), it focuses

primarily on high school seniors and construes them as college-students-to-be. Because there are fewer schools of choice at the secondary level, there is a lack of research on how diversity initiatives in secondary school admissions policies affect the high school experience.

Missing Links: The Question of Agency

As I have discussed, much of the research on alternative education relates to students with special needs or severe behavior problems. There is limited research on what Raywid (1994) would call Type I schools, meaning alternative schools that students choose to attend. The relative lack of research on Type I schools fosters a negative image of alternative schools as being last-resort schools for students who are otherwise considered "unschoolable". This does a disservice to *all* alternative schools. Beyond broadening the perceived definition of "alternative school," examining a successful Type I school is constructive in several ways. The major reason is that students have the choice of whether to attend or not, meaning that Type I schools are likely to be held more accountable to student input. For this reason, Type I schools provide a view into student opinion.

The existing research on affirmative action and admissions policies pertains mostly to higher education settings, as most public high schools do not decide their admissions policy. I selected HBW as the topic of this research in part because it is a public high school that *does* design its own admission policy. Furthermore, there is limited research on how admissions practices (at any educational level) both construct and are constructed by the student experience. Research has focused on demographic

changes in the student body, as well as changes in academic achievement among various demographic groups. While demographic and achievement data do tell part of the story of institutional diversity, it is equally important to address questions of how diversity (or a lack of diversity) impacts the student experience at a school.

Conclusion

This study focuses on the ways in which admissions strategies impact the experience of being a student at HBW. Questions of intent, identity, and agency are inherent in admissions practices. There is a need for research which examines either alternative schools or the issue of diversity from a new materialist perspective, taking into account the intra-actions within and between the necessarily-entangled elements. A new materialist approach provides insight into how students affect admissions policies, as well as how those policies impact the student body and the identity of the institution. Because HBW does set its own admission policy (in contrast to most other public high schools), it provides a window into how admissions and outreach strategies can affect the character of the school. An examination of HBW's admission policy, as I present in this paper, gives one view of diversity-enhancement attempts in a secondary school environment. The admission policy has changed over time, taking into account student input, meaning that the relationship between student opinion and institutional policy can be examined.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS: HOW DOES THE ADMISSIONS STRATEGY AT H-B WOODLAWN REFLECT AND CREATE THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE?

It is arguable that this chapter should be called "Makings" rather than "Findings." In this chapter, I discuss the information, culled from my document analysis, which explores the question of how HBW's admission policy reflects and creates the student experience. As I discussed in the Methodology chapter, the information presented here comes from a variety of documents, written by different authors and with different intents. I pulled from a wide field of documents about HBW. In that sense, I did indeed "find" the information, lying in wait in boxes in an attic or digitally preserved and presented, and so "findings" is an accurate term. Nevertheless, while I have tried to stay true to what I perceived to be the intent and the meaning of each text, I am not presenting the texts as I *found* them, in their raw form. That is not the goal of research, and it is certainly not the goal of diffractive analysis. Remember that "diffractions are attuned to differences — differences that our *knowledge-making practices* make and the effects they have on the world" (Barad, 2007, p. 72, emphasis mine). The process through which I made agential cuts which extracted the information that I felt to be important to the research question, and have organized it here for the review of others, is a knowledge-*making* practice, not a finding practice.

The word “findings” suggests something dug up, minimally cleaned up, and placed on a pedestal for others to view. That process bears almost no resemblance to the process I described in the Methodology chapter, and which resulted in the text found below. Rather, my “findings” have been dug up, taken apart and put back together, diffracted through one another, held up both as the observer and as the observed. A diffractive analysis does not “fix” meaning (Barad, 2007, p. 30). HBW as an entity, like anything else, does not have independent characteristics when no one is looking. The fact that *I* was the one looking, and using the particular methodology I have described, is an entangled and inextricable component of the makings/findings discussed here.

In order to examine the question of how the admissions strategy reflects and creates student experience, it is necessary to understand what the student experience is like at HBW. And because HBW is an alternative school, it is also important to understand the ways in which the student experience at HBW diverges from what we might expect to find in a more traditional school. In the first sections of this chapter, I examine what I found to be salient aspects of the school’s character and of the student experience. I go on to discuss another critical (and nonhuman) agent in the school’s identity: the building in which the school is housed and, relatedly, the size of the student population. With all the entangled elements of the school and student identities in mind, I analyze HBW’s application and admission apparatuses, particularly with an eye to their effect on the student body and diversity. I then discuss the way this diversity is experienced by the students. Finally, I tie my analysis to current and game-changing

events in Arlington County which will almost certainly enact their own agential changes on all of these aspects.

By now it should be clear that a diffractive methodology does not allow us to draw a sharp line separating alternative schools from traditional schools. I do not intend to compare HBW to some sort of paradigm of "traditional education" (if even there were such a thing), delineating ways in which HBW shows "more" or "less" of one characteristic or another than a traditional archetype. Nor do I wish to imply that the student experience can be separated from the diversity of the student body, or from the application process, and so on. In my findings, I focus on characteristics and themes that I found to be recurring in the school documents. Agential realism calls for the making of "cuts" which allow us to make separations and distinctions within entanglements, although these distinctions are necessarily temporary and conditional. An agential "cut" does not create a permanent category; rather, the cut determines the circumstances under which the category can exist. I do not intend to imply that my findings can be neatly and permanently divided into these categories, but rather to discuss each in a way that sheds light on the other.

The Philosophy of HBW

Today, schools still do the two things they were set up to do: babysit and teach. However, the babysitting role seems to have become more important in many schools than the teaching role. At H.B. Woodlawn we try to change that. -Underground Student Handbook, 1979

HBW's philosophy is the defining basis of its identity. The school was formed as an alternative to traditional public high schools in Arlington County, and its philosophy describes the specific ways that the school was and is conceived to be alternative. Although (as I will discuss) the *practice* of how this philosophy has been implemented has changed a great deal over the school's history, the underlying philosophy is largely unchanged. There is a strong pattern of resonance related to HBW's core philosophy. Statements found in founding documents from the early 1970s are echoed nearly verbatim in modern descriptions of the school. I discuss here three elements that characterize the philosophy of HBW as it is represented in the documentation: student individuality, student input, and student responsibility. These elements appeared frequently in the documents, creating patterns of amplification that highlight their importance.

Student Individuality

To introduce the importance of student individuality as a component of the HBW philosophy, I turn to the *Report of the Hoffman-Boston - Woodlawn Merger Committee* (Anderson, 1977), commonly known as the Merge Report, which in turn brings us to a discussion of the school's history. The Merge Report describes the merger of the Hoffman-Boston Program and the Woodlawn Program, to form the school now known as H-B Woodlawn. I will take a moment to point out that there is inconsistency in how people refer to this school. The plethora of names stems in part from the merger of these two schools, Hoffman-Boston (itself a combination of names) and Woodlawn. The current school is variously referred to as H. B. Woodlawn, H-B Woodlawn, or simply as

H.B., H-B, or Woodlawn (though these abbreviations must not be confused with the individual schools to which they previously referred). I have used the abbreviation HBW throughout this text. In any instances in which I refer to "Hoffman-Boston" or "Woodlawn", I am referring to those individual schools prior to the merge.

Both Hoffman-Boston and Woodlawn were alternative secondary schools, each representing different age groups (Woodlawn encompassed later grades, and Hoffman-Boston the middle grades). The Merge Report sets out the intentions for this newly combined school, which initially was to encompass grades 7-12 (6th grade was later added). The Merge Report was written in 1977 and the version available online, which I used for this study, was republished in 1986 with a brief forward from Ray Anderson, the founder of HBW.

The Merge Report begins with the sentence, "The New School is based on the belief that all people are unique individuals and that an appropriate learning environment is one in which that uniqueness is recognized." From this introduction the emphasis on uniqueness and individuality is apparent, and the belief is presented that recognition of this individuality is a critical condition for providing "an appropriate learning environment." The word "individual" appears 13 times in the Merge Report. In fact, there are few sections of the report that do *not* expressly state the importance of individuality.

The Philosophy and Goals section of the Merge Report states that "Various structures and methods will be used which will recognize the distinctiveness of each student's academic progress toward that student's individual intellectual potential." This

indicates a lack of emphasis on groupings, such as age or grade level, as benchmarks by which to gauge student progress, and suggests instead a focus on students' individual academic achievement and needs. The Merge Report also discusses the teacher-advisor system, in which every teacher serves as a teacher-advisor to a group of students. Here again the stress on recognition of individuality is evident: "The main function of the teacher-advisor will be to guide students in their academic progress; the nature and intensity of the guidance will vary with the level and needs of the individual student." In other words, in order for a teacher-advisor to serve his/her essential function, s/he must understand the needs of each student. The recognition of student individuality is continually amplified throughout the teacher-advisor system.

However, the current "H-B Woodlawn Handbook for Parents, Students, and Staff" (2014), written nearly 40 years later, gives a different impression of the role of teacher-advisors and the emphasis on individuality, creating a pattern of dissonance. For instance, the document states that one responsibility of the teacher-advisor is "reviewing course selection in order to determine whether students have the proper courses for their grade-level graduation requirements, and their individual interests and abilities" (p. 5). The emphasis on individuality has been tempered here with grade-level requirements. This reflects a change in the practice of HBW's philosophy over time, specifically as a result of external pressures (in this case, graduation requirements in the state of Virginia). The recalibration of HBW's practices to comply with values of the external community is a theme that resonates again and again in the documents throughout the history of the school.

Student Input

Evidence of the high priority placed on student input is clear in the section of the Merge Report describing the history of the merge. Students were heavily involved in decision-making regarding how the new school would function. The "History" section of the Merge Report states that this decision-making process "took place over a period of six months of intensive concentration and effort on the part of many students, teachers and parents," in which "virtually every configuration imaginable was considered." The Merge Report also details how students, teachers, and parents were all instrumental in making curriculum decisions for the newly combined school.

