DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 413 568 CG 028 179

AUTHOR Phelan, Patricia; Cao, Hanh T.; Davidson, Ann Locke
TITLE Navigating the Psycho/Social Pressures of Adolescence: The Voices and Experiences of High School Youth.
INSTITUTION Center for Research on the Context of Secondary School Teaching.
SPONS AGENCY Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
REPORT NO CRC-P92-144
PUB DATE 1992-04-00
NOTE 52p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (San Francisco, CA, April, 1992). Tables contain small type.
CONTRACT RIG0087C235
PUB TYPE Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC03 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Academic Persistence; Adolescents; Educational Environment; High Risk Students; *High School Students; High Schools; School Holding Power; *Stress Variables; *Student Adjustment; *Student Attitudes; *Student School Relationship

ABSTRACT

This paper describes conditions and circumstances in students' family, peer, and school worlds which students perceive as creating pressures and stress powerful enough to divert their attention and interest from school. Rather than assuming that minority status, linguistic differences, part-time employment, peers and/or poverty necessarily create problems for young adults, students were asked about why they thought they were not connecting in educational settings. The focus, then, is on all students and not just those identified as at-risk. Results indicate significant variation in the types and frequencies of problems for different types of youth. Students whose worlds are congruent and who transition smoothly report tremendous stress from teachers and parents to achieve academically. Other students who report difficulties in making transitions between different worlds worry about understanding course materials as they struggle to make passing grades. Still other students, for whom transitions are most difficult, are burdened with uncertain futures. All students stressed the importance of being connected to at least one caring and empathetic adult in their school environment. When that happened, students were more likely to seek help. (RJM)

CRC

Center for Research on the Context of Secondary Teaching
School of Education, CERAS Building, Stanford University, Stanford, CA 94305-3084

NAVIGATING THE PSYCHO/SOCIAL PRESSURES OF ADOLESCENCE: THE VOICES AND EXPERIENCES OF HIGH SCHOOL YOUTH

P92-144

Patricia Phelan
Hanh T. Cao
Ann Locke Davidson

NAVIGATING THE PSYCHO/SOCIAL PRESSURES OF ADOLESCENCE: THE VOICES AND EXPERIENCES OF HIGH SCHOOL YOUTH

P92-144

Patricia Phelan
Hanh T. Cao
Ann Locke Davidson

Stanford University

April 1992

This is a revised version of a paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Education Research Assocation in San Francisco, CA, April 1992. Research reported here was conducted under the auspices of the Center for Research on the Context of Secondary School Teaching with funding from the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education, Cooperative Agreement #OERI-G0087C235.

NAVIGATING THE PSYCHO/SOCIAL PRESSURES OF ADOLESCENCE: THE VOICES AND EXPERIENCES OF HIGH SCHOOL YOUTH

Introduction

This paper describes conditions and circumstances in students' family, peer, and school worlds which they perceive as creating pressures and stress powerful enough to divert their attention and interest from school. Additionally, we identify structural features and programs in classroom and school environments which enable and impede students' in coping with the difficult circumstances they describe. The results reported here are part of a larger qualitative study which focuses on students' family, peer, and school worlds, boundaries and borders between worlds, and adaptation strategies students' employ as they transition between these sociocultural contexts. (Phelan, Davidson & Cao, 1991)

Researchers, educators, community leaders, and parents are increasingly turning their attention to the range of challenges faced by today's youth, while the popular media reminds us daily of the difficulties that many children and adolescents in this society face. We know, for example, that teachers and schools fail often to engage students in academic and learning endeavors (Fine, 1991; LeCompte, 1987; LeCompte & Dworkin, 1991); that large numbers of students do not complete high school (Fine, 1991; LeCompte & Dworkin, 1991; Rumberger, 1983; Weis et al., 1989); that teenage pregnancy, while continuing to decline in the general population, is increasing among 15 to 17-year-old black and Hispanic females (AAUW Report, 1992); that more children live in poverty and in single-parent homes than ever before (Fine, 1991; LeCompte &

Dworkin, 1991; Youth and America's Future, 1988); that the abuse of drugs and alcohol is rampant among some sectors of the adolescent population (Dryfoos, 1990; McCord, 1990; National Institute of Drug Abuse, 1987); and that suicide rates are the second leading cause of death among young people aged 15 to 24 (Blumenthal & Kupfer, 1988; Gispert et al., 1985; Wetzel, 1989). Further, we know that peer groups are instrumental in the lives of adolescents and can pull young people towards behavior destructive to themselves and others in the society. Involvement in gang activity, while providing emotional support and a sense of belonging, can also involve youth in violent and dangerous confrontations. (Huff, 1990; Moore, 1978; Moore, 1991; Vigil, 1988a; Vigil, 1988b) Finally, developmental psychologists remind us of the often difficult biological and social benchmarks which young people of this age face. (Feldman & Elliott, 1990) In short, few people in the society are unaware that navigating the psycho/social pressures of adolescence can be a difficult and arduous task.

Knowing the problems which abound, schools and community organizations have stepped-up their efforts to develop and implement services to positively impact youth. For example, a wide-range of community, school, and district-level programs have been generated to target at-risk and disadvantaged youth, culturally and linguistically different populations, and a range of mental-health issues faced by young adults (Dryfoos, 1990; Heath & McLaughlin, in press; Pease-Alvarez & Hakuta, forthcoming; Reingold, 1989). Strategies and programs which engage ethnically diverse and immigrant youth academically have been identified and implemented to override the negative effects associated with low socio-economic status, limited motivation, and language and cultural

barriers. (Abi-Nader, 1990; Heath, 1982; Scarcella, 1990; Sleeter, 1991; Trueba, 1988; Trueba et al., 1982; Vogt et al., 1987) At the classroom level, cooperative learning (Johnson & Johnson, 1981; Sharan, 1980; Slavin, 1988; Slavin & Madden, 1989), teaching for understanding (Prawat, 1989), and a myriad of other pedagogical methods designed to reach all youth are currently being implemented in schools throughout the country.

In this paper we identify pressures and problems that students say affect what they do, how they respond, and what actions they take with respect to school. This work differs from previous efforts in several respects. First, rather than assuming that minority status, linguistic differences, part-time employment, peers and/or poverty necessarily create problems for young adults, we have asked students to tell us what affects their ability to connect with and engage in educational settings. Second, we focus on all students, rather than only those typically identified as at-risk. In other words, we have not ignored students who appear, by conventional standards, to be successful and well-adjusted (i.e., white, high achieving students or high achieving minority youth).[1] Third, we consider the implications--educational, social, and emotional--of the stresses that young people report. Finally, we discuss the availability of structures and programs in classroom and school environments, paying particular attention to those which students say help them to cope with pressures and problems they have. Our overall

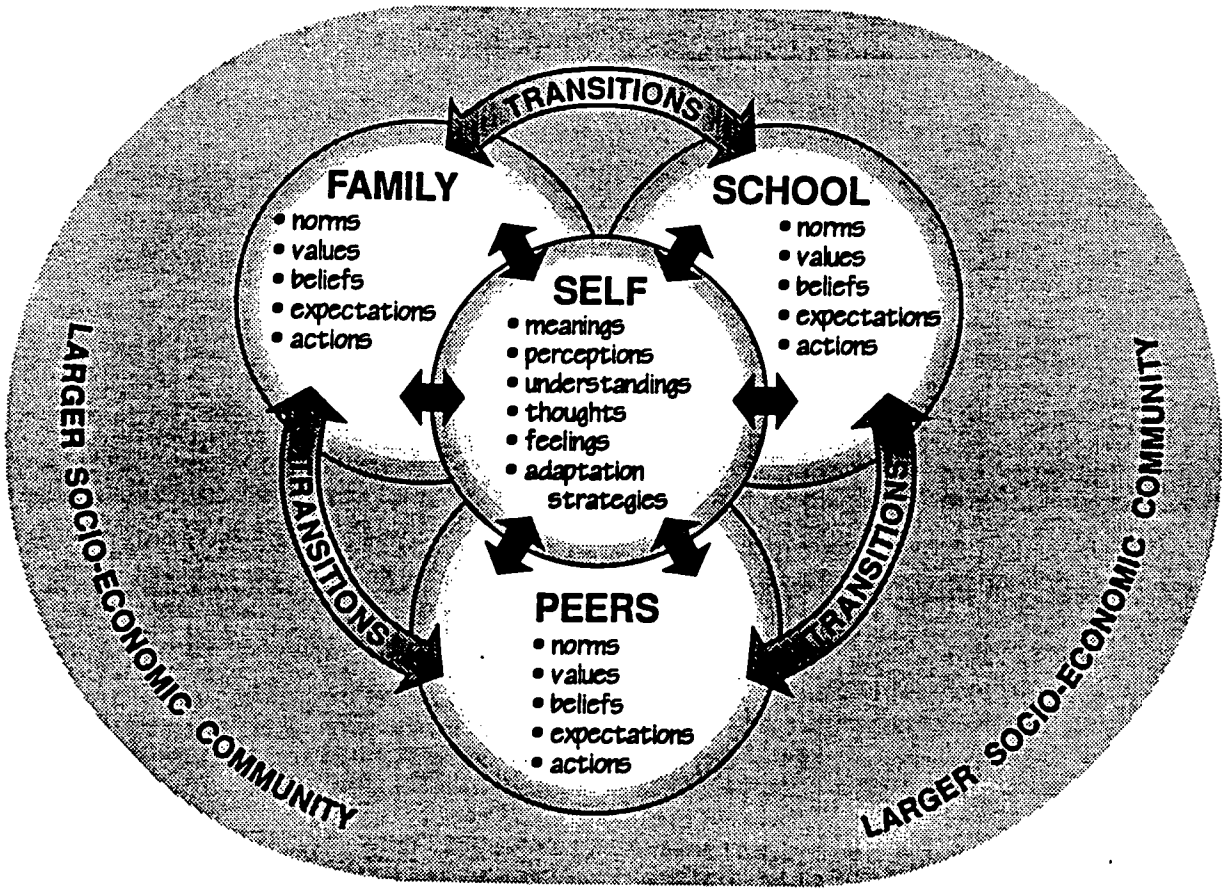
[1]Current efforts, for the most part, direct attention to the problems and difficulties of students who possess characteristics traditionally identified with at-risk populations. Successful, high achieving students (frequently considered less vulnerable) are omitted. And yet, we find that these youth also experience pressures and circumstances that adversely affect their lives in school.

purpose is to contribute a more holistic understanding of the circumstances and events which impinge on students' ability to profit from educational settings.

