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ABSTRACT

A study was done to examine the lived experience of conflict among students in a transitional class for returning long-term absentees in Walker Hill High School (a pseudonym), an inner city New York City high school. The project was a substudy of the New York City Dropout Prevention Evaluation Project. The theoretical framework of the study began with the basic premises of symbolic interactionism for a theory-based methodological perspective. Critical theory was then introduced, and social order was discussed as part of a school's hidden curriculum. Over the course of 2 years, one class was observed by an ethnographer/evaluator approximately twice a week. Data collection included ethnographic interviews, participant observation, and site document collection. Analysis consisted of discovering a salient theme, identifying vignettes with conflict, examining one conflict vignette in detail, and finding and elaborating on a pattern of social interaction. Analysis suggests that fighting is a part of students' everyday lives; and that a recurrent pattern of perceived disrespect, exchange, and audience presence results in conflicts. The paper offers a detailed analysis and description of four conflicts, further discussion of theory and literature, as well as an overview of the implications for conflict mediation programs. Included are 5 figures and 88 references. (JB)

THE STRUCTURING OF CONFLICT EVENTS IN AN URBAN HIGH SCHOOL

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Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Francisco, CA, April 1992.

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THE STRUCTURING OF CONFLICT EVENTS IN AN URBAN HIGH SCHOOL

by

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INTRODUCTION

In the midst of this nation's self-declared educational crisis (National Commission for Excellence in Education, 1983), school dropouts are receiving considerable attention. Across the nation, school districts are operating dropout prevention programs (New York City, AIDP/DPP 1986; Florida Department of Education 1986; Orr 1987), educational researchers are evaluating these programs (Fine, 1983; Grannis, et.al., 1986; Wehlage, 1983) and politicians are acknowledging the existence of this educational crisis (Cuomo, 1986; Governors' Conference, 1985).

Numerous reports have been written attempting to understand, make recommendations for and criticize the existing dropout prevention programs (LeCompte, 1986; Natriello, 1986). Each report provides a different perspective. Some are concerned with methods for calculating dropout rates; others with methods of attracting students to come back to school; still others with describing the individual characteristics of those who are most likely to drop out.

In his review of dropout prevention, Rumberger (1987) lists factors which have been associated with dropping out. He divides them into categories of school-related, economic, personal and other. Yet, with the exception of "school being too dangerous" every subcategory was related specifically to the individual who is dropping out. (See also, Caplan and Nelson 1973.) Furthermore, Fine (in press) reports on an important ethnographic study of a group of South Bronx students who qualify for any of the given definitions of the "at-risk" category. In this study, Fine discovered individual differences between those who remained in school as compared to those who dropped out, differences which differ greatly from the factors cited from the other studies. She reports that "a moderate level of depression, an absence of political awareness, the presence of self blame, low assertiveness, and high conformity may tragically have constituted evidence of the 'good' urban student" (p. 215).

Policy response to the research reported by Rumberger has resulted in many programs which look to the individual or group of students involved while aiming to solve serious needs such as job training, job placement, guidance counseling, pregnancy care, and crisis intervention. Some programs use material incentives in an attempt to induce teenagers to come to school. Others teach students techniques of conflict mediation as an attempt to decrease school suspensions, reduce violence in the schools and share the responsibility with students. Do these solutions which assume that when a teenager leaves school one must find ways to teach, change or adapt the teenager so that s/he can come back and fit in to the existing system address the heart of this deep-rooted

problem? This question and its underlying assumptions are ones which this study proposes to examine.

Erikson (1986) suggests that an interpretive approach to research requires one to ask different types of questions:

> What are the conditions of meaning that students and teachers create together, as some students appear to learn and others don't...How is it that it can make sense to students to learn in one situation and not in another? How are these meaning systems created and sustained in daily interaction? (p.127).

This study does not begin with the assertion that in order to understand social phenomenon one must begin with understanding the personal or psychological characteristics of the behavior of individuals. Rather it asks how meaning is interpreted through social interaction; how students most at-risk of dropping out of school interact within their environment; and how students negotiate their social order in schools.

The purpose of this research, a substudy of the New York City Dropout Prevention Evaluation Project[1], is to examine the lived experience (Greene, 1978) of students in a transitional class for returning long-term absentees in a New York City high school. Since all such students find themselves enrolled in this transitional class, - an integral part of the dropout prevention program and of the school itself - this classroom was initially observed as part of the evaluation project. Over time it also served as an important entry point from which to begin to observe the interactions of those students who have already been designated as "at-risk."

Gaining an understanding of social interactions is made possible by planning a study whose data rely on observing and interviewing the students. The purpose is to gain insight into the meanings underlying their "mutually constructed behavior" (Mehan, 1978). Through this developed understanding, the findings of this research will explore existing interactional patterns.

The finding and analyzing of salient patterns of behavior can lend itself to a deeper, richer and more grounded understanding of the experiences of these students. By shifting the focus away from an individual's characteristic and behavior and towards the social structure and cultural understandings which permit such behavior, it is the hope that future educational decision-making can be made which will better respond to the needs of at-risk students.

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[1]The Dropout Prevention Initiative (DPI) was a major effort in reducing New York City's dropout rate. An evaluation of DPI was coordinated by the Institute for Urban and Minority Education at Teachers College, Columbia University, under the direction of Professor Joseph C. Grannis.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Theoretical frameworks, conceptual systems, and philosophical orientations are bound inextricably to all phases of research activity regardless of whether their uses are conscious and explicit or unconscious and implicit.

Goetz and LeCompte, 1984

The theoretical framework of this study begins with the basic premises of symbolic interactionism (Mead, 1934; Blumer, 1969). Concepts central to symbolic interactionism - meaning, interaction and interpretation - are used to develop a theory-based methodological perspective. Critical theory is then introduced and social order is discussed as part of a school's hidden curriculum. Together these perspectives form the theoretical foundation of this study.

Symbolic Interactionism

> Symbolic interactionism assumes three basic premises:
> 1. Human beings act towards things[2] on the basis of the *meanings* that the things have for them.
> 2. The meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of the *social interaction* that one has with one's fellows.
> 3. These meanings are handled in, and modified through, an *interpretive process* used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters (Blumer, 1969, p. 2, italics added).

Understanding meaning as a research goal is different than understanding behavior. This distinction has both theoretical as well as methodological implications. The former will be discussed here; the latter in the section on Methodological Implications (p.16). Meaning is central to the focus of this study. In much social science research meaning is either "taken for granted and thus pushed aside as unimportant or it is regarded as a mere neutral link between the factors responsible for human behavior and this behavior as the product of such factors" (Blumer, 1969, p.2).

The tendency in psychology and sociology to focus on personal characteristics alleged to produce certain behaviors can be seen as a neglect of the significant role meaning plays in the formation of that human behavior. According to symbolic interactionism, the source of meaning arises in the process of interaction between people and things. The meaning one attaches to a given thing is the result of the ways in which other persons act toward the person with regard to the same thing (Blumer, 1969). Mehan's concept of "mutually constitutive interaction" (Mehan, 1978 helps to further refine the role of interaction:

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[2] Blumer defines "things" quite broadly as "everything that the human being may note in his world." This includes, then, physical objects, other human beings, categories of human beings, institutions, guiding ideals, activities of others, and situations which may be encountered as a part of one's daily life.

> Constitutive studies operate on the interactional premise that social structures are social accomplishments (Cicourcel, 1974; Garfinkel, 1967; Garfinkel and Sacks, 1970; Scheflen, 1972). The central tenet of constitutive studies of school is that "objective social facts," such as students' intelligence, scholastic achievement, or career patterns, and "routine patterns of behavior," such as classroom organization, are accomplished in the interaction between teachers and students, testers and students, principals and teachers. Rather than merely describe recurrent patterns of behavior or seek correlations among variables, constitutive analysts study the structuring activities that construct the social facts of education (Mehan, 1978, p. 36).

From an interactional perspective, one can no longer view students, teachers or schools as passive agents. In classroom studies, it is inaccurate to try to study the behavior of the teacher or the student in isolation. It is the very dynamic, dialectical nature of the interaction that becomes the focus of study. I will return to this clarification in the discussion of reproduction and resistance theories.

Not only is meaning established through interactions, but people's use of meanings in their actions involves an interpretive process. According to Blumer "...interpretation should not be regarded as a mere automatic application of established meanings but as a formative process in which meanings are used and revised as instruments for the guidance and formation of action" (Blumer, 1969, p. 5). Meaning, social interaction and interpretation become, then, the central analytic tools.

Still, these tools are not enough. Symbolic interactionism does not address itself to the role of school experiences in society and, therefore, offers only a partial theoretical position. Schools are not neutral, value-free institutions within which meaning gets interpreted through social interactions. Quite the contrary, many social, economic and political realities exist that form the nature of a social interaction. This study acknowledges the importance of recognizing these realities within the theoretical framework of studying schools.

Critical Theory

An important theoretical link between symbolic interactionism and critical theory is the interactive context.

> The critical educator endorses theories that are, first and foremost, dialectical; that is, theories which recognize the problems of society as more than simply isolated events of individuals or deficiencies in the social structure. Rather, these problems [are] part of the *interactive context* between individual and society. The individual, a social actor, both creates and is created by the social universe of which he/she is a part (McLaren, 1988, p.166).

While symbolic interactionism focuses on the interaction determined by meanings assigned by individuals, critical theory turns our attention to the interaction between the

individual and society.

The social construction of behavior is central to the theoretical foundation of this study. Much of the writing is focused on the interactions themselves, the patterns of behavior; nonetheless, the larger social system within which these interactions take place must be considered. Critical theory offers such a perspective.

Reproduction theorists (Bowles and Gintis, 1976; Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977) have claimed that schools in a capitalist society act in the best interest of a capitalist economy and reproduce the dominant ideology and necessary unequal structure. Schools are seen as agents of society that serve to maintain the existing order. Those with power maintain it; those without continue to have no access. This deterministic view, directly correlating social class and school achievement, fails to explain the exceptions. How is it, for example, that some children do maintain a social status different from that of their parents?

In response to this dilemma, resistance or conflict theorists suggest that while inequality is reproduced in the schools this is generally the product of a complex dialectical process replete with conflict and contradiction; it is not the result of a smooth and uncontested system of training and sorting handed down by the schools in the service of the economy (for examples of such theorists see Claus, 1987; Apple, 1979; Giroux, 1983; Carnoy and Levin, 1985). Giroux's critical discussion of reproduction theory (Giroux, 1983; Claus, 1987; Bowles and Gintis, 1976) and development of resistance theory as an outgrowth of this criticism highlights the neglect of reproduction theory to account adequately for the important role of interaction and interpretation.

> Reproduction theorists have overemphasized the idea of domination in their analyses and have failed to provide any major insights into how teachers, students and other human agents come together within specific historical and social contexts in order to both make and reproduce the conditions of their existence. . . . By ignoring the contradictions and struggles that exist in schools, these theories not only dissolve human agency, they unknowingly provide a rationale for not examining teachers and students in concrete school settings (Giroux, 1983, p. 259).

While "loaded" with political and ideological intentions, resistance theory can also provide a sound theoretical framework for studying the meanings, interactions and interpretations that take place in classrooms.

> In the most general sense, resistance must be grounded in a theoretical rationale that provides a new framework for examining schools as social sites which structure the experiences of subordinate groups. The concept of resistance, in other words, represents more than a heuristic catchword in the language of radical pedagogy; it depicts a mode of discourse that rejects traditional explanations of school failure and oppositional behavior and shifts the analysis of oppositional behavior from the theoretical terrains of functionalism and mainstream educational psychology to those of political science and sociology. Resistance in

this case redefines the causes and meaning of oppositional behavior by arguing that it has little to do with deviance and learned helplessness, but a great deal to do with moral and political indignation (Giroux, 1983, p.289).

Page (1987) examines the negotiation of curriculum in a lower-track high school classroom. This interpretive study analyzes the interaction of students and a teacher during an American History lesson.

> [T]he underlife, defined by the students, invades the official lesson, defined by the teacher, in response to the teacher's increasing control of the content and form of the curriculum ... Students increasingly speak the language of lower-track 'troublemakers' in response to Mr. Robinson's increasing use of the language of lower-track control (Page, 1987, p.22).

As the students feel more and more alienated from the lesson, by repeatedly having their attempt to take a more active role denied, they begin to "act out." This, in turn, leads the teacher to maintain even tighter control which continues the cycle. The conflict builds and the traditional view of lower-track students as uninterested and rebellious is confirmed. "Ironically, curricular negotiations prompt the very disorder and disdain for academic endeavors that teachers of academically unsuccessful students (not to mention . . . national policy makers) most lament" (Page, 1987, p.30).

It is this conflict or mismatch which produces resistance in the classroom. Resistance theory, emphasizing the interactive nature of conflict, affords a more realistic picture of the sociocultural process by which participants in the educational system both create and respond to their experiences in schools.

In his study of vocational high school students in a vocational, food preparation track, Claus (1987) differentiates between elements of accommodation to and resistance of the dominant social order. On the one hand, entering the vocational track meant for many students and their parents a program of study consistent with their own beliefs and values: Physical labor is worthwhile; mental activity is frivolous and unrealistic. He notes that "the parents generally preferred technical and vocational training, and they hoped schools would teach their children to respect authority and to adhere to rules and regulations" (p.8). On the other hand, his interview data clearly illustrate the students' awareness of socio-economic class differences. Claus argues that the students' decisions, after two years of feeling alienated, to move to the vocational track was, in part, "an act of opposition and anger. It was a way of mediating and muting a lower status identification within the high school social structure" (p.16). While on one level the choice reflected an acceptance of and resignation to low status opportunity, on another level it was rooted in a rejection of the social class system which identified the students as lower class.

With this analysis, Claus further refines resistance theory, noting a constraint of current resistance theory research which has focused on explicitly rebellious behavior, and has "left uninvestigated subtle patterns of interaction which may actually be more fundamental to the process by which resistance often contributes to the reproduction of

inequality" (Claus, 1987, p.4). Not all rebellious behavior can be viewed as resistance. Some may be the acting out of internalized societal norms. Another illustration can be seen in the sexist and racist behaviors of Willis' "lads."

In the classic study entitled Learning to Labor: How working class kids get working class jobs, British researcher Paul Willis (1977) describes how a group of working class boys resisted the oppression of school socialization by "rejecting mental labor in favor of more masculine labor" (Willis, 1977, p.36). In so doing, ironically, they further reinforced the oppression they were resisting. They were unable to "use" the school as a stepping stone to other opportunities in life and perpetuated the social reproduction function of schooling. Indeed, in this case, "the resistance only helps secure to an even greater degree the eventual fate of these students" (McLaren, p. 188).