The Merge Report describes a school eager to encourage student participation not only in school affairs but in society at large. In the "Philosophy and Goals" section of the report, the authors describe the new school as "an effort to enable students in grades seven through twelve to become fully participating and effective members of society." It appears that students educated in the Woodlawn fashion were indeed participatory members of their community, as can be seen in the following example from the "History" section of the Merge Report. The decision to merge was not an easy one, and the merge was delayed for one year due to fervent student action: "At a January 1977 public hearing before the School Board a group of Woodlawn students spoke so strongly against the September 1977 date for merger that the Superintendent and School Board reconsidered the proposal and decided to delay the merger to September 1978."

The Merge Report provides important evidence as to the goals of the school community at this pivotal point in its history. In looking at later documents, diffraction

patterns of amplification and interference are evident where the commitments and goals of the changing school community have either amplified or cancelled out the waves caused by this initial pebble. As this chapter diffuses through the different data upon which my findings are based, further evidence both supporting and refuting HBW's commitment to the values stated in the Merge Report will become apparent.

Town Meeting. Town Meeting is the governing body for HBW. It is the decision-making vehicle for internal school issues, and it is one of the primary methods by which students can have input into school policy. The Merge Report names Town Meeting as the decision-making body which will choose teachers for the newly-combined H-B Woodlawn. Town Meeting is described as being "both chaired and dominated by students" (Reese, 1996). The Town Meeting Reference Guide, created by two students in 2000, is one compiled source of information about Town Meeting, and demonstrates the dedication of students to the institution of Town Meeting. In the Reference Guide, students have compiled minutes from Town Meetings from 1989-2000, with notes about each motion and other details such as attendance numbers. The Reference Guide states that Town Meeting holds to an adapted version of Robert's Rules of Order, creating a pattern of resonance between Town Meeting and Robert's Rules. The Reference Guide appears to be harnessing that resonance in order to demonstrate the legitimacy of Town Meeting by this external measure. In some instances, the Reference Guide refers to Town Meeting's version as Robert's [Bent] Rules of Order, indicating that HBW adheres to the Rules in some ways but not in others. Here we see a pattern of dissonance within the larger resonance pattern; an insider's nod to HBW's alternative nature.

Numerous times in the Reference Guide and other documents, a ban is mentioned regarding the scheduling of classes or other mandatory activities during the time reserved for Town Meeting, indicating that Town Meeting is one of the HBW's highest priorities. This is one instance where HBW's philosophy appears to differ with the way that philosophy is practiced. The general student attitude towards Town Meeting can be summed up in this quote from a student: "I should talk about Town Meeting, because *theoretically* it is important" (Reese, 1996, emphasis mine), indicating that students may not truly feel that attending Town Meeting is of importance. Attendance levels at Town Meetings appear to vary widely, from fewer to 10 students at some meetings to hundreds at others (such as the annual Allocation Town Meeting, where the school votes on how to distribute funds during the following school year). Reese describes Town Meeting from a student's point of view:

> It does this nice democratic thing, meaning students, staff and parents all have an equal vote. The beauty in this is that students are always the majority. Obviously, the county can overrule Town Meeting decisions. For example, H-B briefly had coed bathrooms, but this went against Arlington School Board regulations, so that little law was done in. Unfortunately, Town Meetings have been rather boring lately, but hopefully that's just a phase. Some say, though, that it's because H-B is going downhill.

The idea that HBW is slowly becoming less alternative is echoed throughout the documents and arises several times throughout this paper; this is a pattern of resonance that arose quite frequently. Reese's quote, along with the wide variation in Town

Meeting attendance levels, illustrates an important point about giving students input into their education: they may or may not take advantage of the opportunity in the way that administrators, teachers, and parents anticipated.

The Underground Student Handbook. The Underground Student Handbook is particularly valuable for its insights into student perceptions of HBW. The Handbook has been published and revised multiple times over the course of the school's history, creating internal patterns of amplification and cancellation. I refer in this paper to the most recent edition, published in 2000, as well as to the 1995 edition and the original 1979 edition (published just two years after the merger). The authorship of this Handbook (in each iteration) is notable for what it illuminates about the school's structure. For example, let's look at the 1995 edition. The "Disclaimer" page explains that the handbook was written by the Alternative Education class (comprised of "about" 15 students in grades 10-12), which took place during the second half of the 1993-1994 school year. The teacher of the class was an HBW senior, who taught the course as his senior project. In this instance, the senior was functioning as an "outside teacher," aided by a co-sponsoring full-time teacher. Here we have an instance of a student functioning as a teacher as part of his (partially self-designed) curriculum. This resonates with HBW's stated philosophy of valuing student input into his own education as well as input into school operations.

This is a particularly visible example of the co-constitutive nature of school policy, student body, and student experience. These parts of the whole are continually filtering through one another and editing one another over time. The Underground

Student Handbook states that students in the Alternative Education class studied various alternative schools, including HBW, and wrote the handbook "to help address what we see as the growing disparity between what this school could be and what it is." Here again it is clear that the student perception of HBW as reflected in the Underground Student Handbook and other student-produced documents differs in significant ways from what is presented in founding documents such as the Merge Report. This is specifically true with respect to the degree to which HBW is perceived to live up to its reputation of being alternative.

The importance of student input can be seen in logistical documents as well. For example, in the H-B Woodlawn Handbook for Parents, Students, and Staff (2014), one page discusses the process for funding allocation decisions (p. 20). This page shows several dates on which students have the opportunity to have input into new courses and fund allocation. For example, during the 2014-15 school year, students can make an application on November 6 to Town Meeting suggesting a new course or a change to the Program of Studies. In April, Town Meeting (which comprises students, teachers, and staff, each with an equal vote) convenes to vote on fund allocation. Furthermore, this calendar shows dates when students can make choices related to their own schedule. During the same school year on February 5, students meet with their TAs for course selection, and on June 4, students sign up for their classes during Arena Scheduling. This demonstrates how opportunities for students to influence school operations are built into the schedule.

However, this emphasis on student choice must be continually checked against requirements placed on HBW and its students by outside actors as well. HBW must negotiate its place as a public school and as a degree-conferring institution. The H-B Woodlawn Handbook for Parents, Students, and Staff (2014) shows the graduation requirements as mandated by the state of Virginia (p. 14). It also lists the extensive calendar of standardized tests required at various grade levels (p. 16-19). This demonstrates that at times, HBW's philosophy of student choice creates patterns of dissonance with Virginia state standards. The larger environment in which HBW is situated is agential in determining how the school's philosophy can be practiced at any given time.

Student Responsibility

The idea that freedom comes with responsibility is threaded throughout most documents related to HBW. For example, the Woodlawn Handbook, published when the school was founded in 1971, stated that "the basic philosophical assumption underlying the creation of the New School is that some high school students are capable of assuming primary direction over their own education." The importance of student responsibility is also embedded in HBW's motto, *verbum sap sat*. This is a shortened version of the Latin phrase *verbum sapienti sat est*, meaning "a word to the wise is sufficient." The Arlington Public Schools Guidebook for Parents (giving the English only, not the Latin) explains that this motto was chosen to "reflect the association of freedom with responsibility" (Arlington Public Schools, n.d., pg. 4). The motto is referenced in many student-produced documents; the HBW student newsletter is called *Verbum Sap Sat.* The most

recent Underground Student Handbook (Johnston, E.; Carnahan, J.; Gorman, S.; Cohen, C.; & McDermott, J., 2000) states that the motto:

> ...means that you, a normal H-B Woodlawn Student, are smart enough that you don't need to be completely controlled by adults for every single second of your life. You understand the consequences of your actions and are taking responsibility for them. It says a lot about how things work and how people think at H-B [HBW]. We should not have very many constrictive rules, because we, as a school, have faith that you, the student, will learn from your mistakes and grow into making responsible, mature choices. (p. 5)

This quote resonates with the Arlington Public Schools explanation of the motto. It also demonstrates another important component of the HBW student identity. The student-authors who wrote the Underground Student Handbook have identified themselves *as* the school in the quote: "we, as a school, have faith that you, the student…" The HBW student identity is construed in this quote both as an individual and as a part of the larger, collective entity which in turn places faith in those individual students. This quote is an acknowledgement of this entanglement; that the students are the school, and the school is the students. It both describes and enacts the motto of *verbum sap sat.*

The Arlington Public Schools Guidebook for Parents states that "Student choice is the central focus of H-B Woodlawn's alternative secondary program. The school's program does not provide for 'continuous adult supervision'" and stresses that the most successful students at HBW are self-motivated and self-directed ("Guidebook for Parents", n.d., pg. 4). Students who don't have these characteristics often do not succeed

at HBW. The responsibility for balancing personal educational needs with institutional requirements (or the lack of them) falls primarily on the student.

One salient feature of HBW is its use of free blocks, time during which a student has no scheduled class. Since students create their own schedules (with the assistance of their teacher-advisor) much in the same way that college students do, they can build free time into their schedule. The amount of free time generally increases as a student progresses through the grade levels. The current H-B Woodlawn Handbook for Parents, Students, and Staff (2014) stresses that "Students are expected to use their non-class time in a productive manner." This indicates that the onus is on the student to behave productively during this time, rather than productivity and appropriate behavior being policed and enforced by an outside authority. Indeed, if a student chooses not to attend classes, the school does not make a practice of informing the student's parents (Horwitt, 2004).

Students in 8th through 12th grade are permitted to leave campus during lunch or other free times. (A parental permission form is required.) Here again, the H-B Woodlawn Handbook for Parents, Students, and Staff (2014) emphasizes the relationship between freedom and responsibility: "if students leave campus with parental permission during the school day, whether at lunchtime or any other time, we expect them to behave properly and return promptly" (p. 10). The H-B Woodlawn Handbook for Parents, Students, and Staff (2014) shows an interesting feature with regard to student behavior on campus. A commonly used term in describing what students should or should not do is "we ask." For example, "we ask that all members of the HBW community keep their

dogs at home," and "If students have cell phones in school, we ask that they remain silent during classes." In the above example related to off-campus behavior, the term used is "we expect." In other words, HBW makes a *request* that students behave a certain way, but it is clear from the word choice that the decision — and the responsibility — ultimately lie with the student.