Students' Multiple Worlds Framework

Previously, we have presented a model of the interrelationships between students' family, peer, and school worlds, and in particular, how meanings and understandings derived from these worlds combine to affect students' engagement with schools and learning. (Phelan, Davidson and Cao, 1991) The Students' Multiple Worlds Model directs attention to the nature of boundaries and borders between worlds, as well as adaptation strategies that students employ to transition between and adapt to different contexts and settings. (See Model A)

MODEL A



Specifically we are concerned with adolescents' ability to transition successfully to school and classroom environments. This approach stands in contrast to single context approaches which compartmentalize aspects of students' lives--those studies in which peer group, family, and school variables are studied independently of one another. We have generated a typology (described in detail in previous work) which illustrates four adaptation patterns students employ as they migrate across social settings. The four types include:[2]

I. Congruent Worlds/Smooth Transitions: These students describe values, beliefs, expectations, and normative ways of behaving as similar across their worlds. Moving from one setting to another is harmonious and uncomplicated. Many of these students are white, upper middle-class, and high achieving, but not always. Some minority students describe little difference across their worlds and find transitions easy. Likewise, academically average students can also exhibit patterns which fit this type.

II. Different Worlds/Border Crossings Managed: For some students, differences in family, peer, and/or school worlds (with respect to culture, ethnicity, socio-economic status and/or religion) require students to adjust and reorient as movement among contexts occurs. Students in this category perceive differences in their worlds but utilize strategies that enable them to manage crossings successfully (in terms of what is valued in each setting). High-achieving minority students frequently exhibit patterns common to this type.

III. Different Worlds/Border Crossings Difficult: In this category, like the former, students define their family, peer, and/or school worlds as distinct. They say they must adjust and reorient as they move across borders and among contexts. However, unlike students who make adjustments in spite of difficulties, these students find transitions difficult. Common to this type are students who adapt in some circumstances but not in others, i.e., they may do well in one or two classes and poorly in the rest.

[2]The types we have identified are not inclusive of all students, but represent the majority of students in our sample. We are in the process of expanding our typology.

IV. Different Worlds/Border Crossings Resisted: In this type, the values, beliefs, and expectations across worlds are so discordant that students perceive borders as insurmountable and actively or passively resist transitions. Low achieving students (seemingly unable to profit from school and classroom settings) are typical of this type, although high achieving students who do not connect with peers or family also exhibit Type IV patterns.

The framework we use focuses on the individual as mediator and integrator of meaning and experience. Further, unlike most approaches which focus attention on stable characteristics of individuals (i.e., gender and ethnicity), or concentrate on language acquisition or achievement level alone, the model we have developed is generic. It is not ethnic, achievement, or gender specific, but transcends these categories to consider multiple worlds, boundary crossings, and adaption for all students. We have found that the generic nature of the model is particularly useful for understanding diversity within ethnic groups. For example, we see that all students--Latino, Vietnamese, Filipino, black and white--may perceive borders differently and utilize various adaptation strategies as they move from one setting to another. Thus it is possible to find Hispanic, black, white, and Asian students in all four category types.

The Students' Multiple Worlds Model and typology emerged inductively from interviews and observations with 55 ethnically diverse students in four urban, desegregated high schools in California: Maple and Canyon in the Montevideo District and Explorer and Huntington in the Bolivar District.[3] A majority of the students,

[3]As a result of desegregation in 1986, the characteristics of the student populations at Huntington and Explorer have changed dramatically in the last seven years. Huntington's minority population increased from 21.9% in 1985 to 50.3% in 1991. The total student population of 1,584 is 20.7% Latino; 22.7% Asian and Filipino; and 5.4 % black. Nearly 20% of Huntington's students are eligible for the district's transportation program. Similarly, Explorer's minority population increased from 18.2% in 1985 to 58% in 1991. Of the

selected to represent some of the diversity in many of California's large urban high schools, were freshman when the study began in Fall 1989. Students vary with respect to gender, ethnicity, achievement level, immigrant history, and transportation status. Our original selection criteria included an equal number of academically high and low achieving students in each school with both minority and majority students included in the two achievement categories. Students were asked to participate by school personnel. Four in-depth interviews with each student provide information on students' perceptions of classrooms and schools, programs and services available in school settings, the importance and influence of friends and peer groups, and family conditions significant to their lives. In addition, informal conversations and interviews with ten of the 54 students supplement more formal data collection methods. Observations in classrooms furnish documentation of interactions between adolescents and their teachers and peers. Student record data (including standardized test scores, grades, teacher comments, and attendance and referral records) contribute a picture of achievement patterns and teacher perceptions of individual students over time. Additionally, we obtained demographic and descriptive information about students and their families. Finally, we interviewed teachers and administrators about their perceptions of individual students as well as classroom and school level resources available to meet student needs.

---

total student population of 1,359, 40.6% is Latino; 12.2% Asian; 3.2% black. At Explorer, 35.7% of students are transported. In the Montevideo School District, Maple has also experienced a dramatic shift in its student population. Of the total 950 students, 40% are white, 45.7% Latino, 6.8% black and 7.5% Asian. Thirty-five percent participate in the district's transportation program. Eleven years ago, 70% of Maple's 1,929 students were white, and primarily middle-to upper-class, college bound youth. Canyon, with a student population of over 1,200, is located in an upper-middle class urban area and is considered to be one of the district's most desirable schools. Since its opening eight years ago it has maintained a relatively stable student population (54% white, 13.7% Hispanic, 13% Filipino, 11% black and 7.9% Asian).

In this article, we use the Students' Multiple Worlds Framework to guide our analyses as we ask the following questions: (1) What do students say are the most salient pressures and problems in their family, peer, and school worlds? (2) Are there differences in the type and frequency of problems across the four student types we have identified? (3) What are the social, emotional, and educational implications of the pressures that students report? (4) What features in classroom and school environments affect students' ability to cope with the various psychosocial pressures they experience?

Pressures and Problems Related to School

Students report a wide variety of pressures emanating from their lives in school. Stress over grades, worries about homework, problems with specific teachers, difficulty understanding material, isolation in classes, and general worries and concerns about their future are commonly mentioned themes. However, the number of students who talk about specific problems and concerns differs dramatically across the four student types we have identified. (See Table I)

Type I: Congruent Worlds/Smooth Transitions

Almost all students (90%) whose worlds are congruent and transition smoothly say they experience tremendous pressure to achieve academically.[4] In fact, for this group, maintaining high grades and doing well on standardized tests stand out as a primary concern in their lives. Further, these students link closely, achievement to long-range educational goals. For example, worrying about a test is, at the same time,

[4]In this study, ten students exhibit Type I patterns--four white males, five white females, and one Filipino female.

TABLE I

SCHOOL RELATED PRESSURES AND PROBLEMS BY STUDENT TYPE (N = 55)

	TYPE I Congruent Worlds Smooth Transitions		TYPE II Different Worlds Transitions Managed		TYPE III Different Worlds Difficult Transitions		TYPE IV Different Worlds Transitions Resisted		TOTAL	
	(N = 10)	%	(N = 16)	%	(N = 19)	%	(N = 10)	%	(N = 55)	%
Classroom Difficulty Understanding Material	1	(10%)	2	(13%)	13	(68%)	5	(50%)	21	(38%)
Picked on by teachers or other adults for reasons of race, gender, values, beliefs, or personal attributes	3	(30%)	4	(25%)	6	(32%)	7	(70%)	20	(36%)
Feel alone or isolated	0	(0%)	8	(50%)	2	(11%)	2	(20%)	12	(22%)
Pressure to hide ethnic self in reaction to peer values and behavior	0	(0%)	6	(38%)	2	(11%)	0	(0%)	8	(15%)
Academic achievement in relation to long-range educational goals	9	(90%)	11	(69%)	4	(21%)	0	(0%)	24	(44%)
Worried about uncertain future, e.g. not sure what steps to take	1	(10%)	3	(19%)	12	(63%)	9	(90%)	25	(45%)
General worry about high school graduation, e.g. "making it through"	1	(10%)	0	(0%)	7	(37%)	8	(80%)	16	(29%)
Worried about lack of access to information, help, assistance relevant to future possibilities	1	(10%)	4	(25%)	3	(16%)	4	(40%)	12	(22%)
Time pressure, e.g. combination of work, school, and household responsibilities (more students worked but did not express time pressure)	0	(0%)	4	(25%)	0	(0%)	0	(0%)	4	(7%)
AVERAGE PRESSURE PER STUDENT (BY TYPE)	1.6		2.6		2.6		3.5		142	2.6

* Note: Type I students express the smallest average frequency of school pressures (1.6) in comparison to Type IV students who express the most (3.5). Interestingly, Types II and III yield an average of 2.6 school-related pressures per student although adaptation patterns in each type differ substantially. These data support the prototypic patterns we have identified among Type II students--that is, their ability to make adjustments in spite of difficulties they face.