These lads support Giroux's notion of counter-logic, that which pulls students away from schools:

> The social spheres that make up this counter-logic may represent the few remaining terrains that provide the oppressed with the possibility of human agency and autonomy. Yet, these terrains appear to represent less a form of resistance than an expression of solidarity and self-affirmation...this counter-logic must be seen as an important theoretical terrain in which one finds fleeting images of freedom that point to fundamentally new structures in the public organization of experience (Giroux, 1983, p.293).

General observations in urban schools readily point to the usefulness of this theoretical perspective. For example, last year I had the opportunity to talk with a group of high school students in a classroom when their regular teacher did not show up to class. The lengthy discussion ended up on the subject of wearing hats in the classroom. In short, students told me that they resented not being able to wear hats in school. They said that they should be able to dress any way they want to. As the discussion progressed, I learned that they do not wear hats in their houses. In fact, when asked what he would do if a friend walked into his house with a hat on, one student said, "I'd throw him out." Some more probing revealed that not wearing a hat was a symbol of respect. Several boys explained that they would never wear a hat in church, for example. By asking what the meaning is behind the symbol of a hat, one might infer that students were expressing a form of resistance. Wearing a hat in school was a message from the student to the environment. The school's rules about not allowing hats may also be a message - an insistence on respect. An example of subtle resistance, the wearing of hats can be viewed as the students' attempt to gain respect, or at least to acknowledge its absence.

Social order as hidden curriculum

The role of the hidden curriculum in schools becomes important as this study moves away from classroom lessons and closer to the existing social relations in the school. Traditionally, hidden curriculum refers to the unwritten curriculum; the very choice of knowledge which is seen as relevant, the lessons that are implicitly taught by the way people interact. From a critical theory perspective, however, the hidden curriculum also includes the way events are structured and the patterns of behavior one finds within that structure.

> The social relations that constitute the hidden curriculum provide ideological and material weight to questions regarding what counts as high versus low status knowledge (intellectual or manual), high versus low status forms of social organization (hierarchical or democratic), and, of course, what counts as high versus low status of personal interaction (interaction based on individual competitiveness or interaction based on collective sharing). The nature and meaning of the hidden curriculum is further expanded through an understanding of how it contributes to the construction of student subjectivities - that is, those conscious and unconscious dimensions of experience that inform student behavior (Giroux, 1983, p.263).

Hidden curriculum represents the "introduction to a particular form of life; it serves in part to prepare students for dominant or subordinate positions in the existing society" (McLaren, 1989, p.181). By broadening the view of hidden curriculum, a new dimension must be considered when examining social behavior in schools.

> School life is understood not as a unitary, monolithic, and ironclad system of rules and regulations, but as a cultural terrain characterized by varying degrees of accommodation, contestation, and resistance. Furthermore, school life is understood as a plurality of conflicting languages and struggles, a place where classroom and street-corner cultures collide and where teachers, students, and school administrators often differ as to how school experiences and practices are to be defined and understood (McLaren, 1989, p.186).

In an introductory text of critical pedagogy and critical theory, McLaren (1989) offers an uninvestigated, but enticing, explanation of student resistance to which he alludes in the quote above. He suggests examining conflict between street-corner culture and classroom culture as a entry point to understanding school failure:

> I have argued that the major drama of resistance in schools is an effort on the part of students to bring their street-corner culture into the classroom. Students reject the culture of classroom learning because, for the most part, it is delibidinalizing (eros-denying) and is infused with a cultural capital to which subordinate groups have little legitimate access. Resistance to school instruction

> represents a resolve on the part of students not to be dissimulated in the face of oppression; it is a fight against the erasure of their street-corner identities. To resist means to fight against the monitoring of passion and desire... Accordingly, students' very bodies become sites of struggle, and resistance a way of gaining power, celebrating pleasure, and fighting oppression in the lived historicity of the moment (p.188).

While the realm of conflict should be expanded to include the school culture, not only the classroom or instructional culture, this perspective adds an important, and frequently overlooked, dimension.

The more one learns about the street corner culture of the students in urban high schools, the more one can appreciate the disparity. Students, for example, frequently talked about being an adult on the street and a child in the school. They express an awareness for the lack of responsibility they are given in school, at the same time that many provide substantial financial support for their families. Negotiating between street corner culture and classroom culture is a theoretical perspective "grounded" in the observations and experiences within the social world this study is attempting to better understand.

Summary

Adding to the basic principles of symbolic interactionism, a more politicized perspective offered by critical theory and a theoretical perspective of social order as hidden curriculum, provides the basic theoretical foundation for this study. This study aims to focus on teenagers and adults in various school settings, to look at the interactions and the ways in which they manage to negotiate the social order of that particular social setting. Rather than look at classroom organization and social order as a product to be observed, examined and recorded, this study proposes to view social order as a process that results from interaction, negotiation and mediation. The purpose of this study is to begin to understand that process.

Such an understanding, however, must start from the perspective of those involved in the process. Gaining an insider's perspective, then, is one reason for choosing an ethnographic approach to this study. The outsider's perspective can also be useful in that this process may not be "visible" to the participants and, therefore, they may not be able to articulate those aspects of the process which are part of the participants' unconscious behaviors. Not enough work has been done to discover these processes. Ethnography is particularly suited to such discovery-oriented inquiry.

Methodological Implications

> ... ethnography should be considered a deliberate inquiry process guided by a point of view, rather than a reporting process guided by a standard technique or set of techniques, or a totally intuitive process that does not involve reflection (Erickson, 1984, p.51).

This next section aims at presenting the point of view which guided the inquiry process of this study.

The flood of national reports, books, task forces, commissions, funded research is directed at finding answers and solutions to, what many consider, our failing educational system. Some are based on philosophical notions (back to basics, minimum standards, cultural literacy), others rely on "objective" survey results. An assumption of this study is that before trying to find answers, we need to know what questions to ask.

After administering a student survey in a NYC public high school, I had the opportunity to sit and chat with one of the students who took the survey. The following is only an approximation of a small piece of our short talk:
(P=participant; R=researcher)

P: That was long.
R: Too long?
P: Not really, it was kind of fun.
R: I'm glad you thought so.
P: There were a lot of questions.
R: Ummhmm.
P: Can I ask you a question now?
R: Sure.
P: Why were there so many questions?
R: The questions are asked to find out students' attitudes about school, to find out what school is like for you, what you think about it. There's a lot we want to know.
P: You mean you want to know what I think about school.
R: Umhmm.
P: Next time I have a better idea - Why don't you just ask me.

Several months later I was observing a meeting of the dropout prevention team of the high school I am evaluating. They were discussing the ways to make their program more effective, focusing on attendance incentives which they periodically give to students. Many questions arose: What did students like best? What was a real incentive rather than a bribe? Did other students resent the ones who got incentives? I thought of the above-quoted student's response to the survey and asked the team if anyone had ever asked the students. After a moment of silence some said that it was a ridiculous suggestion, while others expressed surprise at not having thought of it earlier.

As already stated, it is an assumption of this study that at present we are not asking the right questions. Furthermore, not only do we need to find out which questions to ask, but we have to find the right people to be asked. "What ethnography should bring to education is not answers, but a listening, learning posture that - based in respect for informants - leads to the explication of the important, unaddressed questions" (Gilmore and Smith, 1982, p. 5). In general, surveys and questionnaires that are not grounded in observation of the social world under study are more likely to be asking the wrong or irrelevant questions. Validity and reliability in models and instruments are of no use if the wrong questions have been asked. This is not to say that there is no place or purpose for incorporating surveys - that is, asking many people the same questions. First, however, one must be sure that the questions asked are "grounded" in the real, lived worlds of those being studied and not solely in the theoretical stance of the researcher.

The theoretical perspective chosen for this study demands a particular methodological perspective. This section begins with an explanation of that perspective, drawing from the theoretical framework described in the previous section. The following section focuses on the more specific, idiosyncratic methodological issues of this study.

Methodological implications of symbolic interactionism begin with understanding that reality exists in the empirical world not in the methods used to study that world. Reality is to be discovered in the examination of that world and not in the analysis or elaboration of the methods used to study that world. "Methods are mere instruments designed to identify and analyze the obdurate character of the empirical world, and as such their value exists only in their suitability in enabling this task to be done" (Blumer, 1969, p. 27). The empirical social world is defined as:

> ...the actual group life of human beings. It consists of what they experience and do, individually and collectively, as they engage in their respective forms of living; it covers the large complexes of interlaced activities that grow up as the actions of some spread out to affect the actions of others; and it embodies the large variety of relations between participants (Blumer, 1969, p. 35).

Blumer describes the processes of exploration and inspection as those which distinguish naturalistic inquiry from other methodologies. During exploration the focus is originally broad and gradually sharpens. Yet while encompassing a broad focus, exploration must remain grounded in the empirical world as well as aware of the implications of the central assumptions of symbolic interactionism. Inspection "consists of examining the given analytical element by approaching it in a variety of different ways, viewing it from different angles, asking many different questions of it, and returning to its scrutiny from the standpoint of such questions." The researcher must see the empirical world as the people being studied see it. Blumer expresses great concern with research studies of human group life and of behavior of people in which the scholar has made no attempt to find out how the people see what it is that they are acting toward.

> This neglect is officially fostered by two pernicious tendencies in current methodology: (1) the belief that mere expertise in the use of scientific techniques plus facility in some given theory are sufficient equipment to study an unfamiliar area; and (2) the stress that is placed on being objective, which all too frequently merely means seeing things from the position of the detached outside observer. We have multitudes of studies of groups such as delinquents, police, military elites, restless students, racial minorities, and labor unions in which the scholar is unfamiliar with the life of the groups and makes little, if any, effort to get inside their worlds meanings. We are compelled, I believe, to recognize that this is a widespread practice in the social sciences (Blumer, 1969, P. 51).

Interaction of individuals becomes the focal point of the study. The premise that group life is simply the result of determining factors working through the interaction of people cannot be maintained. One must view interaction as a moving process in which the participants act, define and interpret each other's actions.

> Anyone who observes social interaction with open eyes should readily recognize that human participants, both individually and collectively, meet each other's actions in diverse and varying forms. Sometimes they cooperate, sometimes they conflict with each other, sometimes they are tolerant of each other, sometimes they are indifferent to each other, sometimes they follow rigid rules in their interaction, and sometimes they engage in a free play of expressive behavior toward one another....The task of the research scholar who is studying any sphere of social life is to ascertain what form of interaction is in play instead of imposing on that sphere some preset form of interaction (Blumer, 1969, P. 54).

This leads to the question of objectivity and subjectivity for this type of inquiry process. According to Blumer, familiarity or firsthand acquaintanceship is a crucial beginning point for any scientific inquiry. He recognizes, however, that this is often viewed as "soft" or "subjective" science. By referring back to the discussion of objects in the theoretical section, one can find another view of the meaning of objectivity.

According to symbolic interactionism, objects are the very basis of human group action. By accepting the contention that "people act on the basis of the meaning of their objects ... it is necessary [for the researcher] to see their objects as they see them." A danger exists that in the name of objectivity, the researcher will understand the objects on the basis of her own meanings and interpretations. This, then, becomes antithetical to what is claimed to be objective. "Simply put, people act toward things on the basis of the meaning that these things have for them, not on the basis of the meaning that these things have for the outside scholars" (Blumer, 1969, p. 51).

Intersubjectivity might be a more useful term in explaining the relationship of the researcher to the social group being studied (Grannis, 1986, personal communication). By asking questions such as how do people communicate given that they are subjects and have different interpretations of objects which determine their social interactions and how, then, can they agree on meaning, meaning can serve as a reference point for studying subjects.

It is equally important to be explicit about the inquiry process and the researcher's relationship to it.

> It was **I** who was **there** doing the fieldwork, not somebody else. My fundamental assumptions and prejudices are part of **me**. I cannot leave them at home when I enter the site. I must study the place as **me**. But you are not me, and you are not there. It's I who have **been there**. So I should at least make explicit to you the point of view with which I left. The desirable goal is not the impossible one of disembodied objectivity (I am a subject, not an object) but of clarity in communicating point of view as a subject, both to myself and to my audience (Erickson, 1984, p. 60).

> To pull this off as an ethnographer one must not only suppress a sense of outrage while in the field, but still stay in there and take advantage of one's rage, using it as a barometer to indicate high salience. Those aspects of a culture that simply are intolerable are probably the key to the difference between that culture and one's own. The method is not that of objectivity, but of disciplined subjectivity (Erickson, 1984, p. 61).

This sense of "disciplined subjectivity" and intersubjectivity of meaning will guide the process for this study. Disciplined subjectivity requires the researcher to not only become aware of her assumptions, beliefs, and potential biases but to state them explicitly in the final writing allowing any reader to take them into account as well. The research process must, therefore, be clearly and consistently documented. Ethnographic inquiry is particularly suited for this study. Its open-ended nature avoids the limitations imposed by prescribed, predetermined categories. It is not uncommon in ethnographic research for the questions posed at the outset to change during the course of the study. Questions that seem essential at the outset are replaced as new questions emerge. One ethnographer, in describing his research to a class of doctoral students, said, "If you come out of the investigation asking the same questions you asked in the beginning - either you knew the answer in the first place and so there was no reason to investigate or you didn't learn anything new and again there was no reason to investigate" (McDermott, 1986, seminar discussion).

Erickson maintains two assumptions about school ethnography. First, the seemingly common place in school life is actually quite extraordinary and must be closely examined. It is precisely the taken-for-granted aspects of school life that the ethnographer must consciously and purposefully disclose. Second, no piece of social interaction can be fully understood until it is placed in context.

> ...what goes on in school is not only a matter of relations between individual teachers and students and parents but of relations among students as groups, teachers as groups, and between the school as a whole interacting with other social units as a whole... In short, it is assumed that the full significance of many events inside schools can be seen only in the context of events throughout the whole schools, influences on the school from outside it, and influences of the school on the larger society (Erickson, 1969, p. 63).

The essential core of ethnography is a concern with the meaning of actions and events to the people we seek to understand. Some of these meanings are directly expressed in language; many are taken for granted and communicated only indirectly through word and action. But in every society people make constant use of these complex meaning systems to organize their behavior, to understand themselves and others, and to make sense out of the world in which they live. These systems of meaning constitute their culture and ethnography assumes and implies a theory of culture (Spradely, 1979). For the purpose of this study, culture is narrowly defined as "the acquired knowledge that people use to interpret experience and generate social behavior" (Spradely, 1979, p. 5).