The diction in those policies is in contrast with other policy statements in the same document which use terms such as "not permitted" or "prohibited," and which refer to policies set by organizations other than HBW. For example: "In compliance with School Board policy, H-B Woodlawn does not permit smoking on the school premises," and "State law prohibits weapons (including any kind of knife) on school grounds. Possession of a weapon on school grounds requires immediate out-of-school suspension, referral to the police and a possible recommendation for expulsion." Thus, the Handbook makes a distinction between regulations enforced by an outside authority as opposed to codes of behavior decided internally by the school community. It is clear from the Handbook that some regulations are non-negotiable, while others are up to the HBW community to agree on. This example is one demonstration of the intra-action of HBW and the larger school community in which it is situated. As can be seen in the documents, the balance of power between HBW and the School Board is continually negotiated.

HBW's philosophy is explicit in its stated intention to provide an educational environment that stresses student individuality, student input, and student responsibility. These three important facets intra-act with one another in both the philosophy and the

practice of the philosophy. Students, parents, and teachers are critical components of the intra-action as well. As I discussed above, other entities, such as the Arlington School Board and Virginia graduation requirements, also are agential in terms of the way the HBW philosophy is interpreted and the degree to which it can be practiced in various instances. Throughout changes in the student body and in external requirements, the HBW philosophy has remained remarkably static on paper. The belief that students should have freedom, choice, and control when it comes to their education repeatedly resonates throughout documents related to the school's founding and continuing governance.

The Building

A new materialist framework focuses on the agency of nonhumans as well as humans, and indeed it is difficult to overstate the importance of the role that the physical building of HBW appears to play in the field of documents about the school. HBW has occupied the same building throughout its entire existence as a program. The building embodies the school's philosophy through its physical appearance, as I will describe below. The building is also agential in enacting and enabling the philosophy to be practiced. The interior space in which HBW is housed has strong visual impact. Depictions of the space and the way it is inhabited by students are used both literally and metaphorically by authors to describe the school's philosophy. Articles describing HBW for an outside audience frequently mention the colorful murals that line the hallways, cafeteria, and many classrooms (e.g. Ganley, 1974; Horwitt, 2004). Each graduating class selects a section of wall on which seniors can paint images, quotes, poems, hand-

prints, full-body-prints, and so on. Furthermore, many teachers offer up the walls of their classroom for painting by classes or individual students. The Town Meeting Reference Guide lists a Mural Committee among the Standing Committees, meaning that it can be reinstated at any time without calling a motion (suggesting the frequency with which it is invoked). Student artwork on the walls is perhaps the most significant feature of the building.

The use of space within the building is notable as well. There is a sense that the building is owned by the students as much as by the staff. The 1979 edition of the Underground Student Handbook describes the building itself as "cavernous, not terribly human, and damn ugly," encouraging students to "find unoccupied spaces where you can read, study, talk, think, dream, create. There are lots of places in the halls and stairwells. If you use them, it'll help make this place come alive" (p. 18). The authors also instruct students to contact teachers or custodial staff if they find that a room they wish to use is locked, and add, "If there's nothing valuable in the room (use your judgement — VSS) leave it open -- it helps the morale to make the place accessible" (p. 7). In this quote, "VSS" refers to *verbum sap sat*, the HBW motto meaning "a word to the wise is sufficient." This sentence draws on three key aspects of HBW philosophy: freedom, choice, and responsibility. Here, the Handbook authors are advocating a sense of student freedom, the idea that students are entitled to access most spaces in the building. Furthermore, the belief in student choice means that students are entitled to decide the level of accessibility (by leaving the door unlocked or not). Finally, the authors invoke the sense of responsibility that students should take for these actions.

The Handbook thus places responsibility on the students for making their house a home, so to speak. This is an interesting intersection between the question of the nature of nonhuman elements and HBW's ethic of student responsibility. Although the authors initially characterize the building as inanimate and lifeless ("not terribly human"), they assert that a specific type of student use of the building can make it "come alive." The school building is full of physical evidence that generations of HBW students have taken this challenge to heart. The place that HBW inhabits is neither entirely nonhuman (i.e., the physical structure) or entirely human (i.e., as it was conceived in the mind of its founders and continues to be conceived by its community). It is a continually re-negotiated intra-action between these elements, in which student activity is shaping the physical space and simultaneously shaping the way that the physical space is interpreted by themselves and by others.

Permission and power to change the physical school environment is granted to a wider variety of people than we might expect at a traditional school. I have mentioned that students are permitted to paint the walls. They also bring in old couches and put them in the hallways and cafeteria. They leave their backpacks strewn in front of their lockers, not stashed inside. In a *Verbum Sap Sat* article describing the "artsy" feel of HBW, Huber (2013) describes how "one can always find somebody playing away on an instrument, singing, or doing something else creative." Student use of musical instruments, particularly in the hallways, is an image that has been used to describe HBW throughout its history, creating patterns of amplification over the decades. A 1974 article about the school featured an image of a student playing guitar; the caption notes that the

school's "relaxed atmosphere often generates impromptu musical sessions" (Ganley, 1974).

In addition to changing the school's atmosphere by virtue of their artwork and possessions, students are permitted to use and decorate their bodies differently, because HBW grants them free access to most spaces within the building and has no strict dress code. Huber (2013) is aware of the impact of these physical characteristics, noting "I wonder what the school would look like if seniors weren't allowed to paint the walls and kids had to stay out of the hallways during classes. I realize that our school would be a lot more boring." Some prospective students are repelled by the appearance of the school or its students. Horwitt (2004) describes the experience of one new student who was shocked on his first day to see "a boy sporting a mohawk, black lipstick and black fingernail polish" (the new student later transferred to another school). Though not everyone sees them in a positive light, these physical characteristics serve as signals to students, demonstrations of their ability to alter the physical appearance of their school with their actions, appearance, and presence. The physical characteristics are nonhuman elements (clothing, paint, musical instruments) that affect the way that HBW is perceived both by humans within its community and by outsiders.

Those senior murals have become one of the singular characterizing features of HBW's appearance in the eyes of outsiders. Articles about HBW by unaffiliated authors frequently mention these traits in order to set the scene, so to speak (e.g. Balingit, 2014b). The walls are significant to those within the community as well. The student newsletter *Verbum Sap Sat* has featured many articles about the senior walls, calling the walls "one

of the most lasting and wonderful HB traditions; a way to forever leave your mark and last words on the walls of a building that has, for many, been such an important place" (Stern, 2012b). For his senior project, one student photographed every quote to create an electronic record (Stern, 2012c). Emerson (2012) notes that "a senior wall seems to be one of the biggest graduation rights of passage." The use of the word "rights" vs "rites" is perhaps a typo or grammatical error, but it is an apt one nevertheless. It is extraordinary that graduating seniors have the "right of passage" to leave a physical mark on the school building, personalizing the structure while memorializing their experiences there.

The senior walls are a means for students to express their individuality (one of the core values of HBW), but also are a visible and public aspect of the school's physical nature. As such, issues of censorship have arisen regarding profanity or discriminatory language (Stern, 2012a). The school has wrestled with the question of how to preserve student freedom while making sure that content displayed on its walls is acceptable. This issue was brought to the forefront when the class of 2012 selected the wall above the entrance to the school's main office. Demonstrating the school's reliance on student responsibility, Emerson (2013) reports that "Frank [the principal] requested that the class self-regulate because they are in such a prominent location." In other words, the principal trusted the students to act responsibly when choosing quotes for the senior wall. The question of how to handle issues of freedom and censorship in senior wall quotes has been brought to Town Meeting multiple times, but no official regulations have been set (Emerson, 2012). Stern (2012a) draws on the concept of *verbum sap sat* ("a word to the

wise is sufficient"), saying that word bans or other outright prohibitions have a negative tone and that "we should trust our seniors to be thoughtful and respectful when leaving a senior quote," echoing the principal's willingness to rely on his students' sense of decency.

Size

When the original Woodlawn program opened in 1971, it had 171 students enrolled (Horwitt, 2004). At the time, Arlington's population was dropping (Beckwith, Guendelsberger & Doxsee, 2013). Along with the number of grades that HBW serves, enrollment has risen. Nonetheless, HBW has consistently maintained a commitment to its relatively small size, and the size is often cited as one of the factors that makes HBW alternative. School size is a factor that comprises both human and nonhuman elements. Population size (human) is one element, but so is building size (nonhuman). The way the space is utilized (which is an intra-action between humans and nonhumans) is a third important component of how school size is perceived. Questions surrounding school size recur repeatedly in documents throughout the school's history. I discuss the importance of the school size issue here, and it also recurs in my later discussion about HBW's future.

Beckwith, Guendelsberger, and Doxsee (2013) write that HBW "was built around the idea that some students need to have close relationships with their teachers in order to get the best learning experience," arguing that "smaller class sizes are required for these relationships." Many students express that the small size is a critical component of HBW. A 1990 graduate of HBW, Horwitt (2004) writes that the "intimacy" of the small

class size "sets H-B apart from larger, more traditional high schools." In an article written by an HBW student and published in the school newsletter of one of the home schools (HBW's term for the "traditional" public high schools in Arlington), the student writes that "H-B gives me that safe-warm-fuzzy feeling that I doubt I could find in one of the larger high schools" (Reese, 1996). The small size combined with HBW's practice of having each teacher serve as a teacher-advisor to a group of students meant that in 2004, HBW had a student-to-guidance-counselor ratio of 13 to 1, while the national average was 485 to 1 (Horwitt, 2004). Kyle and McCracken (2015) assert that many of HBW's most defining features, such as Town Meeting and the teacher-advisor system, are effective only because of the school's size, calling the small community "self-regulating."

In an account of the school's history, Beckwith et al. (2013) argue that HBW's small size has been maintained throughout the fluctuations of Arlington's school-age population. Because the size is so deeply entangled with the identity of HBW, maintaining the relatively small size has been a priority throughout its history. However, as I discuss in a later section, Arlington's school population is now exceeding capacity, with results that directly impact HBW. Before we get there, I discuss the application and admissions apparatuses at HBW. These apparatuses, which determine the nature of the student body, are deeply entangled with the school's size and the student experience, as well as with its diversity.