worrying about one's future. As one student put it, "Everything is riding on your grades." This finding supports the work of other researchers who have discussed the future orientation of high achieving, mainstream students. (Spindler, et al., 1990; Spindler, 1987)

While not particularly surprising, data from in-depth interviews provides a closer look at the hidden costs which emanate from the stress these young people experience. For example, Ryan, a white, high achieving, intrinsically interested learner at Explorer High School explains:

> (IT'S NOT AS IF THE TEACHERS ARE SAYING IT'S REALLY GREAT TO LEARN?) No, it's get your grades for college. It bothers me because it makes messing up even harder to take. Because you think more and more, 'Gee, now it's not just my grades, it's my future.'...As a result, I typically don't really relax too much.
>
> Yeah, [the pressure] is really incredible because I knew college was tough to get into but as soon as you're a freshman, a naive little freshman walks in, and [from teachers] it's your grades, it's your future, don't mess up! And then, from then on it's just pressure. [ES37STD:72-112]
>
> I don't think anybody would admit it if you asked them, because I don't think they realize what they're doing. I think they want to instill a value to get grades and for you to realize that it affects your future, but it's almost overkill because you get so scared. [ES37STD:208-215]

Excessive pressure to achieve academically can result in unintended educational costs. For example, some students describe their emphasis on "learning to play the game" rather than learning to learn. Others report their inability, or their lack of inclination to remember content material following exams. Further, some students say they worry so much about their classroom performance that their ability to concentrate is obstructed.

> Wendy, white female, Explorer: Like usually, if I just go to class ...I just sit there and listen. I find that if I have to worry about maybe someone calling on me or something and then I'll forget everything they're talking [about] cause I'm

worrying about what the question is going to be. (REALLY?) Which is kind of dumb, but...If I would just listen I'd know the answer to the question anyway. [ES47STD:1250-1262]

Perhaps most alarming however, are students' reports of their decreasing, intrinsic interest in learning. Ryan's description exemplifies this point.

> White male, Explorer: I like writing except that writing is fun until you have to do it for a grade. Like I'll think of schemes or something for my ships--like a history--and I'll write it down. It's fun to write but I always worry that I'm going to get a bad grade when I do it for school. So it seems like for school you have to write the way your teacher wants you to write. [ES37STAB:35-44]

Ryan's comments and those of other students, support research by educational psychologists, who have found that an overemphasis on extrinsic rewards can create expectations which dampen students' interest in activities without such rewards. (Lepper & Greene, 1978) Further, it has been pointed out that the use of extrinsic rewards in educational settings can foster compliant behavior despite the fact that many educators say their goal is to promote student initiative. (Eisner, 1985)

Students' descriptions of the stress they feel has social and emotional costs as well. For example, Valerie, a white high achieving student at Huntington, says that her preoccupation with grades leads to competitive behavior with friends.

> I'm so competitive with my friends when it comes to grades and stuff....In math I hope I do better than my friend....She must be like, 'So I'm getting tired of you asking me what did you get?' And I sort of wish I wasn't quite so competitive about it, but I want the highest score. [RA35STC:988-996]

While competition is not necessarily bad, when it becomes a driving force overriding relationships with friends, students are often left with conflicting and troubling thoughts.

Finally, almost all of the Type I students talk about the depression they experience after receiving less than perfect scores. For example, Marian a Filipino

American student at Huntington says, "I don't like any Bs you know. I get really upset when I get a B." [RA34STC:1072-1090] All of these students are uncomfortable, and many express dislike for the behaviors they have adapted in order to succeed.

Only recently are educators and others becoming cognizant and concerned about the psychic costs which may result from students' obsession to obtain high grades and elevate test scores. Further, there is increasing speculation about the possible relationship of academic pressure to emotional and physical symptoms, i.e., depression, anxiety, illness, suicide, etc.[5] For example, Wetzel (1989:29) states, "Experts and lay persons alike associate increases in the suicide rate with competitive pressure for success, to the decline of the nuclear family, and more generally, to ennui--an increased sense of loneliness and depression in our society.

In our sample of ten congruent worlds students, six report rather dramatic events--e.g., one student broke his hand ramming it through a garage door in a fit of rage; one student was diagnosed with obsessive, compulsive disorder and is currently on medication and in therapy; one student died in his sleep from an enlarged heart; two students say they were intensely distracted due to suicide threats by their friends; and one student attempted suicide twice during the two-year course of our study. Although we do not know if pressures to achieve academically are, in fact, related to any of these

[5]In 1990, the Palo Alto Youth Council surveyed students at its two city high schools. The summary report contains the following comments: "...it is not surprising that 85% of the respondents plan to go on to a 4-year college after graduation. However, this quest for academic excellence does not seem to be without some potentially dangerous side affects. Ninety-five percent of the respondents claimed that academic stress manifests itself by worrying about grades, trying to meet parental and self expectations, trying to get into the best college, achieving athletically and having little or no social life. Also of concern should be the number of these young people who ignore and/or accept their feelings of exhaustion, general unhappiness, depression, school phobia, and drug/alcohol use as a result of this stress." (Burnett, 1990-91:2)

incidents, it is certainly noteworthy that such extremes occur for so many young adults who are frequently perceived to be well-adjusted, successful, and problem-free. In fact, the ten Type I students in our study were selected by school officials who described all of them as 'model' young adults. As LeCompte and Dworkin (1991:48) point out in describing contemporary at-risk youth, "Adhering to the traditional [dropout] profile can...obscure other even more dramatic trends and problems."

In none of the four schools in which we work are there any specific supports to help students deal with excessive stress over grades and test scores. While some individual teachers and counselors allude to the pressure that many Type I students experience, for the most part adults in all of the schools are caught in the role of serving as brokers for the university system. Thus, they emphasize repeatedly and unremittingly the advantage of advanced level classes, the importance of high grades, the need to elevate AP (Advanced Placement Test) and SAT results, and the necessity of enrolling in classes to boost scores on college exams. Perhaps the point is illustrated best by a forthright, high achieving young woman at Huntington High School who asked us (when she was a freshman), if she could list her participation in our research study on her college application form in order to augment her chances of getting into Stanford.

Type II: Different Worlds/Transitions Managed

Type II students--those whose worlds are different but manage to border cross successfully--also report pressure to do well academically (69%).[6] However, unlike Type I students, half of these young people (50%) express discomfort and stress in classes where they feel isolated and alone. (See Table I)

> Ivonne, Hispanic Female, Huntington: Well, I kind of feel uncomfortable. Not many Mexicans and Hispanics are in [my] classes. They [other students] probably think of me as weird, because they probably have this view that most Hispanics are dumb or something. They have that opinion, you know, [Hispanics] get bad grades. So, I don't know why I feel uncomfortable. I just..it means you're not really with any other...many people. Maybe by the end of the year they will realize that I belong. [RA28STD:544-570]

> Trinh, Vietnamese Female, Huntington: [Because I'm Vietnamese] I notice the little things more than other people. Just like, I don't really get noticed by all the popular people. Okay, everyone in the class, I know their names and everything....Like being Vietnamese...like they have a lot of Americans in here. That there are more of them, and when you're alone, you're nervous over little things. [RA30STEN: 1212-1260]

Many times these students are one of a few (if not the only) minority students in their high track classes. Teachers frequently perceive these students as successfully assimilated and well-adjusted. If they fail to speak up aggressively and often (which is not unusual) teachers attribute their quiet and self-effacing demeanor as characteristic of a particular cultural group. While there is no question that interaction patterns are influenced by culture, these student's comments provide a more complex understanding of the dynamic which operates to render them silent. For example, Joyce, a black, high achieving (Type II) student at Maple says:

---

[6]Sixteen Type II students include one white female, three white males, one Japanese-American female, one Vietnamese female, three Vietnamese males, one black female, one Filipino female, two Hispanic males, three Hispanic females.

> ...sometimes I feel that I shouldn't belong in there [advanced math] because like there's a lot of smart people in that class and I just don't feel like I'm smart enough to be in that class. ...But when I can I do it.
>
> In biology I could just ask questions with no pressure or anything....(CAUSE THE CLASS IN MORE DIVERSE, NOT JUST WHITE STUDENTS?) Um-humm. Yeah, I feel better when there's more diversity because there's different people around you. You're not alone you know. Only one who's not the same as the rest. [VA16STD:1415-1422; VA16STEN:1662-1685]

Without friends with whom they can talk, these students have no way to test the reality of their perceptions. The resulting meanings that students attach to themselves and others not only leaves them fearful, but also inhibits their verbal participation in classes. As one high achieving Latino student said, "If I raise my hand and say the wrong thing, I feel dumb. (BECAUSE YOU'RE LATINO?) Yeah." [HT28STD:576-595]

The unspoken questions that academically able minority students contemplate--"Am I going to make friends?" "What will people think?" "What if I sound dumb?" "Am I really very smart?"--are not so different than those expressed by females in gender studies which focus on behaviors in mixed gender groups. (AAUW Report, 1992) However, in-depth interviews with Type II students suggest that the pressures they feel and their resulting fear of speaking up also emanates from their perception of differential power relationships within their classroom contexts as well as suspicion or knowledge of their classmates' prejudices. Other writers of color have also described how these forces work to constrain and silence student voices. (Gray, 1985; Neira, 1988)

The educational ramifications of this dynamic are not insignificant. In classes, students' silent responses can prevent them from obtaining help or assistance. Further, students' limited participation restricts the possibility for the exchange of diverse ideas,

thus inhibiting the liveliness and richness possible in classroom contexts. And finally, when students remain silent, bridges to friendship and understanding are less likely to be made--thus impacting negatively both minority and majority youth.