A syllabus for a course entitled "Ethnography and Education" reads:

> Ethnographic research is a human activity. As such, it is "conditioned" on the same principles as any other activity. The doing of ethnography is generated, made possible, constrained and helped by the same conditions which generate, make possible, constrain and help any other activity. Rigor in ethnography consists in clarifying the position of the ethnographer within the process of which he is a part. Creativity in ethnography consists of producing the most relevant "next" utterance in the long range conversation which is producing our collective understanding of each other (Varenne, 1987).

PROCEDURE

There is no room for standardized questions in ethnography. The appropriate ethnographic tool of inquiry is the well-phrased, well-timed, and context sensitive version of 'What's going on here? or 'What's happening?'

R.P. McDermott and L. Hood. 1982

Setting: The School

An inner-city school, Walker Hill High School (WHHS)[3] is an old, well-built and architecturally attractive building facing three other large public schools, a large well-maintained public garden and a renowned art museum. The contrast between the front of the school building and its rear reflects the disparity in available resources. The view walking to the front entrance from the local public transportation stop is scenic and tranquil: trees, flowers, magnificent old, large buildings. On the same block, but on the back side of the school, the view is quite different: burned-down buildings, littered streets, boarded windows. The front is quiet, sometimes almost abandoned, as one walks down the street. The back is bustling. People are out shopping, talking, sitting, walking. Still, there are small signs of one side blending in with the other. In the front, some of

[3] Walker Hill High School (WHHS) is a pseudonym used to protect the privacy of the staff and students who shared their daily lives, thoughts and concerns with me. All names of people and places in the WHHS community have also been changed.

the walls of the beautiful structures are decorated with intricate graffiti. In the back, amidst the littered streets, community people tend two lovely neighborhood gardens.

WHHS has a mixed student population: Black Americans, Panamanians, Jamaicans and Haitians. The immediate neighborhood is also mixed, each group keeping primarily to itself with the exception of the Black Americans who mingle with the Panamanians and the Jamaicans but not with the Haitians. The Haitians seem to be the most isolated from the other groups.

One of ten schools chosen city-wide to participate in a quasi-experiment of different models of dropout prevention programs (DPP), WHHS maintains a reputation of being an "unsuccessful" school. Students don't choose WHHS. Many faculty would prefer teaching somewhere else. And parents are not pleased about their children being in this school. WHHS was chosen for involvement in DPP because of its high dropout rate and recognized ability to improve with support and funding.

WHHS's DPP model consisted of a dropout prevention facilitator and two community-based organizations (CBOs) placed within the school. The school targeted close to 700 students as at-risk of dropping out and all programs were oriented towards those students even though many other students may be tangentially involved. One CBO provided counseling and job training in a case management approach; the other trained students as conflict mediators and held private hearings in an attempt to resolve disputes in the school.

Walker Hill High School has a high principal turnover rate: six principals in five years prior to the dropout prevention evaluation project.

> Faculty was demoralized and depressed. With the current principal, who is now appointed and endorsed, supported and respected throughout the school, there appears to be an "upbeat" tone to the school. The impression the visitor gets when walking through the building and speaking with students and staff is that [Walker Hill] is on the move ... upward. [7/86; fieldnotes]

During the second year of my study, the principalship was again turned over. The principal, who was for the most part liked by the staff and the students, took a leave of absence due to a death in the family. He returned to find that he had been replaced. There is a core of teachers who have been at Walker Hill for fifteen years or more, and yet, almost half of the faculty are temporary and not licensed.

Setting: The Classroom

Because of my role as evaluator, I initially chose a class which was central to this school's dropout prevention program. All returning students and "long-term absentees" were enrolled in this transitional class. The two teacher positions for this class were funded by the program and all the students in the class were eligible for DPP services. During the first evaluation year the class registered on average 35-40 students, but rarely had more than 10-15 students on any given school day. The size of the potential pool, as well as the manageable number of students to encounter each day, both contributed to the choice of this classroom as an entry point.[4]

[4] The number of students enrolled into the transitional classroom turned out to be dramatically different during the second year. This is discussed in great detail on p.18, Entry.

Two teachers share the academic instruction of this class. One (Ms. Grace) is a black, experienced female teacher who frequently shared her opinions about the class, the program, and her role with me. During the initial evaluation year, she welcomed me to observe or participate in her class whenever I wanted. The other teacher (Mr. Leslie) is a white, beginning male teacher who saw my presence as supervision for him rather than as an evaluator of the program. During the course of the initial evaluation year, we managed to balance our discussions between his reflecting on his teaching and his discussion of the class and the program.

It is the combination of the contained setting, that is, the opportunity to see the same students many times, and the rapport that was already developed with the teacher that made this setting a possible place to begin my investigation.

The Rapport Process

Two years were spent in WHHS; two qualitatively different years. These two years need to be differentiated since the proposal to conduct an ethnographic study was born out of my first year experiences working as a program evaluator for a university-based research team. This year will be referred to as the *initial evaluation year.* It was during this time that the process of developing a rapport with key personnel had begun, along with various opportunities to speak both formally and informally with students. The second year was still spent partially as an evaluator, but my focus to gather data for the purposes of producing an ethnographic study began to take priority. This new focus during the second year allowed me to follow cues from the setting and its participants more than I could in the first year.

One of the first on-site considerations when starting an ethnographic study is the development of interpersonal relationships at the chosen social setting. This process is described by Spradely (1979) as having four stages: apprehension, exploration, cooperation, participation. While my experience showed that the progression as described by Spradely was never linear, during the initial evaluation year I had reached the participation stage in some interactions and had for the most part, overcome the apprehension with most participant groups. My familiarity became an important asset during the second year, the year in which the data for this research were collected.

This site was not only chosen because the rapport process was already underway, but because as a research assistant in the larger evaluation project, I had access to classrooms and potential informants which would otherwise have been more difficult, if at all possible. The role of evaluator which allowed me this access, however, also interfered at times. My motives were frequently questioned and my role was not clear to others. Trying to combine the roles of evaluator and ethnographer turned out to be a complicated task.[5]

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[5] For more details on this conflict of interests see Westheimer, M. (1980). Negotiating the 'doing of ethnography' in a large-scale evaluation project. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of Ethnography and Education. Philadelphia.

Entry

Most ethnographers when discussing the procedural aspects of doing ethnography make reference to entry (Spindler, 1982; Whyte, 1984). As a result I began this study with an acute awareness of the delicate issues which may arise. Fieldnotes from the early part of the second year reflect my awareness.

> Despite a great deal of preparatory work last year to begin looking at transitional classes this fall when the school year begins, entry has been incredibly difficult. Throughout the summer I read several books, articles, ethnographic studies which discuss entry as one of the most difficult stages to negotiate when doing an ethnographic study. I understood but felt that somehow I was past the entry stage. I was wrong... I was at the school on the first "real" day of classes and very much wanted to observe the class as they got started. I got the message (from the program coordinator) that I was not wanted in the classroom on the first day - the teachers wanted a chance to get to know the kids and establish their routines without intruders. There was a delicate balance here between wanting very much to see how these routines get determined and wanting positive entry in the classroom. I did not want either teacher to feel that I was a threat. I want as much as possible to be unobtrusive. This may not be possible (9/14/87, personal journal).

Unlike the preparatory literature had warned, I found that 'entry' was not a stage which one had to pass and could then ignore. Rather, entry had to be negotiated every time I arrived. There was great variation, of course, but even towards the very end of the second year, entry was still an issue to be confronted.

While waiting for 'positive entry' into the transitional classroom, many other entries into the lives and experiences of students outside that classroom occurred. These observations, it turned out, offered me easier access to the same students once we met in the classroom. Entry into the classroom only occurred three weeks after my initial attempt and even then it was not totally welcome.

> [I am told] that Ms. Grace has asked for me not to come into the classroom - it was a comment in passing and I choose to ignore it. I went up to the room and walked in just before the second bell. I stood in the room for at least 30 seconds before [the teacher] turned towards me and said, "I have been trying to reach you. It is impossible in here. There's nothing to see. I have already told [them] that unless something changes I will not be here on Monday." I sympathized and continued to explain that this situation is important for me to see as part of the students' experience in school. Ms. Grace agreed but said that the kids I found in the class today would probably not be those in the regular class. "Many of them will have to leave. It just can't stay this way." I was determined to stay in the room and I think [the teacher] felt resigned to it. I walked to the back of the room and stood up for three consecutive periods. I have entered. It seems that

everything was set up to keep me from getting into the classroom. My determination was strong and I probably also used some degree of 'chutzpah' (9/29/87, personal journal).

Because I was not fully emersed into the daily life of this social group; that is, I came to the school approximately two times a week, the issue of entry became a salient one. Many things change during the course of a week in a school and I always felt the need to catch up on the weeks events.

Participant Informants

The term informant (Spradely, 1979) has been used by many ethnographers rather than subject or respondent. Informant implies that the people in the social setting are a source of information for the ethnographer. They become the teachers of the ethnographer; they teach about what they know best - their own lives, their own culture and their own interpretations and assigned meanings. The ethnographer must take the role of learner. In this study, the term participant informants (Carrasco, 1981) will be used to emphasize the interactive process of learning and informing. Neither is a passive role; I was both teacher and learner at different times in different situations and the participants also learned as they informed.

The participant informants were found among those who formed the school community surrounding this transitional class which included students, teachers, guidance counselors and community workers. Anyone who was a member of this social group - the transitional class - and willing to participate in a study of that group became a potential participant informant for the study. Those who emerged as the most useful informants were those with whom I could develop an on-going relationship.

Data Collection

In ethnographic research the processes of collecting and analyzing data cannot be separated. They are done concurrently with one continuously informing the other. The analysis of observations of one social event will determine the direction of future data collection. This approach to qualitative inquiry begins with open-ended questions rather than with hypotheses. Data are generated and scrutinized concurrently through an inductive process designed to produce theoretical ideas. In essence, grounded theory research focuses on the discovery of substantive categories relevant to the phenomenon under investigation. This methodology permits categories and themes to be construed directly from the data (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Still, for the purpose of clarification it is useful to discuss these separately.

Data were collected in a manner consistent with the methodological implications discussed in the introduction (p.16). The data can be categorized into four general groups: ethnographic interview, participant observation, collection of site documents and responses to a posed hypothetical situation.

1. Ethnographic Interview

Ethnographic interviewing as described by Spradely (1979) in his developmental research sequence is a process whereby the ethnographer learns about the culture of the chosen social setting through a series of steps. While the specific steps were not followed obediently, they did serve as a useful reference point to help distinguish ethnographic interviewing from other types of interviewing. More specifically, these served as constructive guidelines to the process of interviewing.

Spradely notes the importance of finding "good" informants. He speaks of requirements for locating an informant: The person must be thoroughly encultured in the social setting being studied, should be currently involved in the scene, should have adequate time and availability and should be put in a situation which allows him/her to speak openly and honestly.

An ethnographic interview is differentiated from a friendly conversation by the following features: Turn taking is less balanced. Repeating replaces the normal rule of avoiding repetition. Expressing interest and ignorance occur more often but only on the part of the ethnographer. In place of the normal practice of abbreviating, the ethnographer encourages expanding on what each person says.

I had several occasions early in the second year to speak informally with students, individually and in groups. Usually this happened when a teacher did not show up for class and no substitute was available or when students were found hanging out in the halls, in the schoolyard or on the stairs. Some of these ethnographic interviews were taped and transcribed. Others were recorded from memory as soon after the discussion as possible.

2. Participant Observations

Participant observation comprised the next most frequently used method of data collection. Observations in ethnographic research are sometimes distinguished between participant and nonparticipant. Participant observations occur when the researcher actively interacts with the participants. Nonparticipant observation is meant to describe those situations in which the observer does not actively (or consciously) interact within the social setting. Based on my own experience, I question the feasibility of nonparticipant observation. Every time I observed in a classroom or any other social setting, I found that in some way I also interacted with it. It is impossible to both be somewhere and pretend that it is the same as if you were not. Still, my observations varied greatly with the degree of participation. There were occasions for me to sit in the classroom and observe without playing any formal role, the more traditional sense of classroom observation. Yet, even when placing myself in a corner in the back of the room, I was a frequent target for comments, glances, questions and occasionally, even lengthy discussions. There were other situations in which the observant role was less obvious. I accompanied some students to lunch or to special events in the school and then the participant side of the participant-observer dominated. In addition, I had several opportunities to meet with and interview groups of students at which time my

role was some combination of researcher/teacher/counselor. All of these roles were made as explicit as possible to all involved. While it is important to keep a record of the role played while different data are collected, it was not always possible to do so. As a counter measure I kept a personal journal throughout that helped me not only keep track of my perception of my role at the time of the interaction but also of the feelings and impressions I had as the research progressed.

3. Site Document Collection

In addition, for the sake of triangulating the data, I randomly collected any site documents that came my way. This method of data collection is considered an unobtrusive measure, because one does not in any way interfere with the social setting. The documents serve as yet another source to confirm or raise questions about the interactional patterns which ultimately emerge.

The type of site document which can be collected varies from study to study. In this study, they appear to be quite random. Since I did not know what the final focus of the reported findings would be, I collected any and all documents from the setting. Some turned out to be very useful; others were not. Documents varied from administrative lists to different scribbles, such as writings and drawings left by students on a desk or on the floor in the classroom. There was no systematic method to the collection of these documents. I simply kept my eyes open and whenever possible asked for or picked up extra copies of: student lists, classroom hand-outs, staff memos, school newspapers, Board of Education fliers, posters on the walls, student magazines and occasional notes left around the school.

Data Analysis

1. Finding the salient theme

As one might assume, data gathered from the methods described above over a period of two years would lead to many different and potentially interesting directions. The first task, then, is to begin to find a focus for the analysis. This was one of the hardest tasks to accomplish throughout this study. The issue of conflict emerged as a salient theme not only in my data but in the qualitative and quantitative findings from other substudies of the larger evaluation project as well. During the first round of longitudinal interviews, nearly every student made some reference to conflict. It often, but not always, concerned fighting and general safety in the school. Our program-wide surveys also found students reporting seeing violence in the school frequently. In my own initial interviews and observations, I found that regardless of the topic being discussed, in or out of the classroom, somehow, someway violence, fighting and conflict became the focus. In fact, one student almost said as much in a group interview. After being told by another student that the best way to get around is to "mind your business," she said:

Well, sometimes you can't really do that in this school, like mind you business cause, even if you mind your business somehow, some way, somebody'll get you into it.