Application to HBW

I have discussed HBW's philosophy and the student experience that results from that philosophy. In this section I move into discussing the way HBW's student body is formed. While my research focuses specifically on HBW's admission apparatus (the apparatus that enacts a cut which determines who is an HBW student and who is not), the application process is in fact a critical component of that apparatus. The "Admissions" section of this chapter explains how the school has selected its students from the pool of applicants. Before we look at admissions, however, we must discuss the pool of applicants itself. In other words, to ask who applies to HBW, and why? This is another important cut which is enacted in the process of creating an HBW student, because any admissions policy can only pull from the field of people who actually applied. HBW's reputation and outreach within the county are necessarily entangled with its admission policy. In this section, I discuss the way that HBW's reputation, outreach, and application process enable and disable potential applicants.

The Nature of HBW's Appeal: Alternative or Academically Prestigious?

Although HBW is widely regarded as an alternative school, there is considerable disagreement reflected in the documents regarding exactly what that entails and to what degree HBW has been able to retain its alternative nature over time. The question of who applies to HBW, and for what reasons, is discussed throughout the various iterations of the Underground Student Handbook. The 1979 edition of the Underground Student Handbook asserts that during the merger of Hoffman-Boston and Woodlawn to create HBW, "the more radical elements of both programs were lopped off in order to

accommodate a wider range of students," concluding that "we no longer offer an alternative education." In the 1995 edition of the Underground Student Handbook, the section titled "Why people come to H-B Woodlawn" begins with what may be a surprising first sentence: "The one thread of consistency as to why students come here seems to be that no one comes here because they want to get an alternative education." The 2000 edition adds "Many people think" to the beginning of that sentence, creating a slight pattern of dissonance in apparently distancing themselves from the opinion. In both editions, the authors go on to explain that incoming students, being 5th graders, are not aware of the implications of attending HBW. The authors' view is that these incoming 5th graders know only that "we have free blocks and off-campus privileges, and that we call our teachers by their first names" (2000, p. 5). In other words, they assert that the incoming students focus on glamorous-sounding student freedoms while lacking a full understanding of the student responsibility component of the HBW philosophy.

Over the years, HBW has garnered a reputation for producing bright, college-ready students. The Underground Student Handbook's (2000) authors write that good press regarding HBW's academic offerings, and the subsequent success of many of its students in terms of college applications, have attracted the attention of parents who are interested in the academic prestige, but not necessarily the alternative aspects of HBW, asserting that "parents send their children here with the intention of getting than (sic) into an Ivy League school, not of having their children play a more active role in the educational process" (p. 6). The authors cite HBW's inclusion in Newsweek's top 100

public high schools in the U.S. as one cause of this perception, and they call Newsweek's rating system "misleading and heavily biased towards wealthy, predominantly white schools" (p. 6), which displays a sensitivity towards racial and socioeconomic issues in terms of school reputations.

An article published in *The Washington Post* during the founding principal's last year before retirement resonates with these perceptions in its discussion of the many changes in academic approach over the history of HBW, explaining that while students used to take a different English elective (most of which were about topics suggested by students) each quarter, these days "many students opt for yearlong AP courses that are no different from the ones they would take at a traditional high school" (Horwitt, 2004). HBW's Assessment Committee in 2001 stated that "H-B Woodlawn has become more traditional as reflected in the forms of assessment used… the challenge is for H-B Woodlawn to be true to its philosophy under mounting pressures." Horwitt (2004) also points to increased standardized testing pressures as one of the factors that are acting in conflict with HBW's alternative nature.

That the philosophy of HBW engenders high rates of academic success is impressive, but what is significant for this research is that HBW's philosophy is entangled with constantly-changing popular opinion and values regarding education. HBW is now viewed not only as alternative, but also as a place that helps students go to highly-regarded colleges; two different perceptions that are in some ways dissonant. What this means is that students and parents who apply to HBW do so for different reasons. Some are attracted to the alternative nature of the school. Others are attracted

by the prestigious academic record. The success of its philosophy (in producing highly capable students) is now viewed by some as undermining that very philosophy by attracting families who are not as committed to those alternative values.

Outreach and Application Requirements

The Arlington Public Schools (APS) website is a major source of documentation that provides descriptions of HBW and its philosophy to prospective applicants. These documents are written by APS employees with the intent of disseminating information about HBW, primarily to parents of prospective students. Thus, these documents describe the character of HBW from an outsider perspective. I provide here an account of the application process to HBW, as described by APS for interested parents and students.

The APS website page titled "Admission to H-B Woodlawn" indicates that there are two entry points into HBW: "H-B Woodlawn is a countywide program open to all students in middle and high school via application to the 6th or 9th grade entry levels. (Note: spaces at the 9th grade entry level may be limited)" ("Admission to H-B Woodlawn", 2014). HBW accepts 68 students each year at the 6th grade level, and an additional 12 students at the 9th grade level, making for a graduating class of about 80 students each year. During the application period for the 2015-2016 school year, 450 rising 6th graders and 160 rising 9th graders applied (W., 2014). It is curious that the APS website states that 9th grade spaces may be limited, because this seems to imply by omission that spaces at the 6th grade level are *not* limited, which is false. As we will see, supply does not meet demand at either the 6th or the 9th grade levels, with long waiting

lists at both levels. The APS quote is dissonant with this reality. The current admissions policy, which I discuss in detail later on, is a geographically-allocated, random, double-blind lottery.

Another case of dissonance within a document appears on the Pupil Transfer Application for School Year 2015-16. This form asks for certain demographic information in addition to information about the schools the student wishes to transfer to and from. The form asks the submitting parent to indicate the gender, ethnicity, and first language of the child, as well as whether the child is currently enrolled in any special programs (such as ESOL, Montessori, or special education). For two of these demographic questions, the form indicates that "This information will be used for data collection purposes only. It will not be used in any way to make admission decisions." This caveat is issued regarding the question about ethnicity and the question asking whether the student is enrolled in special programs. By omission, this implies that information about the child's gender or first language may in fact be used in admission decisions. Depending on the student's identity by these measures, and how the parent(s) filling out the form interpret these questions, this form has the power to be an encouraging or discouraging factor in whether or not the family goes through with the application.

The "Alternative School Attendance Policy" adopted by the Arlington School Board in 1992 specifies the admission requirement (for HBW and 2 other alternative schools in the county) that "the parent or parents shall have visited during school hours both the neighborhood school their child would attend and the alternative school to which

application is being made." This process would help to ensure that parents who are entering their student in the HBW lottery have a better understanding of what HBW stands for. While HBW has a legitimate interest in making sure that all applicants understand its philosophy, it is clear that this school-visit requirement could prove prohibitively time-consuming for some parents. While the school visit requirement is a cut-enacting apparatus which helps to filter out some parents and students who are not amenable to the HBW philosophy, it also filters out those who may be very interested but who simply do not have the time or the resources to make these visits. In 2014, three orientation sessions were available at each level (i.e. rising 6th and 9th grade applicants), all on weekday afternoons ("Admission to H-B Woodlawn", 2014). This practice is a barrier that is differentially surmountable depending on socioeconomic and other factors. Parents who cannot take time off from work for these visits, or single parents, for example, would have greater difficulty with this requirement. Furthermore, parents with limited English skills are significantly less likely to be able to understand and comply with this requirement. This policy is set by the Arlington County School Board, not by HBW specifically, but still impacts the admission pool and thus the student body of HBW.

Indeed, most applications to HBW come from affluent white families (Horwitt, 2004). When HBW selected a new principal, Frank Haltiwanger, in 2004 to replace founding principal Ray Anderson, "Haltiwanger talk[ed] about his vision for H-B Woodlawn -- to maintain its alternative approach to education while increasing its racial and ethnic diversity" (Horwitt, 2004). In 2011, an outreach program was founded in an

attempt to provide information about HBW to elementary schools with a low percentage of minority HBW applicants and to prevent the spread of misinformation about HBW in these schools. An article in the HBW student newsletter, *Verbum Sap Sat*, cites misconceptions that exist within the county, such as that HBW charges an application fee, that there is an entrance exam, and that "you can only go to HB if you're white or if you're rich" (LeValley, 2011). This indicates that many families who are not white and affluent may feel unable or unwelcome to apply.

Who Applies to HBW?

HBW is a Type I alternative school; a school of choice. Thus, one defining characteristic of HBW's admission policy is the fact that student and parent initiative is required. As I discussed in Chapter 2, a specific series of events must take place in order to create an HBW student. The student and family must find out about HBW, decide to apply, go through the application process, be selected by the admissions apparatus, and decide to attend. This means that the HBW student body is partially self-selecting based on the filtering effects of its reputation, outreach, and application process described above. In order to understand more about HBW's admissions and student population, we should understand the students who choose to go through this process.

A 1971 memo regarding the creation of what was then called the New School names four characteristics that the founders believed would be common among applicants:

> a. an enthusiasm for the New School; b. a relatively high degree of maturity and responsibility; c. the ability and imagination to work independently; d. a belief

> that the student's social and educational needs are not being met in conventional school, and that they could be better met in the New School.

This list reflects HBW's prioritization of student individuality, freedom, and responsibility. In this quote, the founders express a belief that applicants who are interested in the school would already possess some of the characteristics that the school hoped to foster in its students (maturity, responsibility, and independence). The founders are relying on self-selection to a certain degree. In other words, that a pattern of amplification would be found among the applicants and the school.

As I discussed previously, HBW's reputation has changed significantly over time. While it is still viewed as an alternative school, it receives considerable attention for its test scores, college placement rates, and other academic factors. HBW has fared well on standardized tests and has received significant press for its rigorous classes and academically successful students. Notably, HBW regularly features on Jay Mathews' annual Challenge Index, which ranks schools based on the ratio of challenging courses, such as Advanced Placement courses, per student (e.g. Mathews, 2014**)**. Despite these impressive academic results, HBW does not market itself as a producer of Ivy League students, and certainly not as a school targeted at booksmart students only. A 1981 memo addressed to "parents of interested elementary school students" states that "academic aptitude is not the primary quality for success at H-B Woodlawn; rather it is academic interest and performance." In other words, the emphasis is on the level of interest and engagement the student shows, rather than raw academic skills. Notably, the memo describes the *students* as interested — not the parents.