"Hiding oneself" has emotional costs as well, not the least of which is danger to individual identity. Christian Neira speaks powerfully to this point:

> When trying to live in two different worlds, one is in peril of not belonging to either of them. One is left in a state of confusion...Being put in the position of changing one's character every morning and afternoon to adapt to two different worlds endangers one's identity...(1988:337)

Further, when students attempt to overcome feelings of isolation by "fitting in" there is the danger that they may feel it necessary to devalue aspects of their home and community cultures--thus causing them to sever important links to emotional support. Finally, silence precludes students from challenging conventional stereotypes, i.e., that they are unworthy, not as smart, less deserving.

As other scholars have pointed out, tracking practices clearly exacerbate problems of isolation, thereby increasing students' feelings that they must submerge aspects of their ethnic identity. (Fordham, 1991; Davidson, 1992) We know, for example, that minority students are consistently over represented in lower tracks and conspicuously absent in those that are advanced. (Oakes, 1985) In this study, students in all four high schools are, to some degree or another, tracked. We believe that tracking is the most significant barrier to problems of isolation encountered by many Type II students.

At the classroom level, teachers' attitudes as well as pedagogical practices can mitigate, to some extent, students' feelings of isolation. For example, teachers who students perceive as caring, considerate, and open often create classroom environments

that foster the free exchange of ideas. Further, classes that are structured to encourage and promote student/student interaction also facilitate students' ability to connect with their peers, thus promoting their chances of feeling personally valued. Unfortunately, our observations confirm other research findings which document the overwhelming tendency for teachers to talk and students to listen. (Goodlad, 1984; Sirotnik, 1983)

In our study, perhaps the program with the most potential to impact students' feelings of isolation is PEP (Personal Effort for Progress), a district-wide program in place at both Maple and Canyon High Schools. This four-year, regularly scheduled class targets ethnic minority and economically disadvantaged youth by providing focused academic instruction and tutorial support in an environment where students are encouraged to develop mutually supportive peer networks. Participation in PEP increases students' confidence that their friends will reward them for their efforts in high track classes (rather than labeling them as "sell-outs"). In addition, because PEP provides students with information about colleges and achievement tests it also addresses issues of inequality with respect to cultural capital (a problem described by 25% of Type II students). Notably, none of the PEP students mention lack of access to information as a problem.

Type III: Different Worlds/Border Crossings Difficult

Like Type II youth, some type III students also express fear of being isolated in their classes. However, because many of these students move from class to class with

their friends in regular or remedial tracks, isolation is sometimes mitigated.[7] Indeed, some even choose to remain in lower track classes specifically to be with their friends. However, for 68% of Type III students--those whose worlds are different and find border crossings difficult--frustration and worry about not understanding content material is of primary concern. (See Table I)

> Jamie, black female, Canyon: Some books are hard to understand and comprehend. They have regular words in it, but you like still don't understand the meaning of it. Some people, they can understand that they be easy for them, like 'Oh this book ain't nothing.' [OR08STD:776-782]

Comprehension difficulties arise from a number of sources. For immigrant students, language problems as well as lack of access to individualized teacher assistance can create tremendous strain. Chieu Huynh, a recently arrived Vietnamese student at Explorer High School, describes having to compete with classmates for scarce teacher and tutor time.

> (DO YOU ASK FOR HELP?) I ask her for help, but I still don't understand it. I try to see the teacher but there are so many people. I can't ask him. Every problem is hard to understand, so I can't ask him every single problem. There's so many people in line. There's only one teacher. I don't get my turn, so I don't go in. So I get further and further behind. I can't catch up. [ES42:125-149]

For others, skill levels are low and pedagogical styles are unsuited to meet their needs:

> Regina, Mexican American, Explorer: Sometimes I don't understand, sometimes it's just I don't want to do it, or mostly because I don't understand it. ...I always need someone [especially English] to like go over the example or whatever. Cause he will just read them out of the book as he gives the page and he goes on and on and on and I don't know where he's at. I'm lost and I give up. I'm just 'ok.' He keeps on talking. I just pretend I'm reading. [ES54STC:549-561]

---

[7]Type III students in our study include one white male, one white female, two Vietnamese males, three Vietnamese females, three Hispanic males, four Hispanic females, three black males, one black female, and one Palestinian male.

Students' comprehension difficulties are exacerbated by course content which they find boring, teaching styles that don't take advantage of their strengths, and low expectations which stem either from the belief that they are incapable of doing well or that they willfully choose not to do so. Inability to concentrate, tuning out, viewing school as boring--all are consequences that occur when students have difficulty understanding material in classes where teachers fail to perceive students' learning needs. Some students adapt alternative (and maladaptive) means to cope with the frustrations they feel, i.e., copying friend's work, creating disruptions in class, or withdrawing quietly from the classroom, the teacher, other students.

Students say that teachers who are sensitive and empathetic to problems they encounter in mastering subject matter knowledge make a difference in their feelings about school and their ability to achieve academically. Students' comparisons of classes also serve to illuminate teacher attributes that create bridges to understanding. For example, Andrea compares her current algebra teacher, in whose class she is earning an A, to her algebra teacher a year ago in whose class she received an F.

> Andrea, Vietnamese/Chinese female, Explorer: [My current algebra teacher], he's very nice and he helps you in any way. And he explains every problem. He gives you about two quizzes before a test and that really helps. But [last year] Ms. Rupert, she just gives you a test and it's really hard to understand and it doesn't seem to cover the material that she covered in class. [ES48STD2]

From Andrea's perspective, teacher encouragement and personalized attention were particularly significant when she began to lag behind. Andrea's comments give voice to the work of others researchers who stress the significance of teachers who exhibit caring

and personalized relationships with their students. (LeCompte & Dworkin, 1991; Richardson, et al, 1989)

At the school level, the availability of supplemental resources to assist students with content mastery (i.e., peer and adult tutoring programs) are also important. Students at Canyon and Maple (Montevideo District) say that tutors are instrumental in helping them with specific subject matter content. Others, are hampered by both external and internal constraints (i.e., transportation schedules, embarrassment at their deficiencies, lack of knowledge that such services are available). Because of budget constraints, such services are not available to youth at Explorer and Huntington. With the exception of one Vietnamese and three Spanish tutors at Explorer (in place to specifically help immigrant students), no outside tutorial resources are available at either of the two schools in the Bolivar School District.

All of the type III students are well aware of the implications of failing grades and most (63%) say they worry a lot about their uncertain future. Further, all say they very much want to graduate. Although frequently teetering between passing and failing, these are <u>not</u> students who reject the educational system unilaterally. To the contrary, they seem to have internalized, to some extent, cultural messages which stress the importance of education for obtaining access to future opportunities. Often doing well in one or two classes and not so well in others, some teachers view these students as lazy, recalcitrant, and uninterested.

Type IV: Different Worlds/Border Crossings Resisted

Although our sample does not include the most alienated, troubled, and extreme at-risk students (i.e., those in gangs, in trouble with the law, etc.), all of the students in Type IV, those whose worlds are different and resist crossing borders, are at-risk of dropping out of high school prior to graduation due to low grades and lack of course credits.[8] At the same time, 90% of these students report that a primary source of anxiety stems from their concern and worry about an uncertain future. (See Table I) Contrary to the popular belief that students who are failing don't care, many (80%) express discouragement and despair knowing that their chances of making it through high school are not good. However, unlike Type III students who struggle to achieve, most Type IV youth in our sample have simply given up (with respect to completing course work). Many blame themselves. Others alternate between self-blame and criticism of both the dominant cultural ideology that "anyone can make it," and a system generally unresponsive to their needs. This "contradictory consciousness" is similar to that voiced by the dropout youth described by Fine (1991).

None the less, many of the youth in our study cling to the hope that they will graduate and often develop elaborate and unrealistic rationales to protect themselves from the hopelessness they feel, i.e., "Even if I have to stay here [in high school] six years I'm going to graduate." However, such plans do not eliminate fear and uncertainty. Many appear to be paralyzed and feel impotent about what to do. Although they know that they should do well in school, their continued failure serves as a reminder that they

[8]The ten students we have identified as Type IV include three white males, one white female, one Vietnamese male, four Hispanic females and one Hispanic male.

are incapable of achieving within school-defined parameters of success. Many appear to simply "drift" away--a concept described by LeCompte and Dworkin (1991).

Related to student's concerns about an uncertain future is the fact that many Type IV students (40%) report that they receive little help or assistance, either with regard to course selection or career possibilities.

> Sonia, Mexican, Explorer: OK, well last year I didn't have no idea of what I wanted to take. Because you know, I mean you have to have so many credits for this, so many credits for that, so many credits for college and all kinds of stuff like that. And I go 'Well if I do get to go to college I have to have these requirements?' I was always worried about what I was taking and everything. But I didn't know what I had to take or anything. That was last year. I choosed them myself. I just chose whatever. I didn't talk to nobody. [EX56STD:2685-2696]

At Explorer and Huntington, assistance is particularly hard to come by. Assist and Link (programs in which 20-30 students are assigned to one teacher for four years) have replaced counselors as a means of providing students with information on course requirements, career options, college application procedures, tests, and so on. Unfortunately, the help that students receive is idiosyncratic to the particular Assist or Link teacher to whom they have been assigned. We find that many students receive little, if any, assistance in thinking about their future. "Basically what they tell us is what classes to take and what your GPA should be, but that's about it." [HT34STD:577-580] In some cases, a student's assigned Assist or Link teacher barely knows who they are. For example, Ivonne, the only high-achieving, transported, Hispanic female across Huntington's high track classes reports that her Assist teacher expressed surprise when he inadvertently noticed (after two years of having Ivonne in his Assist period) that she was in advanced level classes.