My experience was the same. Obviously, as this focus became clearer I encouraged the direction of the discussions but conflict was as strong a focus of the earlier conversations and observations, when I had not yet made this decision, as it was afterwards.

2. Identifying vignettes with conflict

The next step was to isolate temporarily the scenes of conflict from the rest of the data. At this stage, a scene of conflict was very loosely defined. It was any description of a fight, an argument, a display of anger or a reaction to any of those. Soon after, I limited these to focused conflicts. That is, the conflict had to be about a certain event, moment, action or thought. I eliminated general statements of conflict such as: "School pisses me off." "These kids are always destroying things." Based on my interviews and observations, I initially found thirty-five conflict events.

3. Examining one in great detail

Next I chose one event which seemed particularly "loaded." I began to read it over and over, always thinking about and looking for a pattern that might emerge. Based on the theoretical assumption that social behavior is mutually constructed, the purpose was to find a pattern of behavior, a pattern that illustrates the social and cultural preconditions to the observable behavior. I started to make sense of one conflict event by establishing a pattern and then seeing how many other conflict events could be described by that pattern. When I could not go very far, I changed my direction. When the pattern started to explain other events I continued on that track.

4. Finding and elaborating on a pattern of social interaction

Once a basic pattern was established, the other conflict events were analyzed to determine both how they fit the existing pattern and how they contributed to a richer and fuller understanding of that pattern. It was at this point that I discovered the need to separate focused and unfocused conflicts. Unfocused conflicts excluded from the analysis included general statements or descriptions about fights or conflicts. For example, one of the earliest clues to conflict as a theme was one girl describing the school as a combination of a "boxing ring and a fashion show." Statements such as these are not focused conflict and were excluded from the structural analysis. Focused conflicts must have a specific incident that is happening, being described, or in some way discussed. These focused conflicts fit some part of the larger pattern.

Limitations

1. Amateur Ethnographer

The first most significant limitation to this study was unavoidable. As an amateur ethnographer, one must learn by doing, by making mistakes and by redoing. As far as I could tell, there are no short cuts to this learning process. One can be advised about various methods that have been used in ethnographic research; but the specific methods appropriate for a specific study must emerge from the process. More importantly, the process of analyzing the data is highly personalized and must take place throughout the data collection process. No one else knows the setting and has shared the same experiences. Suggestions and critique come at a later stage when it is difficult to alter the process. Of course, one must start somewhere but doing an ethnography for the first time is a limitation to the quality of the study.

Many opportunities were missed while I was learning. While I had plenty of data to work with once I left the field, I recall several discussions with students which I wish I had audio-taped. At the time, I was afraid that taking out my tape recorder would inhibit the discussion. I also relied far too heavily on my own memory. As I later learned, the tape recorder did not limit conversation; informants quickly forgot it was there and always had the choice of turning it off. One time after a one-hour discussion with a student, I asked her if we could talk again so I could tape her. She asked why I hadn't taped her then; I had no answer. The tape recorder was in my pocket. I did not know the rules yet.

If I were to do this over again, I would spend much more time analyzing the data as I collected it. I would not be satisfied with finding a salient theme on which to focus; I would expect to identify patterns earlier on and then spend much more focused data collection trying to further refine and sharpen the characteristics of the pattern.

In addition, since discovery takes time and inexperienced researchers require even more time, two years was barely enough given the frequency of site visits. During the more intensive second year of the study, I was at the school at least once and usually twice a week. Having even more consistent data with which to work would have required more regular and more frequent visits.

Furthermore, when I was not at WHHS, I was interviewing in other schools, supervising student teachers, teaching graduate course, along with several other projects. All this means that my life was not immersed with theirs. I was there sometimes and not there other times. I did not give myself the chance to really become a part of the lived world of WHHS. Ethnographically, this is a serious limitation. Realistically, this was unavoidable.

2. Competing demands

As I mentioned briefly before, the roles of program evaluator and ethnographer were conflicting. Perhaps a more experienced researcher could have juggled the two better than I. My participant informants were always watching me: where I went, who I

talked to, where I ate. They would ask me why I met with someone and what we talked about. Trust was difficult to establish when I was always seen with school authorities trying to get more general information about the larger program. I did learn that when my roles conflicted, a choice had to be made. It was impossible to keep all options open at all times.

I found that out while I was running around one school taking care of my evaluation responsibilities and thinking that it was separate and apart from the rest of my work, I was being carefully watched. Students who saw me sitting in their classroom and hanging out in the cafeteria knew where else I had been. Their awareness of my whereabouts as a result of my other role could have interfered significantly with my study.

> While we walked I asked him [one of the students in the transitional class with whom I had tried to speak several times] why he suddenly felt he would talk to me - after all, I had been around the class all year. He was very clear on this - It was wrong for me to think that I could come into the classroom with my notebook, start writing everything down and expect people to like and talk to me. He didn't know and therefore didn't trust me. That's just the way it is. "I have a good feeling about you now - but I don't know how long it'll last. My feelings are usually good so I go by them but I'm always ready to change my mind." He had noticed everyone in the school that I spoke to - he discovered that I spoke mostly with the people in the school whom he also likes and said that helped him feel he could trust me. But there were other people, he said, he didn't like. He asked me what I was spending time with them for. And why, why did I ever eat in the teachers' cafeteria - that was the worst place in the whole school (3/19/88; personal journal).

3. Artificial ending

My fieldwork did not end because the questions were exhausted or because in some other way there was a sense of being finished. It ended because June arrived; the three year project was over and school was out. While still maintaining some contact with several participants, the regular visits were interrupted. In order to focus more closely on the analysis, it was also time to get some distance from the school. I needed to devote my time and energy to the data and not to the people. This was a very difficult step for me to take.

This artificial ending is included as a limitation because once data were analyzed I wished that time allowed for more questions to be asked, for observations to be even more specific and, perhaps, even more systematic. There is a danger to this wish of mine. however.

From a methodological perspective, according to Mehan (1978), once patterns are described and the structuring of a social event is taken apart, an ethnographer may return to the participants and ask questions in order to confirm or disprove the findings.

But Mehan also warns that the very process of questioning may elicit responses which would not have otherwise been possible. One cannot therefore rely too heavily on such confirmations. In this study, the introduction of hypothetical situations served this purpose. It was not framed in terms that could completely confirm the findings simply because the findings were not finalized at the time of its writing. In one sense, this can be seen as a strength in the results of the hypothetical situation. Without explicitly trying to confirm the various moments of a conflict event, the findings were complimentary.

4. Epistemological limits

The purpose of ethnographic research is to provide rich data from the social group being studied and then to analyze the data looking for patterns or structures. Generalizability, as commonly understood, is not a goal of ethnographic research. On the other hand, one does want to produce the "most relevant 'next' utterance in the long range conversation which is producing our collective understanding of each other" (Varenne, 1987, seminar lecture).

Asking students in different schools to respond to the hypothetical conflict situations begins to address the more traditional sense of generalizability. However, there is no proven hypothesis in this study. There is no attempt to claim that the moments in a conflict event found among this particular group of students in this particular social setting will be true for other students in other settings or even that they will be true for these same students in another setting or at another time.

FINDINGS: THE STRUCTURE OF A CONFLICT EVENT

...sometimes you can't really do that in this school like mind your own business cause even if you mind your own business somehow someway somebody'll get you into it.

Helena Ruby, Walker Hill High School

Fights are commonplace occurrences ... in school and are an important aspect ... of what every student knows. They are fundamental to the adolescent world view. Fight accounts document the everyday, normal adolescent world.

Amy Shuman, 1986

A fight does not just happen. Two people do not encounter one another and then simply decide to throw or not to throw punches. Rather, these data show that fighting is but one moment in a highly complex, socially constructed event that involves several players and can take several different directions given the nature and form of each moment in the process. An event in this chapter has a specific meaning and focus and can be best explained in contrast to experience.

> There has been a tendency ... to assign experience a sense of objectivity so that experience becomes invested with reality, in contrast to stories, which

> are supposedly understood subjectively. This unfortunate tendency has led scholars to confuse events with experiences, as though one could experience an event. Events are ways of categorizing experience; in a sense, the category "event" makes experience accessible to understanding by providing a language for talking about experience (Shuman, 1986, p.20).

By examining several conflict events in great detail, a basic common pattern emerged. This chapter will describe this pattern, provide supportive data and elaborate on the finding to generalize to other available data.

Moments in the Conflict Event

The following is a definition of and elaboration on each individual moment in the conflict event. Clearly, each piece of data that is offered has examples of moments other than the one being discussed. However, this section will artificially isolate each one.

1. Confrontation

A conflict event begins with a confrontation. In some way, the routine or the accepted pattern of behavior is broken. For example, a confrontation can be an invasion of personal space by moving too close to another person, a threat to one's reputation by public name-calling, or a deviation from the normative expected behavior such as inappropriate glances or misplaced comments. Taken out of context, descriptions of confrontations in this data sample include:

..he kept picking on me, looking at me, kissing at me..
..they was talking too much junk and getting too loud..
..Where'd you get them Hush Puppy old man shoes? They hot?
Why she eyeing me?
This girl bumped into me.

While they do not label it as such, students are aware of confrontations. They describe them as being all around them and very difficult to avoid. During one group interview when the students were talking about the reputation of their school and how it influenced their job interviews, one student said that Walker High is not really such a bad place:

Helena: If you mind your business.
Frank: Yeah, if you mind your business.
Helena: Well, sometimes you can't really do that in this school, like mind your business cause, even if you mind your business somehow some way somebody'll get you into it.

Karina: That's true.
Helena: Somebody will get you into it. It could be a person that you sit behind in your classroom and they see you in the lunchroom, right? They say, oh well me and her was talking in class today and she said such and such about and you didn't even have to say it. You probably could have said well me and that person don't get along. Well she called you a bitch, you know.
Miriam: And that's enough to get a fight going.
Helena: Yeah.
Karina: Oh yup, that's enough.
Shanon: That's enough.
[12/9/87; interview: scheduled, semi-structured, audio-taped]

Explaining why one cannot avoid fights in school and why she always seems to be in trouble, Lorelle says:

Lorelle: Umhmm, cause there was always somebody messing with me and I'm, I'm the type of person that will sit back and let the person say until, you know, say
Shawon: a lot
Lorelle: say all they want to say until it just boils up inside of me and that's when I just get up and we fighting and everybody, they used to always bring me down and I've been suspended and I always, my mother always come. [10/26/87, interview]

Confrontations are also used to explain absence from school. Not coming to school is one definite way to avoid inevitable confrontations.

Helena: This school is a trip.
Miriam: Is what? A trip.
Helena: It's a trip. You see, cause, like I'll stop coming, the reason why I'll be absent is cause, it's not cause of the teachers, it's not cause of the work, it's cause of the students. You know. I have a lot of enemies in this school. It's a lot of girls in this school that do not like me, you know, but they won't bother me, you know, when I come by, you know, they'll be smiling, you know, pretending they be talking to they friends but as soon as I pass by [imitating students' laughter], you know, I'm like, uhhhuhh, as long as you don't put your hands on me I ain't going to worry about what you think cause I don't care what nobody say about me cause can't nobody tell them about me but me, you know,
Miriam: Mmmhmm
Helena: and, you know, when I first got into school, my first two years in this school, I stopped coming to school cause I was scared cause these girls was like planning to jump me so I stopped coming to school. Umm, you know, I never told my mother this. But.. you know, she used to think I was just playing hooky to be playing hooky but it wasn't like that. It was cause I was scared. But then the third, my third year, when I came back, I was like I ain't gonna let nobody rob me

away from my education. If it, if it comes down to me fighting, I'm just going to have to fight. If I get jumped I get jumped but I'm gonna come back and get mine.
Miriam: Mmmhmm, mmhmmm, You sort of feeling like, if I'm hearing you right, like because you were scared you weren't going to get yours, you weren't going to get a high school diploma.
Helena: Right.
Miriam: Mmhmm.
Karina: Too much fighting in this school
Helena: It is.
Karina: Too much violence, period.
[12/9/87, interview]

Confrontations are all around. As Helena says, "Somehow some way somebody'll get you into it." Similarly, Lorelle feels that there's "always somebody messing" with her. Helena describes a confrontation of other girls talking about her as being so bothersome it caused her to stop coming to school. She was scared of being jumped.

2. Reaction

A confrontation is followed by a reaction. A reaction is defined more by its place in the conflict event than by its quality. What happens immediately after the confrontation is a reaction. Frequently, in the data analyzed, the reaction is what I have labeled *verbal banter*; that is, a series of quick verbal exchanges back and forth between those involved with the confrontation. Sometimes it can be understood as a playful tease.

> ...you see people in the hallway and they argue and say this and this and this but it may look like it's gonna be a real fight but it's not they're just playing some, some of the time you can't, you can't really tell. When, yo man you this and that. No, you this and that. They come up into each other's face...[12/9/87, interview]

Verbal banter, then, is the "this and that" described above. During the early stages of observation, I was struck by the amount of verbal banter I heard in the classroom. While at that time I was unaware of its place in the conflict event, I was curious about its role in classroom interaction. The following excerpt of a conflict event is an example of verbal banter:

> Tawana: Where'd you get them Hush Puppy old man shoes? They hot?
> Malik: Old man shoes? Man, these are chill. These ain't no Hush Puppy. These are Clarks. Real Clarks.
> Tawana: Clark who?
> Malik: Clark shoes. You ain't heard of Clark shoes?

Tawana: No.
Malik: Shows where you're at.
Tawana: I know ugly shoes when I see them.
Nick: [After talking briefly with someone at the door, gets a pass and leaves the classroom.]
Malik: Man, these were expensive.
Tawana: Still ugly.
Tawana: Bet they hot.
Malik: Shit, what's the matter with you. I bought these shoes. I work for these shoes. I'm a messenger. I don't depend on nobody. Not like others I know.
Tawana: Whatch'u sayin? You sayin....
Malik: All I'm sayin' is I bought these shoes with my money. My money is really my money. And with my money I can buy these shoes and anything else I want. I don't ask nobody for no money. Not like..
Tawana: Now you better watch you mouth. I don't like what I'm hearing.
Nick: [walks back into the room.] Y'all still disin'?

As in this example, verbal banter can quickly turn into a *dis*. A *dis*, I learned from the participant informants, is a verbal insult intending to show disrespect. As in the above example, frequently when the banter turns into a *dis*, one of the members of the immediate social group will label it as such.