This emphasis on academic interest over aptitude has been maintained throughout the school's history, creating a pattern of dissonance between newspaper articles versus internal or APS documents. For example, current APS descriptions do not present HBW as a school designed for high academic achievers only. On its website, APS provides information for parents of prospective HBW students. On the page titled "Admission to H-B Woodlawn," APS states that "The H-B Woodlawn program serves students countywide. *The focus is on students who need less restriction and a degree of freedom similar to that of college students*" (2014, emphasis original). This speaks to the philosophy of the school and the requirement for students to have (and develop) certain *behavioral* characteristics, rather than academic ones.

Admission

An admission strategy is an apparatus that makes a diffractive cut within a population. Out of a group of individuals who have applied for admission, the admission strategy selects some to admit and some to deny. (As I discussed in the previous section, another important cut is enacted between those individuals who choose to apply and those who do not.) The admission apparatus is by definition part of the circumstances required to create an HBW student, and so we will look at it in detail here. I first explain the history of HBW admissions apparatuses, elaborating on several different methods that have been used. I then describe the current system, examining in detail its role in the intra-action of HBW within the wider Arlington community, with specific respect to diversity in the county and in HBW.

History of HBW Admissions

The HBW admissions policies have undergone significant changes over the years. As the number of students seeking admission has risen, the admission policy has had to adapt. As I discussed previously, changes in the school's reputation and in the larger educational climate impacted the application pool. Likewise, these changes have been agential in altering the admissions policy.

The early years. During the early years of what was then called the New School, staff were focused on recruiting students for the program. Outreach at this point appealed to a sense of independence and even rebellion in students. One flier asked, "Are desks and bells and passes and lectures and tardy slips and school lunches GETTING YOU DOWN?" and "Isn't there any school in Arlington that will let you sit down and decide for yourself what you're going to do?" In that quote, specific material details (desks, bells, tardy slips) are metonymic of the kind of education that the New School would break away from. Those nonhuman elements possess the agency to depress students' interest in education.

A 1971 memo from the founders to the Arlington School Board discussed a proposed admission plan for the New School, which was anticipating demand that would exceed the 180 available spots. The memo proposes a "combination of objective lottery (85% of the student body) and subjective compensatory selection (15% of the student body)." The "objective lottery" was defined as an "impartial lottery for 150 students," in which 50 slots would be available for each of the three existing Arlington high school districts. (As I later discuss in detail, this geographic-based lottery system will be

resurrected years later, yet with different intentions and to a different effect.) The remaining "subjective compensatory selection" slots were reserved so that some students could be appointed by school staff. The memo states that this selection, which took place after the lottery, "represent[ed] an attempt to round out any deficiencies in the lottery group as to racial, ethnic, or socio-economic background, academic inclination, and experience in innovative educational involvement." In other words, staff would hand-pick students to increase diversity in the student body. As it turned out, this planning was unnecessary at first; there was space in 1971 for all 171 students who wanted to attend Woodlawn (Horwitt, 2004).

Camp-out. As interest increased, the de facto first-come, first-served method became complicated, engendering long lines at application time. The Underground Student Handbook (2000) describes the "camp-out" years: "Once upon a time, getting your child into H-B meant standing, sitting, sleeping, and cooking in a long line for upwards of several days, as the admissions policy was first come, first served" (p. 6). The camp-out system raised questions about the motivations of families who fervently wanted their children to attend HBW: "Parents said they were attracted by the school's small size and academic freedom, but some School Board members worried that that parents were really trying to escape neighborhood schools with growing concentrations of lower-income and minority children" (Horwitt, 2004). The Underground Student Handbook explains that during the application period for school year 1992-1993, parents camped out for three days, "an image-tarnishing embarrassment for the County" (p. 6) after which the lottery system was put into place.

Lottery. A random lottery was used at first, but concerns about HBW's homogeneous student body gave rise to various attempts to increase diversity. The Underground Student Handbook (2000) asserts that the lottery system began to use "a system of minority preference" in which "some white children were bumped onto a waiting list to allow children of other ethnicities to get in" (p. 6). According to the authors, this system was used in order to "quell the cries that H-B was a 'white flight' school, and to foster an environment of cultural diversity" (p. 6). A similar preference system was used at Arlington Traditional Elementary School, another alternative program (despite its name) in Arlington County.

In 1997, HBW was 64% white (Bahrampour, 1997). After the lottery for the 1997-1998 school year, parents of white children who had not been admitted to Arlington Traditional sued the county, and a parent of an HBW hopeful in the same boat joined the suit. A county judge ruled in their favor and ruled that a new admissions policy would need to be created. The School Board's response to the question of who to admit that year shows a commitment to HBW's small size as well as an admission of defeat in this particular attempt to increase minority enrollment at the school. The school accepted 22 more 6th grade students that year than usual, but "declined to double the size of that class to 120 students, the only way it could have avoided turning away some minority students who had originally been admitted" (Mathews, 1997). The effect resonated around the region; Barampour (2007) writes that other schools and school systems in the area eliminated race-based admissions policies around this time as well.

The new system was a "weighted lottery" in which socioeconomic status, first language, and ethnicity were considered, giving some students a higher chance of being chosen in the lottery. The Underground Student Handbook (2000) authors write, "Naturally, more parents sued, and the judge once again ruled in their favor… Dramatic indeed" (p. 7). As of the 2000 edition of the Underground Student Handbook, an unweighted lottery system was in place, and the authors wrote, "Efforts are currently underway to increase diversity in the school through outreach to minority communities" (p. 7). Bahrampour (2007) wrote that minority enrollment dropped after the minority preference measures were eliminated. In the early 2000s, white enrollment at HBW was as high as 77% (Horwitt, 2004; Bahrampour, 2007), in stark dissonance with white enrollment at the other Arlington middle schools, which averaged only 44% (Horwitt, 2004).

In 2002, a geographic lottery was adopted, in which each elementary school district was given a certain number of places at HBW based on population size. (The system is in place at the 6th grade level only; the second, smaller, round of admissions at the 9th grade level is not allocated geographically.) This geographic system was developed by a group of HBW students and faculty (Horwitt, 2004; W., 2014), demonstrating HBW's ability to elicit and capitalize on student input when developing policies. One student who was on the committee told *The Washington Post* that "at H-B, they actually trust you in a really important way" (Horwitt, 2004), stating that he would never have had the opportunity to effect such change in a traditional high school. The geographic lottery was intended to ensure that the student body represents the geographic

diversity of the county, and "improved the chance of admission for students from less-affluent neighborhoods, who tend to apply to H-B in fewer numbers" (Bahrampour, 2007).

Arlington County, like most populated places, has areas that are predominantly white, black, upper-class, lower-class, and so on (this can be seen in elementary school demographic statistics, which I discuss later). In the unweighted lottery system, a disproportionate number of applicants (and thus admitted applicants) were primarily from those areas of the county that are predominantly white and wealthy. By contrast, and without operating directly on the parameters of race or socioeconomic status, the geographic lottery ensures that HBW proportionally represents all areas of the Arlington map. Through the geographic lottery, HBW harnesses the systemic segregation by race and class within the county to diminish segregation within its own institution.

As of Bahrampour's 2007 article, 67% of HBW students were white, compared to 46% white students overall in the county. In the article, current principal Frank Haltiwanger acknowledges HBW's relatively homogenized history, and says that the geographic apportioning system means that

> ...we have representation from every geographic location in the county, and there's a lot of socioeconomic diversity in the county… The students will find themselves talking about race, which is an important conversation to have and which is important especially in a school that is mostly white… Those conversations are taking place more often, and more thought is given to how families might feel to be in the minority. (Bahrampour, 2007)

As of 2014, HBW was 61% white. The percentage of white students in Arlington County as a whole was 47% ("Civil Rights Statistics", 2014). At that time, 18% of HBW students received free or reduced-price meals, as opposed to 31% countywide. Though this is an improvement, HBW still does not mirror Arlington County in terms of these demographics.

Comparing the Geographic Lotteries — 1971 and the Present

As we can see, the strategy of combining a random lottery with a geographic-based approach has been used twice in the history of HBW. It is important to consider this carefully for what it reveals about HBW's admissions approach and its student body over the full spread of its history. Remember that in 1971, the lottery selected 150 students, 50 from each of the three existing Arlington high schools. This lottery was supplemented by 30 students appointed by the preliminary planning group in a process they called "subjective compensatory selection." This supplemental, diversity-enhancing process appears to have been necessitated by the assumption that a random, geographically-proportional lottery *would not* provide an appropriately diverse student body. In a striking pattern of dissonance, the current admissions policy takes a similarly geography-based approach *with the specific intent* of creating a student body that adequately reflects the diversity of Arlington County. Drawing students proportionately from each of Arlington's elementary schools is the very mechanism by which HBW hopes to ensure the proportional representation of students from various racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic groups. In other words, the geography-based approach has been used twice in HBW's history, with opposite intent and results.

The demographics of the county can help to explain this pattern of interference. Arlington Public Schools publishes race and ethnicity statistics as mandated by the U.S. Department of Education. In 2014, Arlington had 22 elementary schools, 10 of which had at least 50% white students. The elementary school with the highest percentage of white students was 84.8% white. The school with the lowest white enrollment had 5.6% white students ("Civil Rights Statistics", 2014). Arlington Public Schools also provides information regarding the number of students who receive free or reduced-price lunches. The school with the lowest number of students receiving these benefits has 1.4% percent of its students on this plan. It is also the whitest school. The school with the highest number of students on such meal plans clocks in at 81.42%, and is the least-white school ("Free and Reduced-Price Meal Statistics", 2014). The racial and socioeconomic stratification within Arlington County is what enables the geographic lottery system to work towards building more diversity at HBW. In other words, this stratification is one of the conditions required for the proper operation of the apparatus that is the current lottery system.