The one other formal structure at Explorer which helps students align their high school courses and credits with long-range goals occurs at the end of students' sophomore year, when a district academic counselor meets with students to help them develop a course plan for their remaining two years of high school as a part of the SB813 state mandate. Students' perceptions of the usefulness of this one-time intervention varies. In fact, one low-achieving, Hispanic female (Type IV) at Explorer describes the mismatch between this service and her needs.

> ...she asked me 'What did I want to do when I got out of high school?' 'Did I want to go to college?' And she asked me 'For what?' And I go 'To be a veterinarian,' and she said, 'Well with these grades you won't be able to.' And that's all she said. She didn't say what I can do to bring them up or what I can do after I get out of school and what college I can go to for what, she didn't say nothing about that. She just said I can't go to college for what I wanted to be, cause my grades are too low. She said I would have had to get straight As all during my freshman--from my freshman year. [EX40STD:866-884]

At Maple and Canyon the situation appears different with respect to available help and information about future options. In both of these schools counselors take an active role in repeatedly talking with students about their immediate and long-range educational plans, including a required meeting (which often includes contact with parents to advise them of their child's educational status), again as part of the state-mandated (SB813) effort to insure that students are meeting requirements for high school graduation. Meeting with someone they already know, is quite different than meeting with a stranger. In addition, Maple High School also participates in the Student Opportunity and Access Program (SOAP), a statewide consortium made up of major county institutions. The program hires three people--one a UC Adobe Viejo student, one an Adobe Viejo State student, and one from the SOAP office--to work with under

represented youth of color at various high schools (many of the students we have identified as Types II, III and IV). Program personnel target students repeatedly--course selection and implications with respect to college application are discussed with ninth and tenth graders, while juniors and seniors are given direct assistance with college admissions tests, financial aide information, and the college application process. If college is not a choice, other options are discussed as well.

Finally, for those students eligible for PEP (discussed earlier), specific attention is given to helping students gain the "cultural capital" necessary to obtain future goals. PEP in particular addresses students' concerns about their future.

Interestingly, nearly three-quarters (70%) of Type IV students describe difficulties with a least one or two teachers (in comparison to approximately 30% of students in the other category types). From their perspective, they are singled out and 'picked on' for reasons of ethnicity, gender, behavior, values and beliefs, and/or personal attributes. Saul Valencia, a Mexican American transfer student to Explorer, describes being pushed to the breaking point in his history class.

> Well, we didn't get along [the teacher and I] when I first went in there. He asked me how come I didn't have a history class at Caulfield [High School]. And I go 'I just didn't.' Cause I was in low classes at Caulfield. And then he started yelling at me, he's all, I should have had a history class, I should have asked for it and all this. And I go, 'Don't yell at me.' I just told him straight off, 'Don't yell at me.' And he got all mad and 'Saul, go sit in the back of the room.' So I sat in the back of the room. He never passed me out any papers. I was there for I think about a month and he didn't give me not one.
>
> And then one day we had to do a collage. And he gave me that paper, he's all 'I don't think you'll do it, but I'll give it to you anyway.' And I did it and he gave me an F. I did it good too. I put all the stuff about war and peace...I put some pictures from Time magazine and stuff, you know grenades and then I put peace and I put flowers and stuff. He gave me an F. Some guy that did worse than

mine he gave about a B. I just took it and ripped it. He's all 'At least you got a grade.' I do 'Yeah, it's an F.'

And then the next day I just went in there and he started yelling at me. And I just started yelling back. He said [that] I was a smart aleck and I just started yelling. I couldn't handle it anymore. I had to sit in SIS [School In-House Suspension] for the rest of the year. [ES39STC:447-494]

Other Type IV students, like Sonia, a Mexican student at Explorer High School, are sensitive to issues of race and ethnicity, interpret teacher comments as racist, and feel personally devalued:

Yeah it's weird, 'cause most teachers, you know--white teachers, some of them are kind of prejudiced. (WHAT MAKES YOU KNOW THAT?) It's probably the way they look at you, the way they talk, you know when they're talking about something--about something like when they talk about the people who are going to drop out, and they ...look around, look around [at you]. ...

And then Mr. Kula, when he's talking about teenage pregnancy or something like that. He turns around and he looks at us. It's like--he tries to look around the whole room, so we won't notice but like he mostly like tries to tell us, tries to get it through our heads you know. Sometimes I think he's prejudiced. And sometimes I think he's trying to help us. [ES56STB:1890-1913]

Further, students' descriptions of teacher actions and comments illustrate the use of humiliation techniques which apparently some teachers believe will motivate students to perform.

Sonia, Mexican, Explorer: And I was sitting down looking for my papers because I just barely walked in and--not even a minute ago--he walks by and he goes--he points at me and he goes 'nonworker' and then he point at those two girls and he goes, 'the talkers' and then he point at all these white people and he goes 'the worker, the worker, the worker,' and I just like, you know, 'what is it?' You know. [ES56STB:1945-1956]

None of the schools in which we work have formal structures for "resolving" conflicts between students and teachers, although some students report that other adults in their school environments (i.e., VP Discipline, a counselor, another teacher) are

willing to listen to their views, thus diffusing the anger and resentment they feel. However, in most cases, school structures (i.e., In-House Suspension) are designed as punitive means to maintain compliance to norms rather than resolve conflicts which occur.

Pressures and Problems/Family World

The literature abounds with descriptions of adverse conditions in student's families that affect their ability to engage in school settings. However, it is noteworthy that the most frequently cited family stress by students in this study (78%) is that their parents pressure them to do well in school. (See Table II) This is true across student types, where at least 75% of parents in each category type urge their children to raise their grades, do well on tests, complete their homework, or at least pay attention and attend to school matters. Further, parents' emphasis on academic achievement is forceful and consistent enough to cause their children to feel uncomfortably stressed. (In actuality, more than 75% of parents urge their children to do well in school, but a number of students do not report experiencing undue pressure as a result.) These findings, while contrary to common beliefs that many parents are not concerned with their children's school performance, support the work of other researchers who continue to point out that most parents do indeed care about their children's education. (Delgado-Gaitan & Trueba, 1991; Goldenberg & Gallimore, 1991)

There are, however, substantial differences between students in the category types with respect to whether or not their parents' emphasis on achievement is accompanied by

TABLE II

FAMILY RELATED PRESSURES AND PROBLEMS BY STUDENT TYPE (N = 55)

	TYPE I Congruent Worlds Smooth Transitions		TYPE II Different Worlds Transitions Managed		TYPE III Different Worlds Difficult Transitions		TYPE IV Different Worlds Transitions Resisted		TOTAL	
	(N = 10)	%	(N = 16)	%	(N = 19)	%	(N = 10)	%	(N = 55)	%
Achievement Pressures (Total)	8	(80%)	12	(75%)	15	(79%)	8	(80%)	43	(78%)
Parents who help	8	(80%)	8	(50%)	1	(5%)	2	(20%)	19	(35%)
Parents who are unsure what to do	0	(0%)	4	(25%)	14	(74%)	6	(60%)	24	(44%)
Family Conflict (Total)	1	(10%)	9	(75%)	9	(76%)	7	(70%)	26	(47%)
Non-physical family conflict	1	(10%)	5	(50%)	6	(60%)	2	(20%)	14	(25%)
Extreme fam. conflict resulting from member's involv. in physical, sexual & substance abuse	0	(0%)	4	(25%)	3	(16%)	5	(50%)	12	(22%)
Family disapproves of friends, boy/girlfriend	2	(20%)	2	(13%)	9	(47%)	1	(10%)	14	(25%)
Major household, childcare, and/or family business responsibilities	0	(0%)	6	(38%)	8	(42%)	2	(20%)	16	(29%)
Pressure to uphold cultural values and expectations in conflict with school or peer expectations	2	(20%)	8	(50%)	7	(37%)	3	(30%)	20	(36%)
Family liaison to outside world due to language and cultural differences of parents'	0	(0%)	3	(19%)	6	(32%)	3	(30%)	12	(22%)
Divorce	0	(0%)	6	(38%)	2	(11%)	3	(30%)	11	(20%)
Illness of a family member	1	(10%)	2	(13%)	3	(16%)	1	(10%)	7	(13%)
Death of a family member	1	(10%)	0	(0%)	2	(11%)	2	(20%)	5	(9%)
Worried about sibling(s), e.g. possibility of alcohol, drug abuse, peer influence	2	(20%)	5	(31%)	6	(32%)	4	(40%)	17	(31%)
Economic Stress										
Family Level	0	(0%)	9	(56%)	7	(37%)	3	(30%)	19	(35%)
Personal Level	2	(20%)	6	(38%)	5	(26%)	0	(0%)	13	(24%)
Family Instability, e.g. mobility, shifting household configuration	0	(0%)	4	(25%)	4	(21%)	3	(30%)	11	(20%)
AVERAGE PRESSURE PER STUDENT (BY TYPE)	1.9		4.5		4.4		4.0		214	3.9

* Note: The average frequency of family pressures for Type I students (1.9) is approximately half that reported by Types II (4.5), III (4.4) and IV (4.0).

their ability to assist their children in matters pertaining to school, i.e., assistance on homework assignments, communication with teachers and school officials, filing college applications, etc. For example, 80% of Type I students say their parents assist them with school-related matters, i.e., with specific course content, intervention with teachers, and facts about college. The following examples are illustrative of the types of help these students receive.