In this example, the reaction took the form of verbal banter which became a *dis* as Tawana began insulting Malik by calling his shoes ugly. In fact, in this example the banter was always close to a *dis*. It is my belief that the *dissin'* started when Tawana called Malik's shoes ugly. Nick, who labeled the *dis*, left the room before the interaction got more heated. Since he commented on the *dissin'* still going on when he returned, it must have started before he left.

3. Intervention

Among all the moments in a conflict event, the intervention was the most important and the most difficult to identify. The type of intervention is a regulating factor in the conflict event. Interventions vary the most and, I will argue, have the most to do with the eventual resolution of the conflict event. As a result, great attention was given to try and isolate different features of the intervention. An intervention was found to have an actor, a form and a nature.

Actors fall into three categories: peers, adults, and self. Peers can be subdivided into friend, enemy and stranger. Adults can be subdivided into teacher, security guard, other school personnel, and parent.

Interventions took one of three forms: verbal, non-verbal and physical or some combination of those three. For example, telling two students who had just begun a verbal banter to stop is a common example of verbal intervention. Removing one person from any moment in the conflict event is a physical intervention. Combinations of verbal

and physical also exist. For example, telling a student that he would be better off walking away from the conflict event while putting one's arm around his shoulder would be both verbal and physical intervention.

Finally, I have categorized the nature of an intervention as *with or without respect.* This distinction is difficult to define but when examined provides a reliable predictor of the type of resolution. For example, after the confrontation and bantering reaction over the Hush Puppy incident described above, the teacher intervened several times. She told them to stop three times, threatened to call the security guard twice and did call the security guard once. The teacher gave them instructions to stop and, since her instructions were not carried out, she found a way to enforce them. She did not allow those involved in the conflict event to participate in the regulation of subsequent events. The teacher took complete control. By doing so, her intervention was without respect for those involved in the conflict event. At the moment that the teacher intervened without respect, Tawana and Malik both verbally threatened to start fighting. When the security guards arrived and were told to remove Tawana from the classroom, they intervened by asking if they could have the opportunity of talking with her. They asked if Tawana could re-enter the classroom providing she agreed to behave and to resolve the conflict event quietly. This intervention allowed Tawana to be a part of the regulation of events. In this case, then, the security guards intervened with respect.

This conflict event involving Tawana and Malik actually had two different interventions. The first (1) by the teacher and the second (2) by the security guard. Each intervention can be depicted schematically:

(1) adult (teacher) / verbal / without respect
(2) adult (security guard) / verbal and physical / with respect

I have labeled the second verbal and physical because the intervention in the conflict event which was between two students was physical; one of the students was removed. It was also verbal; the security guard spoke with Tawana outside the classroom.

With respect here refers to the way Tawana was left feeling. First of all, by offering to talk things over, Tawana's own ability to handle herself was given credence. Secondly, she could re-enter the room without "losing face." The reverse of this, "keeping face," is frequently described by the participants in this study as crucial to survival in the school. An intervention that allows one to "keep face" is labeled with respect; an intervention that causes one to "lose face" is labeled without respect. Students frequently expressed their understanding of this subtle yet crucial differentiation.

> Frank: Here? Here it's like you just gotta mind your business. Look if he's fighting and he's alone just leave it like that you know you can't do nothing. It's hard. The only thing you could do is probably go for help and that's it.
> Miriam: Go for help?
> Frank: Yeah.
> Miriam: Where would you go?

Frank: Or call somebody big or the principal or whatever. But don't let them find out that you was the one that went and called for somebody. And you know like if I
[tape is interrupted]
Frank: That's like if um if I call like these two guys having a fight and I call this teacher or something and they fought with the teacher and the teacher hit them and the person that the teacher hit alright you know cause he's all messed up or whatever and he found out that I'm the one that went and called the teacher, then he's gonna try and take his anger out on me. So that's why it's good not to
Miriam: There's a lot of
Frank: mix.
Miriam: security in this building,
Frank: Yup.
Karin: Mmmm.
Miriam: Right? Does that help, does that do anything?
Frank: Nope.
[12/9/87, interview]

Frank is helping me understand that the most important aspect of successfully bringing in help to stop the fight is to be sure that no one knows how help was brought. This allows those involved in the conflict event to "keep face". In addition, one must always be willing to fight or at least pretend that one is.

Frank: ...if there's a fight and [inaudible] the fight ... I try to avoid it. But it's real hard to avoid it because the next day it be like - you know you scared of him and everybody be saying, 'Oh, he soft. I can pick on him...'

Karina: And it's like me I don't have to show up. I like people they know me. I don't really talk to them but they know alright she fight you know.
Miriam: So you get like a reputation?
Karina: Like a lot of people that run will say well she's a fighter.
Miriam: That protects you a little bit is that what you're saying
Karina: Sort of, yeah, I guess that's what it does exactly.
Miriam: It keeps people
Karina: away... I felt that umm I had to make that kind of reputation maybe a little bit, you know.

Creating a sense of identity can also be found in interventions. Developing a reputation, letting people know who you are and that you are not afraid are all part of the conflict event. This distinction between intervention with and without respect can give a student clues about how his/her identity is viewed by others.

An intervention takes place some time between the beginning of the reaction and the beginning of the resolution. Through the analyzed conflict events that follow, I will argue that the same intervention with the same initial reaction but with different interventions will lead to different resolutions.

4. Resolution

Conflict events end with a resolution, which also varies. Resolutions include walking away from the event, continuing whatever activity was happening before the event started and having a physical fight. For purposes of this analysis the important distinction is between having a physical fight and not having a physical fight. As each conflict event is analyzed, its schematic representation will show how the event was resolved. The purpose is to establish a pattern and to show that conflict events are resolved by physical fights only when the intervention is without respect and when there is an audience.

5. Audience

In addition to an intervention without respect, an audience must be present for a conflict event to be resolved by a physical fight. From the analysis of all the conflict events, there is not one physical fight that occurred without an audience. While given different names, audience is labeled as such by the participant informants:

> Helena: And then they call and whoever else she going along and then the crowd comes right along behind them and then when that person see a crowd automatically they will go swing on you and if you don't
> Miriam: Is that the support? Is that what?
> Helena: Yeah, cause, cause they got all these
> Karina: *friends watches*, you know, *fight fans*
> Helena: you know, they just there and
> Karina: you know, and then they got all these watches, you know what I'm saying, you know fight fans.
> Frank: I seen
> Helena: That's why I say it's like a boxing match.

The *crowd, fight fans,* and *fight watches* are all different names for what I have labeled an audience. Sometimes students about to start a fight will go and gather the "fight watches" and other times the crowd seems to appears on its own. In one of the examples above, a student said, "Yeah, as soon as there's a fight, everybody's looking." But actually, from close examination of these conflict events, the fight doesn't even start until "everybody's looking."

The analysis of the responses to the hypothetical situation in the longitudinal sample provides abundant support for this. Students say that the shouting will not turn into a fight if there's no one there to see it. The timing of the argument, therefore, in relation to the pending ringing of the bell was mentioned as an indicator of whether or not a fight would start. When asked why the students in the hypothetical situation might be fighting, one student said:

> They're probably just trying to screen each other out. Trying to make someone look bad. Then, you get embarrassed and you'd be forced to fight 'em. It's

probably just a small reason, but when you get in front of people it gets really loud and you start fighting.

According to this student, the confrontation might have been very small but there is always a chance of a *dis* (get embarrassed, look bad). The fight starts, however, only when you "get in front of people."

Another student explained that if she were in the situation she would walk away. The interviewer asked if that would be a hard thing to do to which she replied, "Sometimes, not when you're by yourself but with other people around."

The role played by the audience seems to be a necessary but not sufficient component if the conflict event is to be resolved by a physical fight. Peer pressure and the importance of "keeping face" in the presence of others play an important part. Putting this in the perspective of a socially constructed pattern, audience, like an intervention without respect, when identified in the pattern have shown to be likely predictors of a physical fight.

Summary

Choosing the focus of fighting and then identifying the different moments in the event was a pain-staking process. At first, while I was struck with the amount of conflict, verbal banter and physical fights all around me, I was unaware of how they might all be interrelated. This next exchange shows the misunderstanding I had (and which I shared with many participants in these conflict events) about the larger social structure within which a fight takes place:

Miriam: Yeah, so what, what is that? I mean why is that, you can see in the classroom, I'm sure, like a fight can start with just like a look, right?
Lorelle: umhmm
Shawon: right
Beth: Yeah.
Miriam: right?
Lorelle: It could.
Miriam: I mean somebody looks at somebody and then whatcha looking at, whatchu looking at, what YOU looking at and the next thing you know there's a fight.
Lorelle: There's a fight.
Miriam: What is that?
Shawon: [inaudible]
Beth: [inaudible]
Lorelle: Cause I guess people, people don't like to be stared at.
Clarence: A fight started like that last week.
Lorelle: Cause maybe the other person.
Miriam: Yeah, like what?

Clarence: Last week these girls named Hillary and Linda., They were just looking at each other and they just start fighting.
Lorelle: Oh that girl Hillary, that big mouth girl.
Shawon: She's OK.
Lorelle: Oh, I don't like her
Shawon: She's alright.

There is no awareness here of the complexity of a conflict event and the important roles of intervention and audience. According to this discussion, a fight can start from "just a look". According to the analysis of conflict events in this study, "just a look" is insufficient social interaction for a fight to take place.

While perhaps these explanations are oversimplistic, it is clear that fighting is a part of these students' everyday lives. After a brief discussion of whether girls or boys fight more in school, I expressed surprise at seeing so much fighting.

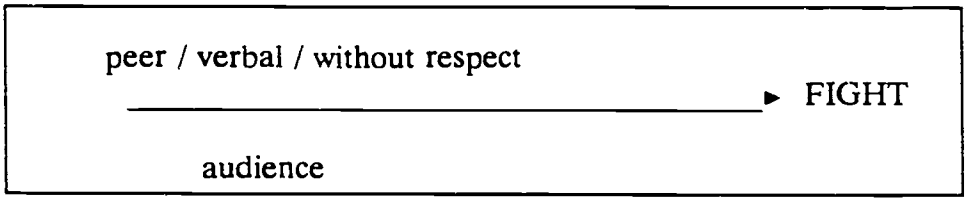
Miriam: And I look at you and I would never believe, you know, you all sitting here, you know, really, we're just talking and then people start saying how, you know, they feel in order to survive here..
Frank: You have to fight.
Miriam: they, you have to fight.
Karina: It's the truth.
Helena: It's a do or die situation.
Karina: You know, you can't be scared, that's all.
Frank: You know they carry weapons, they carry weapons in this school. I mean [inaudible]
Miriam: Is there a lot of that?
Frank: Yeah.
Miriam: What kind of weapons.
Helena: They got razors, knives, guns.
Frank: guns?
Helena: Yup.
Karina: I remember one time in school.
Frank: I haven't seen that.
Miriam: You haven't seen that?
Frank: No, I haven't seen guns yet but I seen knives.
Helena: I've seen it.
Karina: I know.

What becomes clear here is the basic acceptance of these participant informants that fighting is a part of their school experience. Most importantly, "you can't be scared." Being scared does not allow one to walk away from a conflict event while "keeping face."

And finally, at a point in this study when I had a general focus on fighting but no understanding of the different moments involved, I tried to get some insight into how students might classify their fights.

Miriam: Are there different kinds of fights?
[Heads nod.]
Miriam: There are?
Fidel: There's fights when um um two people may want to fight one and that one is telling both of them off. And there's fights that happen because of clothes. There's fights with jewelry. There's fights that you took my five dollars. Fights that
Miriam: You took my what?
Fidel: Like um you took money, stealing or all that. Or there's fights that um start like they thought you know this happened and they thought you did this and then they come up. Before they come in your face, say did you ever do this? They come in you face uddadadada. You know start cursing say and the person say I don't know nothing about that. And then this other person like this person that they rarely trust and anything they say they'll believe and they say, if I say if you believe everything I say and I say she was the one that took um your ring, your expensive gold ring, and you go up without, you know, cause you believe everything I say. You go up and say where's my ring, you know, and I'll or someone say you know, did you see my ring or whatever first. And then everyone starts to get excited and then they watching and you don't just come straight up. Like
Miriam: So a fight could start even though it wasn't if there's no real reason.
Kim: Right.
Fidel: Sss, that's the way it is.
[12/9/87, interview]

All the different moments in a conflict event can be found in this description. "Come into your face" is the confrontation here which is immediately followed by verbal banter. By his nonsense depiction of the reaction: "uddadadada", Fidel seems to indicate that the actual content is not as significant as its role in the event. The verbal banter turns into a *dis* which in this case is cursing. The actors and form of the intervention are unclear but it an intervention without respect since Fidel says "this person that they rarely trust" will somehow get involved. And there is an audience: "everyone starts to get excited and then they watching." Schematically this conflict event would be:



ANALYSIS OF CONFLICT EVENTS

This next section will present, describe and analyze four conflict events found in the data collected for this study. Some offer an overview of the whole conflict event, while others highlight one or two moments and do not provide any additional insight into other moments. The purpose here is not to present four conflict events that perfectly fit

each moment in the pattern, but rather to show that each little piece in some way fits into the larger pattern of social interaction.

Each one begins with a "pure" description of the conflict event; that is, the description is taken directly from fieldnotes, classroom observations and interviews. The specific purpose is to let the reader "experience" as closely as possible the event without being interrupted by analysis and discussion.

The description is followed by an analysis. A schematic representation of the intervention (actor, form, and nature) and the resolution begins each analysis section, which then continues to identify and elaborate the various moments described in the previous section.

Conflict Event #1: Long as they don't touch me

I have chosen one particularly "loaded" conflict event to begin. There are several reasons for the choice of starting with this event. First of all, it allows the reader to identify and become more familiar with all the moments described above. Secondly, it is a complete conflict event; that is, all the moments are either presented by the participants or were observed by me. Thirdly, this event took place early on in the second research year (10/26/87) at a time when I had no idea what the eventual focus of my analysis would be. It is, therefore, free from the potential bias of probing which may have taken place later on in the year. Finally, this first conflict event appeared in my field notes several times under several different categories and from several different sources: I was in the school the day it happened and saw the scene just after the event. I spoke with one of the participants right after the event and right before her next class. I was present at a case conference of the school staff when they were discussing this event. A few months after the event, one of the participants happened to be in one of my audio-taped group interviews (12/9/87) and began to discuss the event in great detail. All of these data sources led me to strongly rely on the validity of this account. The following description is based on all of these different data sources.