In closing my description of HBW's admissions policy, I want to reiterate the importance of outreach and the agency that the application apparatus exerts. The geographic lottery system increases diversity by acting on the population of applicants. Thus, the degree to which this can be effective is predicated on the diversity of that pool of applicants. If only white, affluent families apply, the geographic lottery can do nothing to increase the diversity of the incoming class. The geographic lottery is also situated in a larger intra-action; it is dependent on a certain degree of homogeneity among

Arlington's elementary schools. As I explain in my section about the future of HBW, this dependency must be carefully monitored.

The Student Experience of Diversity at HBW

In an important way, the concept of diversity at HBW is grounded in a single historical event. I have previously discussed the importance of the physical space of HBW to its students and community, namely that certain physical aspects of the building represent and demonstrate HBW's values and philosophy. In the minds of many people writing about HBW, the history of the *building* is linked with the history of the *program*. I discuss this in several examples from various authors below, which create a pattern of amplification around this idea. The school formerly housed in the building where HBW now lives, Stratford Junior High, was the first school in Virginia to be racially integrated (on February 2, 1959). A plaque commemorating this event is posted outside the school (an image can be found here: http://www.hbwoodlawn.org/images/marker.jpg). The two schools are unaffiliated; Stratford Junior High closed and the building was later repurposed as the site of HBW. However, this event in the building's history resonates through many accounts of HBW's history.

A 2013 article in the HBW student newsletter, Verbum Sap Sat, is titled "Race at HBW" (D., 2013). The author (who gives only his or her last initial, D.) mentions the desegregation of Stratford Junior High as a point of pride for the HBW community. The history of Stratford's desegregation appears in other accounts of HBW history as well. For example, in their article, "The History of the School on Vacation Lane" (featured on the "History of HB" section of the Arlington Public Schools website), Beckwith,

Guendelsberger, and Doxsee (2013) discuss the history of the school building in which HBW is currently housed, again mentioning Stratford's desegregation.

The History of HB section on the APS website also features a page about the history of school integration in Arlington. This page also describes the desegregation of Stratford Junior High and argues that "Arlington Public Schools has done much to meet the original goal of the community back in 1959, but many challenges remain to improving diversity in its schools (including the H-B Woodlawn program)" ("History — Integration in Arlington", 2015, para. 2). The page describes the history of school desegregation in Virginia, including the state's movement of "massive resistance" to integration (a term coined by West Virginia Democratic senator Harry Byrd, Sr.). After the decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954, federal law required desegregation, but Virginia state law mandated that any racially integrated school would immediately be closed. It was no empty threat, "In fact, the state had closed schools in Norfolk when they tried to integrate, leaving 17,000 children without a school" ("History — Integration in Arlington", 2015, para. 13). The article describes Arlington residents as "concerned" that they, like Norfolk, would end up with no public schools if they desegregated. The Committee to Preserve Public Schools was founded by Virginia residents (both pro- and anti-integration) in the common interest of keeping public schools open. The page ends by stating that four black students enrolled in Stratford Junior High in 1959. They were in the company of "85 policemen in full riot gear" ("History — Integration in Arlington", 2015, para. 16).

D.'s article and the History of HB pages on the Arlington Public School website don't explicitly state that they believe that the history of the building influences the school that now exists there. Indeed, the "History of the School on Vacation Lane" is written as a history of the building itself, describing the multiple different programs that it housed over the years. It is not intended to be a history of HBW. However, the authors of these documents appear to find the correlation meaningful.

Immediately following the brief account of Stratford's desegregation, D. offers an unequivocal assessment of race at HBW, arguing that "Through a student's eyes, there really is no trace of racism at HBW. Through a teacher's eyes, there is no racism. And through outsiders' eyes, there is no racism. At HBW, students are safe and comfortable regardless of their race" (D., 2013, para. 4). D. does not outright argue a relationship of causation, but does appear to offer the historical note about Stratford in order to bolster his/her argument that HBW is beyond race. D. closes the article with a quote from a student identified as African American: "in terms of race, I definitely think that everyone is treated equally. HB is a really open and accepting environment in that regard… America still has a long way to go when it comes to racism. We as a country have made a lot of progress but there is still some way to go" (D., 2013, para. 6). The student is making the bold implication that HBW has relieved itself of the racial issues which still plague the United States. This is the student's argument, not my own, and it is as much (or more) a demonstration of a student's pride in HBW as it is a statement on its diversity and atmosphere.

Diversity with Common Characteristics

It is important to note that HBW's attempts to increase its diversity have been operating specifically on certain parameters and not others. A cut is made between parameters in which diversity is important versus those in which it is not. That is, the methods have been designed to increase racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic diversity. Other measures by which we might conceive diversity have not been intentionally acted upon. For instance, there is no indication in the documents that HBW has attempted to actively operate on its diversity in terms of sex and/or gender. This indicates that HBW finds its current distribution of students across the various delineations of sex and gender to be either appropriate or irrelevant. Thus there are categories of diversity that HBW essentially ignores, content to leave the makeup of the student body by those measures up to chance.

There are also categories in which HBW explicitly intends to be homogenous. Age is the most obvious. The admission process at the 6th grade level will admit only rising 6th graders as a defining characteristic of its apparatus. A 20-year old is not eligible to apply. In this sense, HBW does not differ from any other public school program in the county. Elementary, middle, and high schools are defined as such precisely because of the ages of the students they serve. These schools do not seek a wide range of age variation; indeed, they *require* a certain amount of age homogeneity as a defining condition of their existence. Similarly, a homeless shelter does not seek a wide range of socioeconomic diversity among its clients. This is a critical reminder that the situation — the intra-action — defines the parameters along which the term

"diversity" is useful and operable. The definition of diversity is necessarily entangled with other components of an intra-action.

All schools have a certain amount of age homogeneity, so that does not set HBW apart. However HBW specifically *seeks* other types of homogeneity that do set it apart. Remember that HBW is intended for students who can thrive with a relatively low level of supervision and external motivation. Just as the school is tailored to a precise age range, it is also tailored to students with a specific set of academic, social, and behavioral proclivities. Not only that — HBW is unequivocally defined by the fact that its student body shares these proclivities. A middle school which changed the makeup of its student body to comprise senior citizens instead of teenagers would no longer be a middle school by any conceivable measure. Similarly, if HBW's student body no longer primarily comprised students who are self-motivated and self-directed, it would cease to be HBW at all. The school's identity hinges on these characteristics. This distinguishes it from other public schools, which must accept, and make all good efforts to educate, all students who live in their jurisdiction, regardless of their self-motivation or self-direction. As we see from its admissions apparatus, HBW is also distinguished from other schools of choice which select students based on academic ability, usually as determined by grades or test scores.

HBW actively seeks diversity by some measures (ethnicity, race, socioeconomic status), is neutral on others (sex, gender), and actively seeks homogeneity on still others (academic, behavior, and social predilections). The machinations by which diversity and homogeneity are sought and created are meaningfully different. As I have discussed at

length, HBW has designed its geography-based admission policy to garner racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic diversity (albeit without operating directly on those categories). The actual admission apparatus — the random, double-blind lottery in which each elementary school is allocated a proportionate number of spots — operates with this motive. That admission apparatus, however, does not operate at all on the characteristics in which HBW seeks homogeneity. Any Arlington County student of the appropriate age can apply to HBW, and the admission apparatus is not designed in any way to filter out students who have the proclivities that HBW specifically seeks.

The method by which HBW attempts to seek out its preferred type of student is in the outreach and in the application process, not in the admissions process. I will reiterate the quote from the 1971 Woodlawn Handbook asserting that "The basic philosophical assumption underlying the creation of the New School is that *some* high school students are capable of assuming primary direction over their own education" (emphasis mine). Outreach materials for the school, whether written by HBW students, HBW staff, or Arlington Public Schools staff, invariably emphasize the need for students to be self-motivated and self-directed. While HBW is designed to foster these characteristics in these students (it does not require that students arrive fully-formed), outreach documents are clear that not every student is guaranteed to be successful in the HBW environment. HBW relies on self-selection on the part of the student (and his/her family) in order to create a class of students with the desired propensities.

A meaningful question for this research, then, is whether these proclivities create patterns of resonance or dissonance with the dimensions in which HBW strives for

diversity. HBW's values of individuality, responsibility, and freedom are interpreted differently by different families, some of whom find these values appealing and others of whom do not. For some parents, the idea of sending their child to a school where s/he will call teachers by their first names is unimaginable. Recall also the student who was turned off by seeing a peer wearing a mohawk and black makeup (Horwitt, 2004). Some households, intentionally or not, foster self-motivation in their children, while others prioritize obedience. Furthermore, the question of the "type" of education that is provided to a given student is itself political and necessarily involves issues of socioeconomic class, as Gee (2012) discusses:

> The history of literacy shows that education has not, for the most part, been directed primarily at vocational training or personal growth and development. Rather, it has stressed behaviors and attitudes appropriate to good citizenship and moral behavior, largely as these are perceived by the elites of the society. And this has often meant, especially over the last century, different sorts of behaviors and attitudes for different classes of individuals: docility, discipline, time-management, honesty, and respect for the lower classes, suiting them for industrial or service jobs; verbal and analytical skills, 'critical thinking', discursive thought and writing for the higher classes, suiting them for management jobs. (p. 56)

Gee has made a diffractive cut here — a cut that divides "behaviors and attitudes" that are seen by "the elites" as appropriate for "different classes". And indeed, we have seen that HBW specifically sets out to foster certain "behaviors and attitudes" in its students.

Using the cut that Gee has enacted, however, it appears that HBW pulls from both sides. As we see from its emphasis on student responsibility and freedom, HBW values time-management and honesty (attributes that are appropriate for lower classes according to Gee). As we see from HBW's emphasis on student input and choice, HBW also values critical thinking and discursive thought (attributes that are appropriate for higher classes). Based on Gee's categorization, it does not appear that we can argue that HBW's educational strategy is designed to cater to students from one socioeconomic class rather than another. Nor, according to Gee's cut, does it appear that HBW's educational strategy seeks to create students who identify with a specific socioeconomic class.