> (HELP WITH COURSE CONTENT) Mark, white male, Canyon: If I have really hard questions [about calculus], I'll ask my dad. But unfortunately, my dad knows so much more than the calculus teacher does that calculus is a second language to him, so everything is so easy for him and so complicated for me. [OR04STB:690-696]

> (INTERVENTION WITH TEACHERS) Beth, white female, Maple: She [mother] keeps on calling and telling her [Spanish teacher], asking her if she can have us talk more. ...She [the teacher] just says that oh she's going to do it, she's going to do it. She just says all that and then my mom just made another appointment [to talk to the teacher].

> (FACTS ABOUT COLLEGE) Wendy, white female, Explorer: (HOW ABOUT COLLEGE WENDY? WHO DO YOU GO TO FOR INFORMATION ABOUT THAT? My mom. I ask her. And I ask my dad cause he went to Bishopville Polytech. And I talk to him about that. I ask my mom about interesting things that I would like to do. Cause I don't want to get stuck in a job I don't like. [EX47STD:1981-1992]

In contrast, only one Type III student (5%) and two Type IV students (20%) report that their parents are knowledgeable enough to assist them, even though they pressure them to do well. The following response is typical.

> Jamie, black female, Canyon: See my sister was the first girl that went to college. ...So I'm the second girl and there's like a stress on me in a way because they're like 'What's your grades? What's your grade point average Jamie?' And I tell them I get a "D" and 'Oh God! You can do better!' And I'm like, 'I'm trying. I'm trying,' you know. [OR08STD:532-550]

Further, many Type III and IV students also bear responsibility for assisting their siblings in matters pertaining to school.

> Donna, Mexican American, Huntington: I'm like a second mom at home, okay? And that's a tradition, ...when my mom's not home, and even when she's home, they ask me to help them with their homework and stuff, and my mom can't do it, you know, cause she didn't go to high school. [RA52STEN:510-522]

Bridges to minority parents are sorely lacking at both Explorer and Huntington where parent-involvement strategies continue to target primarily middle-class parents, ignoring minority parents who are concerned, but are either uncertain of the steps to take or espouse a different style of parent participation. In contrast, efforts to involve parents at Canyon and Maple involve counselors and teachers in outreach to low-income and minority communities. While these efforts are admirable, they are also infrequent. Bridges to insure minority parent's involvement, in all four schools, continue to be few and far between.

The fact that some parents can and do intervene on behalf of their children while other families lack the knowledge and skills to do so illustrates vividly differences in students' access to "cultural capital." (Bourdieu, 1977) Moreover, many Type III and IV students must deal with parents who stress achievement but do not possess the knowledge and skills to assist them in school-related matters. A good number of Type II students (25%) also face this problem.

With respect to other family pressures, interviews confirm that many young adults are not without circumstances frequently cited as prevalent in many of today's families. For example, nearly 50% of the students report that family conflicts impinge negatively on their psychological well-being, interfering, more or less frequently, with their ability to

concentrate in school. These students say that at times, they are severely distressed over family controversies which range from heated verbal conflicts, to alcohol induced fights, to physical abuse and other intense, confrontational situations between family members. At the same time, they are well aware that many teachers are disinclined to consider the problems they have.

> Manuella, Mexican/Filipino American, Maple: Students have problems inside. Sometimes you have a personal problem that you really can't stand it, you know, and you just don't want to do anything. And then maybe if you told your teacher, 'look, I'm going to take this [schoolwork] home,' you know, and this and that, and 'I have a problem,' and [teacher] 'Oh, you have a problem. Why don't you leave your problems at home? This is school.' [VA22STD:1056-1067]
>
> All the teachers should be a little sensitive--our personal lives really do affect us in school and I know it's not supposed to be the place to take care of it, but you know, if it's the only place we have. [VA22STC:246-252]

Bridges which assist students in handling problems emanating from their lives outside of school are found in programs and services which connect students' with appropriate mental-health services, student support groups designed to address common concerns, and adults who are willing and able to listen. The students in our study at Explorer receive little help. Without counselors to identify students in need, most are left to face difficult issues alone. Although an outside mental-health professional is on-site periodically, none of the students in our study were aware of her presence. Further, seeing a counselor for personal problems is antithetical to beliefs and experiences of many youth. At Explorer, bridges to the few services available (including efforts to increase students' understanding of the benefits of counseling) are essentially non-existent.

While there are no counselors at Huntington, three of the students in our study did receive assistance from the VP of Guidance (the one person available for 1200 students). In one case, a student was aggressive enough to ask for help, while two others were identified and referred by classroom teachers. However, at both Explorer and Huntington, "chance" appears to play a major role in the identification of students who desperately need help.

In contrast, students at schools in the Montevideo District (Canyon and Maple) all received, at least some assistance, with family-related concerns. Personal contact with counselors resulted in the referral of students to outside mental-health resources and inclusion in school-run support groups (i.e., children of alcoholics). For example, Maria describes the help she received from her counselor following a traumatic event at home:

> Hispanic, Female, Maple: I'm having problems at home. My dad's an alcoholic, and he just has such a short temper. My problem...I was dating this guy. He's 20, but older for me. And my dad found out about it, and he got really upset. He hit me, and he tried to kill me...My hair was long and he cut it with a knife. He had the knife to my throat...[VA19STD: 20-34]
>
> (AT SCHOOL, WHO CAN YOU TALK TO MARIA?) Miss Intell, my counselor....I told my friend that day, then next day when we came to school - my hair - I just put it up in a pony tail. She seen me that I - my eyes were red, and I cried all that night. I didn't even cry when he hit me, 'cause I was too angry, but that night, I cried all night long...
>
> My friend got really worried, and she got scared and went to the counselor and said, 'I have a problem with my friend and her dad tried to kill her.'...my counselor took me and my sister and talked to us with the nurse and everything...she counseled us. She helped us through it, and she put us in a group for alcoholic parents - girls with alcoholic parents and they called social service, I think to protect us [if] he ever did it again. [VA19STD:316-370]

While taking different forms, family conflicts appear to cross-cut student types. It is remarkable, however, that 19 of 26 students who report stress from family situations continue to function in school (that is, maintain passing grades). In fact, 10 of 26 are high achieving students in advanced track classes.

Still another pressure for some students is their parent's view that they should uphold cultural traditions and behaviors which sometimes conflict with norms and expectations in their peer and/or school worlds. Over one-third of the students in our study say this is true (many whose cultural backgrounds are different than the mainstream).[9] For example, with respect to school, the following issues can arise: cultural norms which hold teachers in high regard, thus requiring respectful behavior which precludes asking questions, speaking out, challenging ideas (expectations common in some classrooms); cultural beliefs which emphasize the importance of modesty, thus contending with physical education requirements for students to suit-up and shower together; cultural values which stress the importance of academic study and the irrelevance of extracurricular activities[10]; and belief in the omnipotence of the family with respect to transmitting specific knowledge, i.e., sex education, appropriate male and female role behaviors, etc.

When these and similar issues arise, students are caught in a bind between family and school. In many cases, teachers' lack of knowledge about the lives and culture of

---

[9]This could happen, as well, with families whose religious beliefs are in opposition to norms or ideas promoted in school.

[10]We have also found that many minority parents, unfamiliar with extracurricular events, worry when their children do not return home immediately after school.

their students' causes them to misinterpret students' responses. Further, without bridges to connect minority parents with school, the ability and opportunity to negotiate solutions is curtailed.

Other pressures and problems reported by students confirm the variety of stress producing situations faced by many of today's adolescents. Illness of a parent, severe economic circumstances, death of a family member, divorce, and family instability are only some of the ills that impact the mental health and functioning of these young adults--particularly with respect to their ability to profit optimally from their school and classroom environments.

Pressures and Problems With Peers

For the most part, students across types say that with their friends, they can be themselves. Rather than encountering constant pressure and conflict, students congregate with young people with whom they can relate. Perhaps most important, being with friends provides a fresh release from family and school pressures. These students' descriptions confirm the work of other researchers who point out the many positive aspects of adolescent peer relationships. (Csikszentmihalyi & Larson, 1984; Ianni, 1989; Savin-Williams & Berndt, 1990)

The following responses are typical:

> Ryan, white, high achieving, Explorer: Yeah, when I'm with them [friends], like we can do just about anything we want. You don't have to worry. When you're just with them it's like there's no real rules. [ES37STB:535-543]

> Trinh, Vietnamese, high achieving, Huntington: Friends are important because I can talk and share things that I wouldn't normally with my family. I can tell them

things and they would see both sides of the story unlike when I tell my parents, and they usually just speak of their point of view.

Friends seems to see things more clearly because they can relate to it more; whereas, the parents see things how it was when they were that certain age...I feel more comfortable with [friends] because I have the same interests, whereas, if I got with my parents, many times, my ideas will not coincide with theirs. [With friends], I can be myself without worrying of their high expectations of me. I can act silly without having them stare at me and think I'm children like in the family world. [HT30 - essay]

Although often comfortable with their friends, students across types speak of the pressure they experience from peers to participate in behaviors which worry adults (cutting classes, drinking, excessive partying, etc.). (See Table III) Nearly 30% of the total number of students report pressure from friends to engage in actions which adults in their lives do not condone. Clearly, with respect to school, tardies and truancies are especially problematic for students at risk of not graduating.

Extracurricular school programs (i.e., sports, drama, social events, and government) which involve students in activities with their friends are instrumental in providing opportunities for positive peer interaction. Although such programs are present in all four schools in which we work, some are threatened by recent (California) state budget cuts. Also, bridges to involve students frequently utilize strategies most comfortable and familiar to mainstream youth. At the classroom level, we find little to compete with the advantages students find among their peers. In fact, for the most part, teachers fail to take advantage of students' orientation towards their friends. For example, encouraging students to work in groups, fostering discussions in which students talk and listen to each other, and encouraging students to help and assist each other on class assignments are pedagogical methods infrequently used.