1. Description

During the 5th period in Ms. Grace's classroom, I noticed that Helena was sitting with her head in her hands. I asked her if she was alright. She nodded her head yes but when she looked up she had a red eye and looked very upset. I asked again if she needed any help. She said no and then continued to tell me what had happened:

> Helena started to tell me that she got into a fight with a Jamaican boy (Michel) in Mr. Leslie's class. She said Michel was staring at her since Friday and bothering her. He started cursing at her. Then he walked out of the room. She closed the door. He broke the window of the door and jumped in through the window. They started to fight. (10/26/87; fieldnotes, classroom observation,)

Several weeks after this event, Helena was part of a group interview during which the students were discussing different reasons for starting a fight. Sharon said that she never gets into fights because she just walks away and I tried to give an extreme example to see if she might have a different reaction. Helena then described her fight.

Miriam: What if somebody called you a bitch?
Sharon: I just walk away with it as long as they don't touch me.
Helena: That's how I feel. As long as they don't hit me.
Sharon: Long as they don't touch me.
Helena: They don't have no problem but when they touch me...
Sharon: Yup.
Helena: that's when they have a problem. Cause now you getting physical. And all you doing is running your mouth and ..
Miriam: And no one's ever touched you.
Sharon: Nope.
Helena: In my school, in the four, in the four years I've been to this school I only had one fight - and that's this fight with this guy in class
Miriam: This year?
Helena: Yeah
Miriam: That was, I was, we, we spoke right after that remember?
Helena: Yeah. Umm. He he asked for it cause he kept picking on me, looking at me, kissing at me and I don't like
Karina:: [inaudible]
Helena: and I didn't like him. I couldn't stand him and he (kissing noises) and staring at me [laughter] and all of this.
Frank: [inaudible]
Helena: And in the lunch room he bumped into me right? I say you bumped and he laughing and joking with his friend bumped into me right? So then I says you bumped into me. He turned to me all stupid and went to grab me for my chest.
Karina: Oh shit.
Helena: He bumped me in my chest and went to grab for my chest to say sorry to me. And everybody lookin'. That's what got me really offended. That's why I really didn't like him and then when he started..
Miriam: I can understand that.
Helena: Staring at me from across the classroom and throwing kisses at me and I I told him..

[One side of the tape ended and I didn't notice. According to my memory of the conversation about 5 minutes elapsed when Helena was still talking about the fight she had and how it all got started. It continues...I remember that she said the fight had started and some students pushed him out of the room and closed the door shut. Then he broke the glass window next to the door leading into the classroom and jumped in through the broken window. I was there that day. I saw the

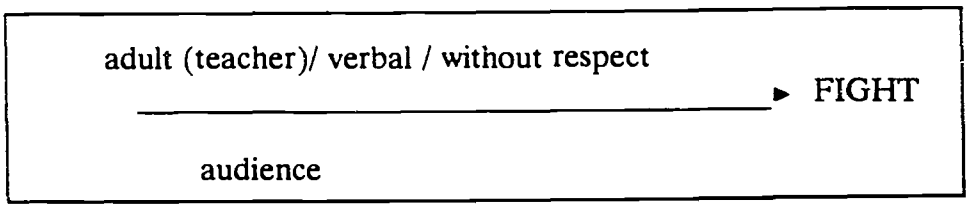
broken glass on the floor. I also saw Helena right after the fight in her next class and we spoke a little.]

Helena: Yeah, and I picked up a chair. I did. [laughter] What would you say someone jumping through a window at you? What you, your first reaction gonna be? Pick up anything that's closest to you. [laughter]
Karina: Right. [laughter]
Helena: I picked up a chair. [laughter] I'm serious. [laughter]. I'm serious. I picked up a chair threw it at him. And then after he got over the shock of the chair, he just started fighting. He tried to pull my jacket off of my head but I snuffed him in his face. Then he caught me in my eye but that's all he got off of me.
Miriam: I saw that.
Helena: Caught me in my eye. I punched him in the head and pushed him against [laughter] the lockers. And then all I remember is the security guard. Cause I didn't even seen them coming in cause I was over there [motions of fighting] [laughter] I was... that was an incident boy.
Karina: Oh yeah.
Helena: He's lucky, he's lucky they came when they did cause I was about to try and trip his ass and pick up another chair and ummm .. demolish. [12/9/87; scheduled, taped, group interview]

The same day of the incident I attended a staff meeting and heard Mr. Leslie present his view of what had happened. The whole incident was discussed for about five minutes.

One teacher said that trouble had been brewing for a while. He explained that one can usually predict when a fight will start or when students are leading in that direction. He said that as soon as he saw the tension starting, he separated them in the room and told them that they were not allowed to speak to one another in his classroom. He warned them that if they continued fooling around he would have them thrown out of his room. They wouldn't stop and he told them that they were acting like little children. He said he can't understand how these high school students "act out every little thing." This teacher then asked his colleagues what else one might do in such a situation. Another teacher responded sympathetically explaining that she has two girls in her room with children from the same man and they are always after each other. She has asked for weeks to have them separated; that is, put into different classrooms. She said, "Their personal histories make it impossible for them to be in one class without major disruptions. They've already had two fights and I know we're headed for the next one. [10/26/87, general observation]

2. Analysis



The confrontation in this event is somewhat more prolonged than in others. Helena describes its beginning as "he kept picking on me, looking at me, kissing at me." These were behaviors which she interpreted as interfering with her own regular routine in the classroom and at school. Her reaction to this intervention seems to have been ignoring it. It did not lead to bantering or a *dis* like many others. But it did lead to another more threatening confrontation. Helena makes it very clear that the initial confrontation with personal space was not enough to start a fight. It was the physical confrontation which, she explains, she could not tolerate. Before she began to tell the group about this experience she spoke about her feelings in general:

> As long as they don't hit me. They don't have no problem but when they touch me....that's when they have a problem. Cause now you getting physical.

Then she continued to describe how she finally got provoked to the fight:

> And in the lunch room he bumped into me right? I say you bumped and he laughing and joking with his friend bumped into me right? So then I says you bumped into me. He turned to me all stupid and went to grab me for my chest... He bumped me in my chest and went to grab for my chest to say sorry to me. And everybody lookin'. That's what got me really offended.

After this confrontation, Helena reacted by telling Michel what he had done. Perhaps she was still trying to resolve the confrontation without fighting. His reaction was to take it even one step further and grab for her chest. It was the next period that they started to fight.

The resolution in this conflict event is a physical fight. It took place in the classroom not in the lunchroom where many fights do take place. Apparently, Helena was in the room when Michel started to fight and still another intervention occurred. Some students pushed him out of the room and Helena closed the door. This intervention is certainly without respect. But the intervention takes place during the resolution. Trying to break up a fight is also an intervention, but it intervenes with the resolution, not before. The fight had already started. The intervention in this case does not have the same role of determining the type of resolution which might occur. There are only a few examples of trying to break up a fight. The rules appear to be different at

this moment in the conflict event; differentiating between keeping and losing face is more severe once the fight has already begun. This may be, in part, because the audience is by definition already established. Michel could not get back in so he broke the glass window of the door and then the fight continued.

Without the teacher's information, it would seem that perhaps there was no outside intervention before the resolution of this event. But we know that for several days Helena and Michael were separated and told explicitly not to speak to one another. And finally, they were warned that no "foolishness" would be tolerated. This intervention by the teacher is verbal and without respect.

While explaining that Michel grabbed for her chest, Helena also described "everybody lookin..That's what got me really offended." They had an audience. In this conflict event the combination of an intervention without respect and an audience led to a physical fight.

Conflict Event #2: Up against the wall

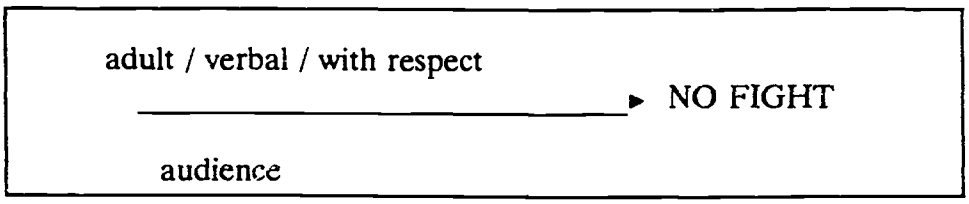
1. Description

Once a week, two CBO (community-based organization) case managers would meet with the transition class and have "group counseling" sessions. This involved, among other things, various values clarification games. This observation was the first meeting with this particular group for which they had planned a "getting to know you" exercise. They asked students to stand up against the walls around the room and tell members of the group (1) their name and (2) two things they liked to do. The students did not participate easily and after a while the case managers gave up. Finally, one of the case managers, June, told the class that she understood they were not pleased with the activity and asked the students to tell her what they would most like to do during these lessons.

> One boy who said his name was "Black" was sitting at the teacher's desk. He raised his hand and the following discussion took place:
>
> Black: I would most like to take you to my house and go into bed with you.
> June: First of all, I am married and I am too old for you.
> Black: I don't care - that's what I most want to do.
> June: My husband is 6 foot 4.
> Black: Am I supposed to be sacred?
> June: What do you really want to do?
> Black: That's it.
> Joan: Something that's realistic.
> Black: Oh. You didn't say that before.
>
> June discussed this exchange with me later on and said she felt that he was just asking for attention, but it still made her very nervous. She couldn't understand

how these kids could speak so openly and have so little respect. I expressed an understanding of how difficult it can be with so many kids in the room and not knowing exactly what to do with them. We walked back to her office. [11/4/87; classroom observation]

2. Analysis



There are actually two confrontations here. One is more general and the other more specific. In general, the whole lesson was a confrontation. Students from WHHS are not accustomed to "playing games" in class. Furthermore, being told to "stand up against the wall" is associated with police interactions on the street. Students made this clear as they immediately put their hands up against the wall and pretended to be searching one another. More specifically, Black confronted the "unwritten rules" of classroom interaction when he told June that he wanted to go to bed with her.

The reaction to the latter confrontation was some verbal banter which quickly turned into a *dis*. June told Black that her husband is tall implying that Black should feel threatened.

The intervention in this case was done by June herself. By qualifying that his response should be realistic, June allowed Black to "keep face" after being publicly *dissed*. He was not willing to let go of his "true desire" to take June to bed until she gave him an out. ("Something that's realistic.")

As a result of the intervention, the class resumed the discussion of what students would most like to do which continued until the bell rang.

Based on June's reaction to Black's invitation, it would seem that she did not understand (1) that she had publicly *dissed* him and (2) his need to "keep face." Her position in the class (case manager/teacher) allowed her to rectify the situation and continue. Given the public setting (the audience), had she been a peer and not given Black the out, this confrontation would probably have resulted in a physical fight.

Conflict Event #3: Who you looking at?

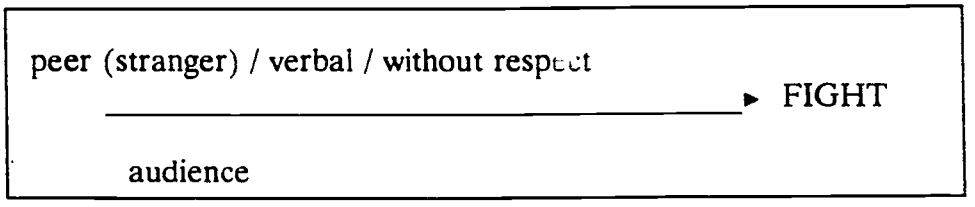
1. Description

During a spontaneous group interview, students were talking about the conditions of the school: it's physical appearance, safety, and quality of teaching. I asked them how

long they each had been attending WHHS. After each one answered, the conversation continued:

Shawon: When I came here I never
Lorelle: The first time I came here, I liked it a little bit.
Shawon: Yeah, I did too.
Lorelle: Nobody bothered you. And then the second year it got bad.
Shawon: [inaudible]
Lorelle: It got bad.
Shawon: When you start moving up that's when they start acting up
Lorelle: Umhmm.
Shawon: Even the freshmen when they come here from like 123 and all those schools.
Lorelle: Yeah.
Shawon: They be wild
Lorelle: There was this one time I was on the staircase and this girl, this young girl, she says who you looking at? I say who you talking to?
Beth: Them freshmen right?
Lorelle: I said you're a little girl. I said to me beating you up they will take me down there and blame me for hitting you
Shawon: Yup. That's how it is.
Lorelle: Then this guy comes by and looks at me. He looks at me and he says 'you ain't scared of that little girl are you?' I wasn't scared but I didn't want to fight, know what I mean?
Beth: Yeah
Lorelle: and such a little girl and she's looking rolling her eyes and doing all of this other stuff. Acting tough like and then everybody's there, watching and everything.
Shawon: So you fought her, right?
Lorelle: Shit, yes. I mean I had to.
Beth: Uh huh.
[10/26/87; interview]

2. Analysis



As Lorelle describes it, she was walking up the stairs when a freshmen stopped her and challenged her ("Who you looking at?"). Lorelle reported the beginning of verbal bantering and described that she was trying to avoid a fight. She didn't want to get into trouble and she knew she would be blamed for it. She was trying to keep her record clean.

The intervention happened when another student walked by and challenged Lorelle once again ("You're not afraid are you.") As a result, she felt that she could not avoid the fight and "keep face."

In addition, the second condition for a fight to take place in school is also met. There was an audience ("and then everybody's there, watching and everything").

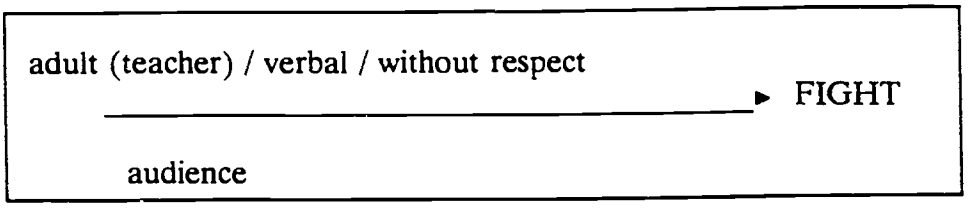
The resolution: a fight. Given the pattern being presented here, a physical fight could have been predicted. In fact, Shawon's reaction indicates that she too understands that there was no choice but to fight ("So you fought her, right?"). And Lorelle replies, "Shit yeah, I mean I had to."