Nonetheless, it is clear that HBW's image and reputation are interpreted differently depending on student or family identity. Recall the misconceptions I discussed earlier that HBW charges fees or that only white, rich students can attend. Leaving aside issues of its reputation, there is also the issue that some parents and families aren't even aware that HBW exists. Two years after the geographic lottery system went into effect, the principal of an Arlington elementary school where the population is largely Hispanic and low-income told *The Washington Post*, "I think our people simply haven't known about it," but added that outreach efforts by HBW were starting to have an effect (Horwitt, 2004). HBW's philosophy, application process, and admissions apparatus are entangled with cultural values, educational theory, and Arlington County demographics.

Relocation in 2019

Rising Enrollment Levels in Arlington Public Schools

During the course of this research, Arlington Public Schools decided, after long debate, to move HBW to a new location within the county ("The Future", n.d.). In December 2014, the school board made the decision to relocate HBW in response to rising student enrollment and crowding issues countywide. Enrollment at Arlington Public Schools has grown 15% since 2006 ("Capacity Planning FAQ", 2014). It appears that this took the county by surprise; an article about the crowding issue in *The Washington Post* indicates that "the school system had been expecting an enrollment decline as late as 2007, when the numbers suddenly swung in the opposite direction" (Balingit, 2014a, para. 21). Arlington Public Schools has taken a variety of steps to accommodate the rise in students, including reconfiguring the use of space within existing buildings; increasing class sizes and utilization rates; adjusting schedules; and bringing in "relocatable classrooms," meaning trailers ("Capacity Planning FAQ", 2014, para. 12).

Arlington Public Schools describes itself as "aggressive in its approach to maximizing the capacity of existing facilities" but notes that new construction is also necessary to manage enrollment levels. In the Capacity Planning FAQ (2014) published on their website, Arlington Public Schools argues that "capacity numbers are governed by state standards, but also reflect a school system's values and the resources the district has available." This demonstrates Arlington Public Schools' desire to perform well

according to this measure by maintaining appropriate facilities for its enrollment numbers.

In order to create a management plan for the growth in enrollment, Arlington Public Schools engaged a software called Decision Lens in 2011 ("Capacity Planning FAQ", 2014). Decision Lens is a nonhuman element that played a critical, agentic role in the development of Arlington's capacity management plan. According to Arlington Public Schools, this software was intended to "create a transparent framework around very complicated decision making process" ("Capacity Planning FAQ", 2014). After coming up with a "solutions catalog" of "all potential capacity planning solutions," the School Board used Decision Lens to rank the solutions. The intra-action here is between the solutions catalog, which was developed by humans, and the ranking, which was done by the software (which in turn was developed by humans). Arlington Public Schools seems to assert that this indicates that the ranking was neutral — not influenced by human preferences. In this sense, Decision Lens is agential not only in terms of creating the ranking but also in terms of validating it. In 2012, the county superintendent developed the capacity management plan "using results of ranking and analysis" ("Capacity Planning FAQ", 2014, para. 21), so the software directly influenced the plan. While the specific details of Decision Lens are not discussed, it is clear that this software was agential in the development of the county's plan.

The New Site of HBW

As part of APS's enrollment management plan, HBW will be relocated to a new site. The new site, selected in December 2014, is currently occupied by an old school

building that is no longer in use. Arlington Public Schools plans to construct a new building on the site, and projects that HBW will be relocated to the new building starting in the 2019-2020 school year. Arlington Public Schools estimates that the building will hold 775 students, meaning that "H-B Woodlawn will grow by 10% by 2019 to accommodate the crowding in Arlington" ("The Future", n.d., para. 1). The current site of HBW will be renovated and enlarged to create a new middle school that will host an extra 296 students compared with the building's current capacity ("School Board Adopts Secondary Capacity Options", 2014).

The decision to relocate the program came after months of intense debate about various options to relieve overcrowding (Balingit, 2014b). The question of how to deal with the increasing student population involved both logistical and emotional issues. On the one hand, HBW currently "is in an area of the county that is in dire need of middle school seats and where land is highly valuable" (Balingit, 2014a, para. 8), making the relocation an obvious choice in terms of logistics. And yet, Balingit observes that "families with connections to Woodlawn" were particularly upset about the change, saying that some of those individuals "view the building — with walls that bear decades of student artwork — as an important part of its legacy" (2014b, para. 8). As I have discussed previously, the building in which HBW is housed is a significant part of its identity. Students have made their mark on the building, and its features have shaped the development of the school. I have mentioned that the importance of the senior walls is repeatedly amplified in the documents, and we see it resonating again in the quote above from Balingit (a photograph of a senior wall accompanies the article). Their significance

as a symbol cannot be overstated. A 6th grade student is quoted as saying, "There's so much history… All that history will be torn down" (Balingit, 2014a, para. 10). Despite the contentious debate preceding the School Board's decision to move, the HBW community appears relatively optimistic now that the decision is final. For instance, the HBW home page on the Arlington Public Schools website shows renderings of possible designs for the new building, noting that "there are even some possibilities of where to locate the frisbee field at the [new] site" ("The Future", n.d., para. 2). Given that Ultimate Frisbee is HBW's only school sport, it appears that HBW is already attempting to adapt to the changes ahead.

Impact on Diversity

The county's enrollment management plan, including but not limited to the relocation of HBW, impacts two particular components of its diversity that are central to this research, namely, the building and the admissions policy. As I have discussed, the history of the building is a significant part of HBW's identity *and its diversity* as conceived by its students and by Arlington County. Despite the fact that Stratford Junior High (the school which desegregated in 1959) and HBW are entirely unrelated institutions, the fact that HBW is, for now, housed in the same building appears to correlate it with desegregation and diversity for many within the HBW community and the larger Arlington community. The physical space of the school is entangled with the history and conception of diversity in Arlington schools.

With respect to HBW's admission policy, one particular element of the county's plan to manage enrollment is potentially significant. That element is the county's plans

to restructure the borders of some of its elementary school districts. APS states that the restructuring of the elementary school districts is intended to "improve enrollment balance among schools" ("Boundary Refinement Process", 2015, p. 6). Though elementary school districts may appear at first glance to be unrelated, HBW is meaningfully entangled with them. Remember that enrollment at the elementary school level is an instrumental component of the current admissions apparatus at HBW. Since HBW's geography-based lottery is directly predicated on elementary schools and their enrollment levels, this restructuring could have an effect on the admission policy and subsequently diversity at HBW.

APS cites six criteria that it will use when determining how to draw the boundaries: alignment, contiguity, demographics, efficiency, proximity, and stability. The criterion of interest here is *demographics*; APS defines this criterion as "promoting demographic diversity" ("Boundary Refinement Process", 2015, p. 12). Demographic diversity at the elementary school level could create a pattern of interference with HBW's admission apparatus and actually *decrease* diversity at HBW. As we have seen, HBW's geography-based lottery works to increase diversity within its own walls by leveraging the relatively homogenous racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic demographics of Arlington elementary schools. Remember that white, affluent families are still the most likely to apply to HBW and the geography-based lottery works to offset that.

Recall that the Arlington elementary school with the highest percentage of white students was 84.8% white in 2014, and it was also the school with the fewest students receiving free or reduced-price lunches. The school with the lowest white enrollment had

5.6% white students and also had the greatest number of students receiving those meal benefits ("Civil Rights Statistics", 2014). Now imagine that the elementary school borders are restructured in such a way that the predominantly non-white school now has more white students. If what we know about HBW applicants (namely, that they are often white and wealthy) remains the same, and what we know about the HBW admission apparatus (which accepts a proportional number of students based on the size of each elementary school) *also* remains the same, then those white students from that predominantly non-white school who apply to HBW now have an excellent chance of getting in, because there is likely to be little competition. In other words, if an elementary school has a small minority of white and affluent students, many of whom then apply to HBW while students of other ethnic or socioeconomic backgrounds in the school do not apply to HBW, then the diversity-increasing potential of the geographic-based lottery system is diminished.

Conversely, diversity in schools at the elementary level helps engender diversity at the traditional middle and high schools in the county as students progress through the grades. It would be obviously inappropriate to suppress diversity at the elementary school level in order to increase the diversity-enhancing properties of HBW's lottery, and I am not suggesting this path. Rather, I want to point out how this scenario highlights the entangled and material nature of HBW's admissions policy within the larger environment of Arlington County. I have already discussed the fact that some communities within Arlington County, particularly non-white communities and those with less socioeconomic standing, are continually less aware of the school's philosophy, intent, or even existence.

This potential change in elementary school boundaries highlights the need for continued and increased outreach to those communities within the county who have proven less likely to apply to, or even be aware of, HBW.

This change also highlights the fragility of the current admissions apparatus and the need for periodic re-evaluation of its effectiveness as other aspects of its entanglement change. Though the admissions system appears robust and effective when operating on the current county demographics and elementary school boundaries, it is clear that the policy is dependent on these factors. Non-human elements such as boundaries have agency over the lives of schoolchildren under this policy. In order for HBW to maintain the effectiveness of its admission apparatus, the school will need to continually attend to changes in the human and nonhuman entities with which it is entangled.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Conclusions

The purpose of this research was to understand the ways that the admissions strategy at HBW reflects and creates the student experience there. Data collection took place both online and at the physical HBW site, collecting documents about the school's history, policies, and procedures. Through a theoretical framework of new materialism, I investigated the intra-actions of HBW's admissions policies (including the application process) and the experience of being a student there.

Limitations of the document analysis methodology meant that investigating an individual student's experience at HBW was not part of the data collection. Nor was it appropriate to interview an administrator or staff member to learn about the decision process that went into designing any of the admissions apparatuses that have been in use in the school's history. Rather than working with individuals, the data collection depended on written documents, which are themselves a human-nonhuman intra-action, as I have described. The theoretical framework of agential realism, however, compensates for the lack of focus on individuals because the intent of a diffractive methodology is not to look at individuals or events in isolation. Indeed, agential realism holds that it is not possible to effectively do so. Accordingly, this research looked for diffraction patterns — patterns of resonance and dissonance. These diffraction patterns

allowed me to discover the ways in which HBW's admission policy reflect and create the experience of its students.