TABLE III

PEER RELATED PRESSURES AND PROBLEMS BY STUDENT TYPE (N = 55)

	TYPE I Congruent Worlds Smooth Transitions		TYPE II Different Worlds Transitions Managed		TYPE III Different Worlds Difficult Transitions		TYPE IV Different Worlds Transitions Resisted		TOTAL	
	(N = 10)	%	(N = 16)	%	(N = 19)	%	(N = 10)	%	(N = 55)	%
Conflict with friends	2	(20%)	1	(6%)	3	(16%)	2	(20%)	8	(15%)
Pressure to participate in socially defined unacceptable behav., e.g. cutting, drinking, drugs	2	(20%)	3	(19%)	7	(37%)	4	(40%)	16	(29%)
Oppositional school behavior, e.g. pressures against "acting white" or "selling out" which stems from working hard in school (Ogbu, 1987)	0	(0%)	1	(6%)	2	(11%)	1	(10%)	4	(7%)
Maintaining high academic standards of group	3	(30%)	1	(6%)	2	(11%)	0	(0%)	6	(11%)
Worried about friends' well-being, e.g. pregnancy possible suicide, drug abuse, family problems	3	(30%)	2	(13%)	3	(16%)	2	(20%)	10	(18%)
Pressure to assoc. with own ethnic group members	1	(10%)	0	(0%)	2	(11%)	0	(0%)	3	(5%)
Expected to maintain the symbolic markers of ethnic grp., e.g. support grp members in conflict	0	(0%)	0	(0%)	3	(16%)	2	(20%)	5	(9%)
Discrimination, e.g. feel devalued because of culture, ethnicity, language	1	(10%)	8	(50%)	6	(32%)	4	(40%)	19	(35%)
Fear of violence	1	(10%)	1	(6%)	3	(16%)	2	(20%)	7	(13%)
AVERAGE PRESSURE PER STUDENT (BY TYPE)	1.3		1.1		1.6		1.7		7.8	1.4

*Note: There is little difference in the average frequency of peer pressures across student types. Overall frequency of peer pressures for all students (1.4) indicates that students experience less pressure from peers than they do from their family (3.9) or their school worlds (2.6).

Perhaps the most striking and disturbing finding with respect to pressures that students say emanate from peers is that over one-third of all students (20 of 55) talk about repeated incidents of discrimination in their school environments. (All 20 are students of color.) These incidents take the form of direct verbal or physical assaults, racist comments which are overheard, implicit messages which exclude minority students from participation in or access to resources and/or space available to others. Such incidents cause strain and distress. Marian, a high achieving Filipino student at Huntington, describes it like this:

> You get kind of discrimination from all sides, you know. From whites and from a lot of Mexicans, cause they really hate Asians...Cause a lot of gang members will go, 'This was our land, and the Asians are taking over,' and everything. The Japanese are--everyone is Japanese to them or Vietnamese. It's really messed up, so...There's a lot of discrimination in this school. (SO IT'S NOT AN EASY FEELING OF BEING ABLE TO REALLY MINGLE WITH...) No, you have to be a certain way, I guess if you want to mingle. But no, you can't do that. [RA34STC: 1588-1637]

Elvira, a high achieving Filipino student at Canyon gives a more personal example.

> And well, most of the people here are friendly. There are a few that are like kind of not. ...I don't know, I guess they are not willing to integrate or they don't really want to. Sometimes I'm fine. But like walking with a friend, there are these two guys and they're like saying, 'New York City, here comes de' program.' [Referring to Elvira and her friend as transported students.] I hate that, it's like 'Oh my god,' and I try to ignore them but...[CA09STA:113-128]

Although students at all four schools describe discriminatory behaviors by peers, it is particularly noteworthy that 16 of the 20 students who report such incidents attend Explorer High School. Although our sample was not selected to make direct comparisons across schools, interviews and extended observations in the school settings suggest that the peer group climate at Explorer is characterized by tension, hostility and rigid boundaries between student groups. (Phelan, Davidson & Cao, 1992) Below,

several students from Explorer High School speak emotionally about the prejudice they experience.

> Rosa, Mexican American female: It's like--I don't mean this to you or nothing but a lot of the white people like to stay to themselves. Like they're scared to touch us or something...They would really give you hard looks because of your skin, and they try to talk about you, and they don't understand that all Mexicans don't speak Spanish. They walk around you...(AS IF YOU WEREN'T THERE?)...Yeah. Or they just stare at you like you're an alien or something. I don't know, just a lot of kids here [at Explorer] are racist against Mexicans and Blacks. [ES40STC:22-27-75-87]
>
> Saul, Mexican American male: [If] you're a Mexican, you know, they'll like kind of leave you out, kind of push you out, push you out, push you away from what they're talking about. I don't know why, it's just how it is. [ES39STA:620-629]
>
> Andrea, Vietnamese/Chinese female: I'd like to play with Americans, but they hate Vietnamese so we hate them. [ES48STB:1320-1324]
>
> Duc, Vietnamese male: The American kids are very mean. They are prejudiced. They never associate with the Vietnamese. They play with their own group. [ES53STD:140-147]

Tensions, hostilities, and direct encounters with racism perpetuate stereotypes, foster misunderstandings, and thus serve to maintain rigid and impenetrable borders which block interaction between student groups. Students respond to discrimination from their peers in a number of ways. Some internalize the hostility and often yield to an overwhelming sense of hopelessness. Others react with anger and attribute stereotypes to all other members of a particular group (i.e., gringos). Still others ensconce themselves in protective groups and separate themselves as much as possible from peers that are culturally different. Many of these students also avoid taking classes without their friends. Finally, some students attempt to hide who they are and "fit in" with the mainstream crowd.

Rampant discrimination in school environments has school-wide consequences as well. For example, discriminatory acts can push students towards peer group norms which are anti-school success. Further, tension and stress resulting from racist and hostile comments diverts students' attention away from academic goals. Here again, barriers to fostering positive attitudes among cultural groups is hindered by classroom practices which fail to encourage student/student interactions, by school level polices which condone tracking, and by discipline policies which unwittingly "pit" students against each other. [11] While all four schools in which we work sponsored events such as "International Day," these sporadic attempts to promote cultural exchange are limited and few. Further, without more concerted and widespread efforts (i.e., to modify Euro-centered curriculum, to change traditional classroom practices, and to impact overall school climate) these events serve only as arenas in which predominate views and behaviors are played out.

> Javier, Mexican, Explorer: Here I feel that no Hispanic has any control. They think they have some, but they don't. Not one, not one Hispanic has influence. (CAN YOU GIVE ME AN EXAMPLE?) Well, here, some guys go around in gangs. And there are Americans, how is said? 'Gringos' (laugh), that also go around in gangs. And they don't ever speak to the Mexicans. The day that was Open House, no, not Open House, International Week, we made food, tostadas, and we were all in a big circle, all of us who were selling outside with table. And we were selling, but we were [excluded] out of the [main] circle...Like I said, none of us has any influence. I think that we need a Hispanic principal. [ES38STD:206-239]

[11] See Davidson (1992) for a description of how discipline policies can adversely affect student relationships.

Conclusion

In this article we identify a variety of pressures and stresses which students say affect their lives. The problems that young people face emanate from a variety of sources. However, regardless of source, most problems have the potential to negatively impact students' ability to engage productively and optimally in school and learning endeavors. Using the Students' Multiple Worlds Framework and typology, which includes four prototypic adaptation and transition patterns, we find significant variation in the types and frequencies of problems for different types of youth. For example, students whose worlds are congruent and transition smoothly (Type I) report tremendous stress from teachers and parents to achieve academically--that is, to maintain exceptionally high grades and test scores. For Type II students, those whose worlds are different but manage transitions relatively successfully, the pressure to achieve is also great. However, in addition to experiencing pressure to achieve academically, many of these youth also express tremendous discomfort in high track classes where they feel isolated and alone. Uneasy with peers who they feel devalue who they are, silenced by their perceptions of unequal power relationships, and fearful of standing out, many of these students feel compelled to hide major parts of who they are--namely their ethnic selves. Still other pressures arise for Type III youth--those who find transitions between different worlds difficult. For these students, many of whom are determined to "make it through" high school, worry about understanding course content material creates a constant strain in their lives as they teeter between passing and failing grades. This finding negates the common belief that marginal students do not care about their

academic success. And finally, Type IV students, those for whom transitions are the most difficult, are burdened with the knowledge that their futures are uncertain and that their chances of graduating from high school are slim. However, rather than receiving help and assistance, from their perspective, many of these students contend with teachers who single them out unfairly and a system that fails to provide them with information relevant to future possibilities.

While problems vary across the four student types we have identified, it is important to note that all young people report pressures and stress powerful enough to divert their attention, interest, and commitment from school. In other words, even students least likely to be considered "at risk" experience, at times, circumstances and events which hinder their ability to engage fully and productively in school. There are other commonalities across student types as well. For example, all students talk about the importance of being connected to at least one caring and empathetic adult in their school environment. When this occurs, students are more likely to obtain the specific help and resources they need. In our study, many students are essentially invisible to the adults in their school environments. (This is true of students who are doing extremely well and are therefore perceived as having no problems, as well as students who are doing poorly but who are inconspicuous because of their lack of participation and quiet behavior.)

Finally, all of the students in our study talk about the importance of the quality of interactions between students and among student groups. While minority youth speak poignantly of the discrimination they experience, their white mainstream counterparts

describe their fear and misunderstanding of those different than themselves. We feel it is critical for educators to focus energy and attention on students' relationships with each other, for it is the quality of these relationships that frequently impact adolescents' ability to connect with school settings.