Conflict Event #4: Bump in the auditorium

1. Description

Karina: In my first year in this school, I didn't even get a program. I was coming to the auditorium cause you know so many people and I was walking home. That time I lived in [inaudible] when I lived in the Bronx, right? And all I do was bump into this girl, I didn't know her, I was, you know, scared. I said sorry and I it's like it didn't do no good. She wanted to fight me, you know, I said so.. she pushed me and see I've a temper, I'll fight but, you know, being that you've just come into a school and your scared, you know, cause it's your first you don't know nobody, you know, and she pushed me and I still didn't say nothing. She kept, you know. I still, you know, wanted to walk away but then this teacher came. He say stop acting stupid. What? I mean who you calling stupid. The little girl, real little, right? She said yeah you heard him, stop acting stupid. And so I said well, you know, I guess I'll just have to fight, you know, and from that first fight I just been fighting ever since. And I been in that [inaudible] you know, and just recently it calmed down a little. I don't have too much people [inaudible], you know.
Miriam: mmhmm
Karina: Yes.
Miriam: And, it just happened that you bumped into her
Karina: just by accident, and I said sorry that's all you hurt me, you know, and I said sorry, and it was like it didn't do no good. That's when I realized, you know, to me from that first incident that all right I can't say sorry to nobody for nothing - you know, if I bump them so if a girl says all right, cause me something I guess I'm just gonna have to fight. That's what's my attitude. I'm just gonna have to fight. They didn't even say this [inaudible]. Instead of walking away I guess it don't make no sense cause I tried it and it didn't work
Helena: Yup.
Karina: So it's just fighting and that's all this school is really about when you think about it.
[12/9/87; interview}

2. Analysis



The physical confrontation in this conflict event makes it easy to identify. Karina bumped into someone she did not know in the school auditorium while she was trying to register for school.

Karina reacted to the confrontation by apologizing, but the student who had been bumped reacted physically; she pushed Karina. Apparently, still trying to avoid an undesirable resolution, Karina tried to just walk away after being pushed but found herself pushed again.

Then a teacher comes by and intervenes by telling them to stop acting stupid. This intervention combined with the assumed presence of an audience (It was in the auditorium during registration) left Karina no choice but to fight.

What I found striking here is the generalization Karina makes: apologizing did not work in this case so it never will. She continues her generalization in her last comment: "So it's just fighting and that's what this school is all about when you think about it."

THEORETICAL DISCUSSION

While theoretical and analytical linkages between schools and the societies in which they are located have been common . . ., practical solutions to school problems seldom have been sought in these linkages. Rather, they have been limited to 'damage control,' or manipulations of the curriculum, clients, and staff of educational institutions themselves. These do not and cannot address a more fundamental question: Are the public schools still functional? Or have they, rather than the students, dropped out of American society?

Margaret LeCompte, 1987

The purpose of this section is to relate the specific findings of this study - the moments in a conflict event - to the introductory theoretical discussions and then to discuss some practical implications. Organizing the final chapter of this study in this fashion supports the methodological approach taken. That is, conflict was first found to be a salient theme and then analyzed. It is only then that the literature on conflict was consulted to place these findings in the larger context of the professional, academic dialogue. Reporting on this literature first would erroneously imply that by reviewing the literature, questions arose which were then examined in the field.

Symbolic Interactionism

Blumer's theory of symbolic interactionism provided this study with a much needed entry point into inductive research methodologies. By presenting an alternate paradigm for understanding social interaction, it provided answers to the many predictable questions raised as an inquiry process moves away from a hypothesis-testing paradigm. Focusing an empirical study on the understanding of meaning requires a constant dialogue with the theoretical perspective. While immersed in the "field" of the social world being studied, one can forget the theoretical perspective. How to get from one place to another; how to ask questions without seeming rude; or how to talk to one group while maintaining relations with another become the focus of one's study. Meaning, interaction and interpretation become meaningless in the day-to-day functioning of an ethnographer. However, as one moves away from the intimate relations with the social world and towards an intimate relation with one's data, the theoretical perspective becomes significant once again. The theoretical perspective dictates the kinds of questions one asks from the data. Questions asked were not why students fight or which program in the school most reduces the number of fights or even why fights in schools occur at all. Rather than trying to understand **why** events occurred, questions were posed to understand **how** they occurred. How did a conflict event end up in a fight. What happened? How did it happen? How is it, as posed earlier, that people communicate given that they are subjects and have different interpretations of objects that determine their social interactions and how, then, can they agree on meaning. In this way, meaning serves as a reference point for studying subjects. More specifically, one looks to the descriptions of conflict events and tries to find patterns of interaction that can shed light on that meaning.

Confrontations were commonplace. Students knew that they were not avoidable. But fights, at least theoretically, are avoidable. Interventions that allow students to "keep face," that is, interventions with respect, would prevent a confrontation from ending in a fight. Students in this study shared an understanding of the meaning of the different types of interventions evidenced in their unsolicited explanations and definitions.

The place of audience in a conflict event is another example of shared meaning. Fights did not occur without an audience. Students explained this clearly. The shared meaning of the presence or absence of an audience shaped the interactions that took place as the conflict event developed.

However, with the new insights gained as a result of this study, some shortcomings of symbolic interactionism are also evident. While it places heavy emphasis on interactions as the negotiating of meaning, symbolic interactionism still focuses on the individual and human behavior as its unit of analysis. The interaction is the central focus, but it is the interaction between two individuals and the goal is to understand the meaning behind that interaction and its implications for understanding how an individual functions.

The analysis in this study has focused on the structuring of events. The interactions and the meanings assigned to those interactions all take place in the structuring of the social events - in this case, the conflict event - but they are not the unit

of analysis. The findings of this study fall more in line with what Mehan (1978) refers to as "structuring school structure" than it does with symbolic interactionism. Mehan refers to this type of study as "constitutive ethnography." The unit of analysis in constitutive ethnography is the event. Within the event, attempts are made to describe the "interactional work that assembles systemic patterns and social structures" (Mehan 1978, p.38).

> Participants display their orientation to the sequential and hierarchical organization of school events by marking the boundaries of interactional sequences and event phrases with distinctive verbal, paralinguistic, and kinesic shifts. The presence of these markers demonstrates that [such] ...interactions are rhythmic, cooperative activities, involving the complex coordination of speech and gesture. These studies [constitutive ethnographies] consistently find that successful interaction occurs when participants synchronize the rhythm of speech and gesture, while breakdowns occur in the absence of synchrony. Interaction is segmented, and to some extent controlled, by systematic shifts in participants' postures, conversational rhythms, and prosody. These changing arrays of postural configurations demarcate the division of the continuous flow of interaction into discrete segments. By indicating something new is happening, these changes have profound effects on what is communicated (Mehan, 1978, 59-60).

The "breakdowns" which result in the "absence of synchrony" are of particular interest. It is in this moment of the structuring of social events that conflict occurs. The studies which Mehan uses to present his approach to "constitutive ethnography" do not focus on the breakdowns. For example, when a confrontation takes place in a conflict event, one might say that the breakdown has begun. It is this breakdown, the first moment of a conflict event, that could be resolved in a physical fight. It may be at this theoretical point where Mehan diverges from the developing perspective of critical theory.

The structuring of events is the form of inquiry. Meaning and interaction are components of the prerequisite shared knowledge of such structuring. Once conflict and fights emerged as a salient theme in the data collected, examining the data from this perspective resulted in identifying the distinct moments in a conflict event. From a different perspective, one might ask different questions from the same data. One could ask, for example, what reasons students give for fighting. But this question again turns the focus to the individual and not to the structuring of social activity.

Critical Theory

Historically, studies conducted from the perspective of critical theory were centered around a "discourse primarily concerned with the notions of domination, class conflict, and hegemony;" there was "a structured silence regarding how teachers, students, and others live out their daily lives in schools. Consequently there has been an

overemphasis on how structural determinants promote economic and cultural inequality, and an underemphasis on how agency accommodates, mediates and resists the logic of capital and its dominating social practices" (Giroux, 1983, p.282). This study has attempted to follow the tradition of scholars such as Becker (1961); Stinchcombe (1964); Suttles (1968); Willis (1977); Wolcott (1973); and many others who have focused specifically on disclosing the "structured silence."

As discussed earlier, the inevitable dead end to which reproduction theory leads, opened the way for an understanding and appreciation of resistance theory. Theoretically, the perspective offered by resistance theory provides one with a way to explain how some people "make it" against all social, political and economic odds. It also implies a sense of hopefulness in sharp contrast to the hopelessness found in reproduction theory.

However, when it came to analyzing this data and trying to understand whether or not the conflict events I described were, in fact, resistance, resistance theory was much less clear. The difficulty in finding empirical evidence for resistance is not unique to this study.

> In his critique of Willis' Learning to Labor, Walker (1985) argues that while it is clear that the lads are antagonistic to the school and its teachers, and that they have a recusant attitude to the dominant values of the school; it is not clear that they are resisting the system of domination/subordination of which the school, supposedly, is a part. Much less is it clear that they are consciously or unconsciously, actually or potentially, tending to erode the casual mechanisms through which that system is reproduced (p.65).

According to Walker, resistance theory draws attention to the existence of conflict and antagonism in schools and in pupil's resistance to school's authority and ideology. In Learning to Labor, Paul Willis unduly romanticizes resistant practices by the subjects of his ethnography - the lads. An alternative view of resistance permits a more socially and historically relevant evaluation of nonconformity.

Walker states that while a great deal has been written on resistance theory, much less has been done on empirically examining it. It is here that Walker believes much work is to be done. Willis has clearly made such an attempt but, Walker argues, falls short of providing any convincing evidence. From a methodological standpoint, Walker argues that Willis has not triangulated his data with other voices, other data sources. He also provides several examples of alternative explanations. In conclusion, he comments:

> I hope to have demonstrated something of the **theoretical** and **practical** importance of close critical examination of ethnographic data on youth rebellion... and the manner of its presentation. It is clear, I think, that Willis's data could have been arranged, presented, and interpreted in ways quite different from his own, and with different implications for education. But although it is important thus to stress the theory-ladenness of data, it is also clear that such theory-ladenness need not and in Willis's case does not prevent all critical

discussion....The full implications of this analysis for our evaluation of resistance theory must wait for another occasion....(Walker, p.82).

In developing a theoretical case for a "critical theory of schooling," Giroux discusses several weaknesses in previous resistance theories:

> First, although studies of resistance point to those social sites and "spaces" in which the dominant culture is encountered and challenged by subordinate groups, they do not adequately conceptualize the historical development of the conditions that promote and reinforce contradictory modes of resistance and struggle. What is missing in this perspective are analyses of those historically and culturally mediated factors that produce a **range** of oppositional behaviors, some of which constitute resistance and some of which do not. Put simply, not all oppositional behavior has "radical significance," nor is all oppositional behavior a clear-cut response to domination (Giroux, 1983, p.285).

The findings of this study may be empirical evidence to the "range of oppositional behavior" to which Giroux referred. It is not clear that all fights and conflicts in school are examples of resistance. And yet, there do seem to be various signs of resistance throughout.

While this study does not provide any answers, it does raise some interesting questions. Issues relating to one's identity and the possibility of establishing an identity through fights are raised. What does it mean when a student must participate in a conflict event or have a fight in order to establish his/her identity? Are there no other means within the school structure for one to find a sense of self? One might interpret students' participation in conflict events as a means by which they can establish an identity in a system that provides no viable alternative. In this way, even the confrontations might be seen as resistance. Resistance to the very structure that both allows for - and actually participates in - fights in school.

Furthermore, one might examine the role of the confrontations in school. Students shared an understanding of what constitutes a confrontation. That is, confrontations, for the most part, were purposeful. What is their purpose? It is conceivable that the beginning of a conflict event - a confrontation - is intended to disrupt the regular, expected flow of activity in school. In this way, students resist in subtle ways which are not recognized as resistance by the school community. From a resistance perspective, confrontations can be seen as a critical response to an unresponsive system.

McLaren, as previously quoted, describes the inevitable tension as the disparity between students' school lives and their lived street culture grows. Survival in poor, drug-filled neighborhoods requires protection. Students themselves explained that fighting is not always necessary as long as everyone around knows that one is willing and able to fight. Establishing such a reputation on the streets requires one set of skills. What happens when those very successful skills are brought into the school? Might this not also be a form of resistance - resistance, that is, against the school culture which contrasts so drastically from the world outside of the school?

Much more work needs to be done to better understand the conflicts that occur. From the findings of this study, one can only raise questions. Answers to these questions, however, should be the focus of yet another study.

DISCUSSION OF SELECTED LITERATURE

William Labov

Labov's discourse analysis (1972) elaborating on rules for ritual insults is consistent with the structural analysis of a conflict event. He focuses the beginning of his discussion on the shared or social knowledge which is necessary in any discourse. Simple conversation among people from the same cultural background assume a shared knowledge base. This is true for verbal as well as nonverbal interaction.

A conflict event also assumes such shared knowledge. The participants are not always aware of their unique shared knowledge which others do not share but by carefully examining language and actions one can begin to decipher the hidden codes of social interaction. One begins to learn what social is necessary to become a part of a given social group.

Labov explains that there are explicit rules to be followed in ritual insults. It is all a part of the shared, social knowledge with which people interact. As with my findings, not possessing this knowledge can lead to a fight. A closer look at one small piece of interaction analyzed by Labov makes this point clear:

> Rel: Shut up please!
> Stanley:.....'ey, you tellin' me?
> Rel: Yes. Your mother's a duck.

Labov reports that sequences such as these can lead to fights. The fights are semiserious, but nonetheless real. If Rel had just said "Yes," there would certainly have been some punches traded. But his last remark was accepted as appropriate, coherent discourse, which established some kind of closure to the incident.

Who would imagine that just saying 'yes' would cause a fight? It seems to the unknowledgeable outsider that the insult following the "yes" is much harsher than what some might call "fighting words." Not so for those involved. Without going into great details of the rules of ritual insulting, the point with which I compare this to my findings is the understanding and analysis of shared, social knowledge. The students in my study knew how to prevent a fight, what to say and what to do. They also knew how someone might cause a fight with or without knowing. This shared knowledge even involved mediating and negotiating conflicts for these students who do not possess the same shared, social knowledge.

Labov has labeled "sounding" and "playing the dozens" what in my study seems to be dissin'. My analysis based on observed interactions and analysis of group discussions did not examine the spoken words as closely. This study is not a sociolinguistic analysis.

However, doing such an analysis with the data I collected would lead to more patterns and deeper understanding of the structuring of fights in schools. Such a study could be an outgrowth of this one.

Simon O. Johnson

Johnson (1980) describes some "games" Black students play which lead to fighting. He argues that these games are played so students can gain status with their peers. If the teacher recognizes these games and can learn how to terminate them, he believes, some discipline problems can be prevented or eliminated.