These diffraction patterns demonstrate places where policy and student experience either amplify or interfere with each other. For example, HBW's stated intent, in all official outreach and descriptive documents throughout its history, is to be an alternative school. As we have seen, some documents written by those internal and external to the HBW community express doubts as to how successful HBW has been. Particularly notable to this study are documents where HBW students themselves express such doubts. This was one example of a pattern of dissonance; a place where the data contradict themselves. An example of an amplification pattern was seen in the continual reiteration of the importance of the senior walls. The significance of these walls as a symbol (of the school's alternative policies) and a signal (to students about their power in this environment) was stated numerous times throughout the documents. The diffraction patterns found throughout the data illustrated the nature of the intra-action between admissions policy and student experience.

Analyzing data across the school's decades-long history led to the critical conclusion that fostering and maintaining diversity at a Type I alternative school takes continuous adjustment and calibration. From early founding documents all the way up to present-day documents, there is a stated desire to ensure that HBW has a diverse student body. The fact that the admission apparatus has changed multiple times over the school's history speaks to the idea that the procedures necessary to ensure this diversity can and

do change over time. HBW's student body is entangled with other factors, most notably (for this study) Arlington County demographics and population size.

Implications

The implications of this study are threefold. First, I discuss the implications for HBW as it goes forward with continually revising its admission policy, particularly in light of the relocation and Arlington County enrollment management plan that I discussed in Chapter 4. Next, I discuss the implications for other schools, including traditional schools, which may not have the same level of control over their admissions policy. Finally, I discuss implications for other researchers who may be interested in using Barad's (2007) framework of agential realism, and the related methodology of diffractive analysis, in their own research.

Implications for HBW

I chose HBW for this study because it offers a particularly clear glimpse into the intra-action between admission apparatus and student experience. At HBW, both the admissions apparatus and the student experience are specifically designed with a specific result in mind, i.e., to create an alternative school. Since HBW is a Type I alternative school, a school of choice, the admissions apparatus is explicit, enabling its examination through document analysis. The HBW community (staff as well as students) have developed the admissions apparatus over time. The admission policy is also clearly laid out for the public (for example, on the Arlington Public Schools website). This is in contrast with what could be called the implicit admissions policy in use at most other high schools, which accept all students of a certain age who live within their district. The

explicit nature of HBW's admissions apparatus made it a good choice to examine in this research.

The implications for HBW of the entanglements described in this study are that the school will need to continue to adjust its admissions policy in response to changing demographics within the county. As I discussed in Chapter 4, changes in elementary school district boundaries will change the way HBW's admissions apparatus functions. These changes (specifically, a drop in diversity) would become clear over time as HBW's incoming class demographics changed. However, an understanding of this intra-action between elementary school districting and HBW demographics will allow HBW to predict and pre-emptively respond to these changes. With this intra-action in mind, it is not necessary to wait until diversity is diminished at HBW. The admissions apparatus can be adjusted to maintain a diverse student body. This will become particularly important given HBW's planned relocation in 2019 and the resultant 10% increase in size.

Of particular importance to this research is the idea, discussed in Chapter 4, that increased diversity at the elementary school level (which Arlington Public Schools is actively seeking in its capacity management plan) has the potential to negatively affect diversity at HBW under the current admissions apparatus. As I stressed in Chapter 4, this of course does not mean that Arlington Public Schools should engineer a homogeneous student body at one level or school in order to engender diversity in another. What it illustrates is the fact that managing demographics, student enrollment, and diversity is a balancing act among all schools within the system. They are mutually entangled and

cannot be manipulated in isolation. A school's student body is not only a function of its admissions policy. It is also a function of county politics, particularly racial and socioeconomic stratification.

Implications for Other Schools

The entanglements demonstrated in this study affect all schools. The entanglement of admission policy with student experience is not specific to HBW, to Arlington Public Schools or to Arlington County. The admissions policies at many high schools are implicit rather than explicit, but this does not mean that they are not entangled in the same way. On the contrary, increasing our understanding of the entanglement of admissions and student experience is equally important in a traditional school. Healthy, dynamic diversity and a positive student experience are important components of a school's atmosphere and policy. This study demonstrates the need for schools to be aware of changes in their community so that they can respond and adjust in a timely, appropriate manner that is sensitive to the various entangled components of their institutions.

Further research is necessary in this area to understand the differences between alternative and traditional schools in terms of admissions, student body, and diversity. The student experience is necessarily different at an alternative school compared to a traditional school, so not all of the findings in this research are generalizable to all schools. Nevertheless, this research demonstrates the importance of considering admissions policies as part of a larger whole. When considering diversity-enhancing initiatives at other schools, it is critical to keep in mind other factors, such as the makeup

of the community and the experiences students bring to the table from their prior schooling. Considering these factors as "external" is misleading. These elements are entangled and need to be evaluated as such. Administrators, teachers, and community leaders who make decisions regarding districts, school demographics, and admissions policies would do well to understand the intra-action at work.

Implications for Other Researchers

Barad's agential realist framework, and the associated methodology of diffractive analysis, ask a great deal of the researcher. As I described in the beginning of Chapter 2, agential realism troubles some long-held research traditions. First to be dispensed with is the idea that an object under investigation has independent properties, and the idea that the goal of research is to uncover these properties and describe them. Agential realism (based on Bohr's indeterminacy principle) holds that an object does not have independent properties at all. Rather, I reiterate that "concepts are defined by the circumstances required for their measurement" (Barad, 2007, p. 109). The goal of research, then, is to describe the circumstances necessary to reproduce the phenomena described. The idea of causality is troubled by agential realism. In fact, the traditional concept of linear time is troubled in agential realism as well. Barad (2014) argues that "past, present, and future [are] not in a relation of linear unfolding, but threaded through one another in a non-linear enfolding... a topology that defies any suggestion of a smooth, continuous manifold." The past does not cause the present and the future. Rather, cause and effect arise in intra-actions.

In this research, the implication was that I could not look for ways that the admissions apparatus caused a certain result in the student experience at HBW. My discussion of changes in the admissions apparatus and the related demographic changes over time, therefore, could not argue for a relationship of causation. Rather, the results demonstrate the significance of the intra-action between admissions and demographics. The implication for other researchers using this framework may be similar. Research often relies heavily on the traditional understanding of causality and linear time. Researchers using the agential realist tradition need to compensate for this assumed reliance by clearly stating the goals and limitations of their work.

A note on data collection and analysis: agential realism requires a detailed analysis of the data, which I feel makes documents an ideal data source. Repeated engagement with the data is required in order to pick out the patterns of resonance and dissonance. The fact that my data were language-based meant that I maintained a heightened level of attention to linguistic detail that highlighted patterns of amplification and interference (for instance, the wording chosen in HBW outreach documents). Furthermore, agential realism necessitates continual evaluation of the language at use in describing one's findings. Indeed, that language (the language that the researcher uses to describe the findings in writing) is in fact *creating* the findings, as I discussed in the introduction to Chapter 4 when I troubled the idea that "findings" is an appropriate term at all. It is indeed possible that "makings" is a more accurate term.

This is certainly not to say that the findings of research from an agential realist framework are useless or restrictively specific. As I described above, the findings of this

study describe important characteristics of the intra-action between HBW's admissions apparatus and the experience of its students. Additionally, these findings demonstrate areas where further research is needed, namely, with the intent to better understand the entanglements at play in traditional schools with regards to diversity and the student experience. I also do not wish to suggest that numerical data are not amenable to a diffractive methodology. I simply want to highlight the fact that language is a critical, agential component of research from an agential realist framework.

From a research perspective, this study demonstrates to other researchers the challenges and benefits of examining a topic through an agential realist framework. Barad's work is based in theoretical physics, and yet her framework is applicable to research in education, as I have shown here and has been shown by other education researchers (e.g., Lenz Taguchi & Palmer, 2013; Palmer, 2011). This study will be useful to administrators, teachers, and students who are committed to developing and furthering diversity in their educational environment. It highlights the ways that a school environment is deeply entangled with the community in which it is situated. As I discussed in Chapter 4, HBW's intra-actions with its community in a time of rapid population growth have included a significant change in its material existence – the move to a new location. Matter and identity are inseparable, and thus this change in physical location presents significant challenges to the school. It also presents opportunities for growth and self-evaluation. HBW's student-oriented policies allow for change from within (i.e., student-led change) but students, as well as staff, administrators, and other interested parties, can benefit from recognizing their entanglement with the larger

community. The relocation was fiercely fought by many at HBW, but now that the decision is final, work can begin on making peace with the move and enfolding it into HBW's identity. By alleviating overcrowding, HBW's move will benefit Arlington County, of which it is an entangled component. Therefore, the move certainly has the potential to benefit HBW as well. Recognition of this will help HBW through the transition.

It is the importance of recognizing mutual entanglement that I wish to convey through this research. Agential realism necessitates the understanding that ethics are entangled. We have a responsibility to each other, and because we are all entangled, this amounts to a responsibility to ourselves as well. Barad, in an interview with Dolphijn and van der Tuin (2012), refers to this as "response-ability," by which she means the "possibilities of mutual response, which is not to deny, but to attend to power imbalances." In terms of this research, this entailed looking at questions of power and agency as they related to admissions policies and the student experience. Thinking about diversity requires thinking about questions of power imbalances, and agential realism offers us a way to do that. In terms of future research, as well as in terms of the continuous and continuously-entangled act of existing responsibly in our communities, agential realism asks us to be aware of and to be responsible for our actions. Our intra-actions continually and materially re-configure the world (Barad, 2007). Entanglements are everywhere, and any topic to which we turn our human attention (whether in the name of research or in less formal endeavors), already a rich field of intra-actions, is further enriched and forever altered by the attention.

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