The research we report here is significant for increasing our understanding of the nature and origin of the pressures and stresses with which students contend. As educators attempt to build optimal learning environments for all youth, we feel it is critical that students' voices and concerns be taken into account as pedagogical strategies, programs, and services are developed and implemented.

REFERENCES

AAUW Report. (1992). How Schools Shortchange Girls. American Association of University Women Educational Foundation.

Abi-Nader, Jeanette. (1990). 'A House for My Mother': Motivating Hispanic High School Students. Anthropology and Education Quarterly, 21(1), 41-58.

Blumenthal, S.J., & D.J. Kupfer. (1988). Overview of Early Detection and Treatment Stategies for Suicidal Behavior in Young People. Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 17, 1-23.

Bourdieu, Pierre. (1977). Outline of a Theory of Practice. Translated by Nice, Richard. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Burnett, Andre. (1990-91). Youth Survey: An Analysis. Palo Alto Youth Council.

Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly, & Reed Larson. (1984). Being Adolescent: Conflict and Growth in the Teenage Years. New York: Basic Books.

Davidson, Ann Locke (1992). The Politics and Aesthetics of Ethnicity: Making and Molding Identity in Varied Curricular Settings. Doctoral Dissertation, Stanford University.

Delgado-Gaitan, Concha, & Henry Trueba. (1991). Crossing Cultural Borders: Education for Immigrant Families in America. New York: The Falmer Press.

Dryfoos, Joy G. (1990). Adolescents at Risk: Prevalence and Prevention. New York: Oxford University Press.

Eisner, Elliot W. (1985). The Educational Imagination: On the Design and Evaluation of Educational Programs. New York: Macmillan Publishing Company.

Feldman, S. Shirley, & Glen R. Elliott (Eds.). (1990). At the Threshhold: The Developing Adolescent. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Fine, Michelle. (1991). Framing Dropouts: Notes on the Politics of an Urban Public High School. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Fordham, Signithia. (1991). Peer Proofing Academic Competition among Black Adolescents: 'Acting White' Black American Style. In C. E. Sleeter (Ed.), Empowerment through Multicultural Education (pp. 69-94). Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Gispert, M., K. Wheeler, L. Marsh, & M.S. Davis. (1985). Suicidal Adolescents: Factors in Evaluation. Adolescence, 20, 753-762.

Goldenberg, Claude, & Ronald Gallimore. (1991). Local Knowledge, Research Knowledge and Educational Change: A Case Study of Early Spanish Reading Improvement. Educational Researcher, 20(8), 2-14.

Goodlad, John A. (1984). A Place Called School. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Gray, Jacquelyn (1985, March 17, 1985). A Black American Princess: New Game, New Rules. The Washington Post.

Heath, Shirley Brice. (1982). Questioning at School and at Home: A Comparative Study. In G. D. Spindler (Ed.), Doing the Ethnography of Schooling: Educational Anthropology in Action (pp. 102-131). New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston.

Heath, Shirley Brice, & Milbrey W. McLaughlin (Eds.). (in press). Possible Selves: Achievement, Ethnicity, and Gender for Inner-City Youth. New York: Teachers' College Press.

Huff, C. Ronald (Eds.). (1990). Gangs in America: Diffusion, Diversity, and Public Policy. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.

Ianni, Francis. (1989). The Search for Structure: A Report on American Youth Today. New York: The Free Press.

Johnson, Davis W., & Roger Johnson. (1981). Effectivs of Cooperative and Individualistic Learning Experiences on Interethnic Interaction. Journal of Educational Psychology, 73, 444-449.

LeCompte, Margaret D. (1987). The Cultural Context of Dropping Out: Why Remedial Programs Fail to Solve the Problems. Education and Urban Society, 19(3), 232-249.

LeCompte, Margaret Diane, & Anthony Gary Dworkin. (1991). Giving Up on School: Student Dropouts and Teacher Burnouts. Newbury Park, CA: Corwin Press, Inc.

Lepper, Mark R., & David Greene (Eds.). (1978). The Hidden Costs of Reward: New Perspectives on the Psychology of Human Motivation. Hillsdale, N.J.: Lawrence Earlbaum Associates.

McCord, Joan. (1990). Problem Behaviors. In S. S. Feldman, & G. R. Elliott (Ed.), At the Threshold: The Developing Adolescent (pp. 414-430). Cambridge: MA: Havard University Press.

Moore, Joan. (1978). Homeboys: Gangs, Drugs, and Prison in the Barrios of Los Angeles. Philadelphia: Temple Univeristy Press.

Moore, Joan. (1991). Going Down to the Barrio: Homeboys and Homegirls in Change. Philadelphia: Temple Univesity Press.

National Institute of Drug Abuse. (1987). National Survey on Drug Abuse: Population Estimates, 1985. Rockville, Md.: National Institute on Drug Abuse.

Neira, Christian. (1988). Building 860. Harvard Educational Review, 58(2), 337-342.

Oakes, Jeannie. (1985). Keeping Track: How School Structure Inequality. New Haven, CN: Yale University Press.

Pease-Alvarez, Lucinda, & Kenji Hakuta. (forthcoming). Perspectives on Language Maintenance and Shift in Mexican-origin Students. In P. K. Phelan, & A. L. Davidson (Ed.), Cultural Diversity: Implications for Schools and Learning.

Phelan, Patricia K., Ann Locke Davidson, & Hanh Thanh Cao. (1991). Students' Multiple Worlds: Negotiating the Boundaries of Family, Peer and School Cultures. Anthropology and Education Quarterly, 22(3), 224-250.

Phelan, Patricia K., Ann Locke Davidson, & Hanh T. Cao. (1992). Speaking Up: Students' Perspectives on School. Phi Delta Kappan, 73(9), 695-704.

Prawat, Richard W. (1989). Teaching for Understanding: Three Key Attributes. Teaching & Teacher Education, 5(4), 315-328.

Reingold, Janet R. (1989). Current Federal Policies and Programs for Youth . Youth and America's Future: The William T. Grant Foundation Commission on Work, Family and Citizenship.

Richardson, Virginia, Ursula Casanova, Peggy Placier, & Karen Guilefoyle. (1989). School Children At-Risk. New York: The Falmer Press.

Rumberger, R. (1983). Dropping Out of High Schools: The Influence of Race, Sex, and Family Background. American Educational Research Journal, 20(2), 199-220.

Savin-Williams, Ritch C., & Thomas J. Berndt. (1990). Friendship and Peer Relations. In S. S. Feldman, & G. R. Elliott (Ed.), At the Threshold: The Developing Adolescent (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Scarcella, Robin. (1990). Teaching Language Minority Students in the Multicultural Classroom. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc.

Sharan, Shlomo. (1980). Cooperative Learning in Small Groups: Recent Methods and Effects on Achievement, Attitudes, and Ethnic Relations. Review of Educational Research, 50(2), 241-271.

Sirotnik, Kenneth A. (1983). What You See Is What You Get--Consistency, Persistency, and Mediocrity in Classrooms. Harvard Education Review, 53(1), 16-30.

Slavin, Robert E. (1988). Cooperative Learning and Student Achievement. In R. E. Slavin (Ed.), School and Classroom Organization (Hillsdale, NJ: Erklbaum.

Slavin, Robert E., & Nancy A. Madden. (1989). What Works for Students at Risk: A Research Synthesis. Educational Leadership, Feb., 12-14.

Sleeter, Christine E. (Eds.). (1991). Empowerment Through Multicultural Education. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Spindler, George D. (1987). Beth Ann--A Case Study of Culturally Defined Adjustment and Teacher Perceptions. In G. D. Spindler (Ed.), Education and Cultural Process: Anthropological Approaches (pp. 230-244). Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, Inc.

Spindler, George, Louise Spindler, Henry Trueba, & Melvin D. Williams. (1990). The American Cultural Dialogue and Its Transmission. London and Philadelphia: Falmer Press.

Trueba, Henry T. (1988). Peer Socialization among Minority High School Students: A High School Dropout Prevention Program. In H. Trueba, & C. Delgado-Gaitian (Ed.), School and Society: Learning Content Through Culture (pp. 201-217). New York: Praeger.

Trueba, Henry T., L.C. Moll, S. Diaz, & R. Diaz. (1982). Improving the Functional Writing of Bilingual Secondary Students (Contract No. 400-81-0023). Washington, D.C.: Natinal Institute of Education.

Vigil, James Diego. (1988a). Group Process and Street Identity: Chicano Gangs. Ethos, 16(4), 421-445.

Vigil, James Diego. (1988b). Barrio Gangs: Street Life and Identity in Southern California. Austin: University of Texas Press.

Vogt, Lynn A., Cathie Jordan, & Roland G. Tharp. (1987). Explaining School Failure, Producing School Success. Anthropology and Education Quarterly, 18(4), 276-286.

Weis, Lois, Eleanor Farrar, & Hugh G. Petrie. (1989). Dropouts from School: Issues, Dilemmas, and Solutions. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Wetzel, James R. (1989). American Youth: A Statistical Snapshot . Youth and America's Future: The William T. Grant Foundation Commission on Work, Family and Citizenship.

Youth and America's Future. (1988). The Forgotten Half: Pathways to Success for America's Youth and Young Family . Youth and America's Future: The William T. Grant Foundation Commission on Work, Family and Citizenship.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI)
Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC)

NOTICE

REPRODUCTION BASIS

☐ This document is covered by a signed "Reproduction Release (Blanket)" form (on file within the ERIC system), encompassing all or classes of documents from its source organization and, therefore, does not require a "Specific Document" Release form.

☑ This document is Federally-funded, or carries its own permission to reproduce, or is otherwise in the public domain and, therefore, may be reproduced by ERIC without a signed Reproduction Release form (either "Specific Document" or "Blanket").