Johnson explains the function of fights in classrooms. He gives examples of students who are just trying to play a game of teasing and ridiculing and that at a certain point - often when a comment is made about one's mother - a fight can break out. He suggests that teachers learn to see the signs of this game early on to interfere before the game becomes a fight. In fact, he recommends "once the game is in progress, the teacher should take steps to remove the observers from the scene, for usually the game will not continue if there aren't any observers" (p.208).

Based on the findings of this study, Johnson is giving sound advice. Removing observers is wise since a fight will not start if there is no audience. Even with regard to the type of intervention, Johnson's advice is consistent with these findings:

> For the teacher the crucial counseling point is saying to the student, in effect "I respect your right to fight for your honor and under the same conditions I might react in a similar manner. However, I still must maintain a wholesome teaching and learning environment in this class. I want you to respect me and to respect my problems by helping me maintain a good learning environment" (p.208).

Herbert Foster

Foster's book, Ribbin' Jivin' and Playin' the Dozens, was written as a result of his experiences in inner-city schools. It explores classroom contests between teachers and students, the problems caused by inner-city street-corner behavior in the classroom, the specialized jive lexicon used by inner-city youth, and a methodology of discipline designed to produce the "natural" inner-city teacher.

Foster explains the intricate nature of various games played by inner-city black males. He differentiates between ribbin', playing the dozens, and shuckin' and jivin'. His

experience as a teacher has led him to use these descriptions to give advice to teachers on how to handle various situations. Foster's ribbin' is very similar to what I have called verbal banter. As a type of reaction, I have distinguished verbal banter from a dis which, based on his description, seems to parallel Foster's playin' the dozen or whoofin'. While there is no need to delve deeply into the differences of the various games, the point here is to illustrate compatibility and differences between two studies. Attempting to provide useful information to inner-city school teachers, Foster differentiates between various types of games. Games in Foster's work seem to be very similar to conflict events in this

study. His purpose in labeling the games is to prescribe specific different interventions for each game. In contrast, this study points to different moments in any conflict event and shows that certain criteria must be met in order for a fight to occur.

Foster recognizes the role of audience very clearly. In his descriptions audience plays a key role in the having or not having of a physical fight. On the other hand, he did not see the role of an intervention and how it plays into the scene. According to Foster, the conflict is restricted to the interactions between the two people directly involved.

Both Foster and Johnson maintain that it is important to learn how to intervene and "keep face" as a teacher - that is, how to survive in an inner-city school, maintain order in the classroom, etc. But they do not realize that, as this data show, the intervention itself is a part of the resolution: it plays a crucial role in determining whether a conflict event will be resolved through a physical fight or not. This may be a serious oversight with strong educational implications.

Amy Shuman

Shuman's ethnographic study (1986) of the uses of oral and written texts by adolescents, particularly junior high school girls in an eastern United States inner city school, focuses on "fight stories." Shuman studied uses of text by examining the relationship between an event - a fight - and a narrative - a fight story. She brings to question the common distinction between writing which often assumes absent-authorship and speech which typically requires face-to-face communication by showing instances in which the boundaries are not clearly defined.

While her specific analysis focuses on literary style of oral and written text, much of her description and discussion is supportive of the findings in this study. She notes, for example, that "adolescents worked toward the possibility of replacing physical battles with verbal negotiations and defined growing up in those terms" (p.1). At closer examination, the verbal negotiations she presents are similar to the verbal banter reaction and the *dissin'* found in a conflict event.

In her discussion of storytelling rights she supports the finding of the confrontation in a conflict event. "Although storytelling rights are central to social interaction, they are perceptible only through infringements or violations and only among groups, such as junior high students, who call attention to the violation (p.2). According to the conflict event findings, it is after the reaction or the "calling attention to the violation" that a *dis* can take place.

Shuman refers to an offense (confrontation) which is followed in her analysis by a retaliation (reaction). She discusses the importance of the reaction saying that if an apology is expected but not received the offensive mode of interaction will persist. Interestingly, she has noted, but not labeled, a *dis* as a prerequisite for an actual fight. Since she has focused solely on fight stories, Shuman's discussion of instigators can be labeled, in the language of this study, interventions without respect. She also has shown the significant role these instigators can play.

> The linear sequence was most disrupted, the confrontation most easily derailed, by the transformation from report to event. When someone other than an antagonist reported an event to another person, the reported, here termed the "instigator" could be challenged for offending one of the antagonists by meddling (p.41).

A specific example cited in Shuman's study also supports the finding of intervention with respect. In this story Rose is the intervener in a conflict between Robert and Allen.

> If Rose had reported the story to Allen, a larger dispute might have developed. Rose, however, ignored Robert's remarks and said nothing to Allen, and the two boys resumed their friendship (p.43).

Shuman's discussion of Rose's narrative also supports the need for those involved in the conflict event to "keep face." "He did not necessarily have to retaliate, but he had to demonstrate his willingness to stand up for himself" (p.43).

In describing an aspect of the narrative of fight stories as "he-said-she-said" stories (p.45), Shuman provides another perspective on the role of an audience.

> He-said-she-said stories enlarged the audience for the story and, at the same time, enlarged the audience for the dispute...[These] stories turned listeners, those who heard the account, into witnesses of the potential fight (p.45).

While there are many comparable aspects of the findings of the two studies, Shuman's analysis also raises some questions. For the most part the conflict events of this study are narratives or "fight stories" and not the experiences themselves. It is not clear, therefore, in each event as reported, whether or not the fight actually did take place. In fact, Shuman reports that many more fights are declared and told about than have actually taken place. In this study, among the six conflict events which did result in a fight, four were either witnessed or supported by another data source besides the narrative. Still, one must ask how the telling of an experience - a fight story - might differ from the experience - a fight.

IMPLICATIONS FOR CONFLICT MEDIATION

Numerous programs have been designed to teach students to mediate their own conflicts. Comparing the intervention strategies of these programs to the findings of the moments in a conflict event will illustrate that by their very design these programs erroneously focus on the individual and not on the structuring of the event.

In one study (Parkhurst, 1988), a middle school principal with seventeen years of experience as a classroom teacher implemented a practicum designed to develop positive, long-lasting social skills among elementary school students in the intermediate grades. The primary goal of the intervention was to decrease the number of instances in which students used verbal or physical aggression to solve conflicts in informal or unsupervised

situations. The intervention was implemented through an elaborate process of training teachers to train students who then train other students. The outcome measures were (1) the number of referrals to the principal's office because of aggressive behavior and (2) the number of verbal conflicts on the playground. This study showed improved initial effects, but no significant changes over a longer period of time. Another similar program (Stichter, 1986) focused on training elementary school children to mediate and resolve their own conflicts successfully. This study claimed that the key to developing such programs is to educate the students in how the system works before getting into the process. By the system, they refer to the way a fight starts to happen. The students are taught how two people get themselves into a position in which they have no alternative but to fight.

Turiel (1978) has proposed that children have distinct concepts of moral and social rules and can distinguish between them at a very early age. Assuming this perspective, a study (Mantzicopoulos, 1987) was conducted to examine how adolescents who exhibit antisocial behaviors understand and interpret school rules with moral and social-conventional underlying themes. Subjects were 20 students attending a high school for students with serious behavior problems. Scores on the Behavior Problem Checklist classified subjects as high aggression (HA) or low aggression (LA). Each subject read and answered questions about four stories of an adolescent breaking a school rule. Two of the stories had moral themes and two had social-conventional themes. Given the existence of a school rule, subjects evaluated the transgression negatively in all four stories with the exception of the story portraying a fight between two students. In this story, subjects in the HA group reported that the act was acceptable despite the rule. In the absence of a rule prohibiting the acts, all subjects positively evaluated the social-conventional acts, and negatively evaluated the act of destroying school property. In the absence of a rule, LA subjects negatively evaluated the act of two students fighting while HA subjects positively evaluated fighting.

After reviewing several different conflict mediation programs, Kramer (1987) concluded that students need opportunities for developing a strong self-image and for learning how to cope with life's problems safely and effectively. Programs should be provided that offer young people the opportunity to develop (1) a strong and secure sense of self-worth; (2) more effective communication skills; (3) the ability to cope with disappointment, rejection and loss; (4) an inherent understanding that violence is never acceptable behavior; and (5) clearer and more realistic expectations about their roles in all relationships including marriage, parenting, family life and career. The most successful programs are those that are a mandated part of the basic educational process, comprehensive, year-long, and taught by the best teachers.

Parkhurst, Stichter, Mantzicopoulos and Kramer all focused on fighting in schools. They each examined either intervention strategies or explanations for conflict among students. Most significantly, they each focused solely on the individual or individuals involved in the conflict. Examining their conclusions in light of the findings of this study raises several issues. By maintaining their focus on the individuals involved, the studies above continue to blame the victim. They do not take into account the larger social context within which a fight will occur, and, more importantly, without which a fight will not occur. For example, there is no indication of any understanding of the role of an

audience in a fight nor of any sort of intervention. The event is understood as a simple interaction between two people which can be avoided by teaching those individuals most likely to get into a fight how to avoid it.

On the other hand, other studies do begin to show an understanding of the complexity of a conflict event. Shantz (1983) investigated fighting behavior in young children in a sample of 96 first- and second-grade children from 14 classrooms in two suburban schools. A fight or "conflict episode" was defined as a sequence of interchanges between two children in which child A attempts to influence child B's behavior, child B resists, and child A persists. Six specific questions addressed in the study concerned possible correlates of a child's rate of participation in dyad fights during free play: that is to say, they related to how high-rate fighters differ from low-rate fighters in terms of number of children fought with, range of behavior exhibited during fights, relative success at fighting, and extent of popularity with peers. Once a week for 10 consecutive weeks, subjects divided into eight same-sex, grade-balanced groups met for 1 hour of free play with various age-appropriate toys. Their behavior was video-recorded and monitored. Dyadic conflict episodes were identified and the nature of the outcome, identity of winner/loser, behaviors occurring during the course of each fight, and the type of issue fought over were coded. Before and after the playgroup experience, subjects were interviewed to determine the sociometric status of members in each group. Results of a correlational analysis are consistent with the hypotheses that a high level of fighting contributes to unpopularity and that unpopularity may contribute to the tendency to fight.

Shantz' findings as described in a conflict episode are closer to those discussed before. He discovered various moments or parts of the episode but he limited his analysis to the interactions between two people. By not looking to the larger social setting within which the interaction is taking place, it is conceivable that something was missed.

Project S.M.A.R.T.

Walker Hill High School was one of several schools with a comprehensive conflict mediation program called Project S.M.A.R.T. (School Mediators' Alternative Resolution Team). Project S.M.A.R.T. is designed to help students, teachers, and families resolve disputes and disagreements through mediation. Project S.M.A.R.T. was brought to WHHS in response to the increasing number of fights in the school, as measured by the number of suspensions. In fact, the number of fighting incidents decreased during the time that Project S.M.A.R.T. was in operation at WHHS. Fighting also decreased in all the other schools in the larger evaluation sample which had a similar program (Grannis, et al. 1989).

In mediation, people involved in a dispute are helped to resolve their differences through discussion and compromise. This is done with the help of a mediator. Each party has a chance to explain the events leading up to the dispute without interruption. The mediator will then help both parties identify and discuss the issues involved in the dispute. The mediators do not judge guilt or innocence, take sides, or tell the disputants what to do. Instead, the mediators help the disputants communicate with one another in a productive way and arrive at a solution that best suits the needs of each disputant (Project S.M.A.R.T., 1989).

One room near the cafeteria is designated as the mediation room. Students who were trained mediators spend most of the free time - as well as some "cutting time" - in this room. It was a meaningful place for students; a place in which they felt a part.[6] Frequent participant observation in this room convinced me to take part in a mediation training workshop at WHHS. From discussions with students, observations and participation in the training, it was evident that conflict mediation explicitly focuses on the two individuals involved in the conflict. Mediators are trained to help those two individuals resolve their dispute. One hand, one can view this program as another way of blaming the students. During the training there was no mention of other factors which might contribute to a fight. Students are seen as solely responsible and, therefore, are the focus of mediation. It is assumed that by training students how to mediate conflict, there will be less fights in school.

In fact, the number of incidents of fighting were reduced. Assuming the reduction is in part a result of Project S.M.A.R.T., one might question the validity of the findings of this study. If a program which focuses specifically on mediating between the two individuals involved in the conflict event manages to be successful perhaps the role of intervention and audience are not significant. There is another explanation, however. By teaching several students the necessary skills to be mediators in an artificial setting such as the conflict mediation sessions, it is possible that students are also learning ways to intervene in conflict events as they arise more spontaneously. In other words, the conflict mediation program is changing the role the students play in the interactions involved in a conflict event. They are able to intervene with respect and, as a result, fewer fights are reported in the school.

In one sense, Project S.M.A.R.T. empowers students by allowing them to share the responsibility for the social interactions in schools. In another sense, it continues to blame the victim. It in no way addresses the larger context of conflict events. There is no discussion of how conflict events and fighting may be a form of resistance, as discussed earlier. There is no discussion of the roles played by interveners and audience. And so the blame remains with the students.

CONCLUSION

By changing one's focus from the characteristics of an individual to the necessary social interactions and meanings which structure those interactions, this study has presented another way of examining the serious dilemma faced by many of urban high schools - violence. Typically, the effectiveness of implemented programs to deter such violence is measured by the number of fighting incidents or the number of school suspensions for fighting. These findings suggest that such measures may not be complete indicators of success. We may need to find ways to examine the types of interventions that take place in the lives of students in our schools. For example, conflict mediation programs should be examined to determine what effect they have on the roles played by those involved in conflict events. The important role audience plays in school violence also needs to be addressed in these days of severely over-crowded schools.

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[6] For a more in-depth description and analysis of the relevance of this project, see Gerics and Westheimer (1989).

This is by no means meant to suggest that the discovery of this pattern of social interaction labeled a conflict event will solve the problem. But it does offer an alternative view, a view which takes the focus - and the blame - away from the individual and places it with the social interactions that take place within the larger social structure of the setting.

As I have tried to demonstrate, many pieces have to be in place in order for a fight to take place. A fight is one moment in a complex, highly variable conflict event. A deeper understanding of this event might lead to a deeper understanding of the nature of violence in our schools and then, hopefully, to a change in the focus and nature of current discussion and policy-making. Such a change must turn our attention away from examining and, therefore, trying to change the individual to examining and thereby changing the social institutions.

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