Learning to be Bad and Mexican

Management of Identities and Behavior in a Texan High School

Trine Halstadtrø Syverinsen
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Thank you, thank you, thank you…….

This is probably the section I have been looking forward to writing the most. When progression was slow and painful I looked forward to telling everybody who read this thesis (and I imagined there being many of them) that it came from my own sweat and tears, maybe even blood – without much help from anyone else. When progression picked up, usually always after conversations with bright-headed fellow students and/or department staff, I wanted to write this thank you to warm the hearts of all the people who indulged in my mood swings and I-can-never-do-this-depressions, and repeatedly showed me the way to renewed effort. Among these are not only fellow anthropologists, but also the people who have always been there, loving and supporting me, much more in spite of than because of. This is going to be the page where I try to partly make up for 28 years of pig-headedness and more-than-occasional ego-centrism, and where I try to find the words that will let them all know what I have come to learn a long time ago: That this could not have been done without them.

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Introduction

And through this description I have tried to answer the question which sent me to Samoa: Are the disturbances which vex our adolescence due to the nature of adolescence itself or to the civilisation? Under different conditions does adolescence present a different picture?

Coming of Age in Samoa, Margaret Mead ([1928](2001:10))

The material for this thesis has been collected through fieldwork in Austin, Texas in the USA, during the period from June to December 1999. During this period I visited one public high school, to be referred to as *Anglo High* in this thesis, daily from August to October, and then irregularly after that. The reason why visits became more infrequent after late-October was that the social work organization, *SWO* in this thesis, closed its office at Anglo High after this date. This office was where I was conducting the majority of the conversations with the kids who provide most of the voices for this thesis. From October, and throughout the remaining period, I started visiting a different high school, *Charter School* in this thesis, instead. The material collected here will sometimes be used independently, and sometimes as a contrast to observations made at Anglo High. The names for kids, schools and organizations have been changed to ensure anonymity.

The questions that sent me to my “Samoa” were similar to those voiced by Margaret Mead in the quote above. After several years of working with kids in Norway I wanted to use my period of fieldwork to examine views and opinions relating to kids’ everyday school-life in a different society, which was at the same time similar. I wanted to learn about opinions held by different individual *kids*, different groups of kids, and their *adult* in-school authorities. How do these experiences and opinions differ from each other, and what controls and influences the social processes inside a school? Both *management of identity* internally among the kids, and those labels externally ascribed by adult councilors and mentors, and *management of behavior* – and especially such behavior that was frequently associated with some kind of *risk* – be that a risk for the individual, the school, or even for large-scale society.

Not to reveal, nor simplify, too much in the outset – the italics presented above are key concepts to the following text: *Kids and Adults, Management of identity, behavior* and *risk.*
My first priority was to say something about kids, or *adolescence* in Mead’s term, but in the same process I found it both natural and necessary to say something about what Mead calls *civilization* – in this case different aspects and levels of the American society.

Understanding "Youth": Youth Problems and Problem Youths

Come mothers and fathers
Throughout the land
And don't criticize
What you can't understand
Your sons and your daughters
Are beyond your command
Your old road is
Rapidly agin'.
Please get out of the new one
If you can't lend your hand
For the times they are a-changin'.
Bob Dylan[1] *"The times they are a-changin'"*

In her book *Violence in the life of Adolescents,* Martha B. Strauss (1994, and Appendix I) provides a list of some Self-Help books for her readers, because, as she says: "(t)he publishing market generated by problems of adolescence is staggering" (ibid:203). I have included this list in appendix I of this thesis. Several things struck me with the list presented. For one, it gives no specification of the reference made to *problems of adolescence* – what problems, and for whom? Secondly, her list of Self-Help books contains one and a-half page of books for adults dealing with adolescents, and only half a page of books for adolescents. This might provide some answers to for whom this is perceived to be a problem. And last - of the eight books listed for adolescents, four of them had the word *survive* in the title. The parent's list had titles including words like *decoding*, *key, survival kit, first aid, guide, ten steps* as well as *understanding*. The majority of the books therefore present this period of life as one that is supposed to be deciphered by adults through some clever strategy, and one that is to be survived and endured by kids. These are not views exclusive to the book mentioned. Rather they are representatives of a common opinion that views adolescence with concern and unease. Part of my hope for this thesis is that it will give some nuance to the *unavoidable crisis* mentality, and the *quick fix* search.

Anthropological literature addressing issues related to youth and/or young people has traditionally dealt with the transitional aspect of this group, as seen from the position of the established community. Adolescents have been portrayed as occupying an intermediate position, either through being seen as *incomplete adults* on their way to full societal membership, or as executers and possessors of *knowledge and cultural practices* that are unavailable to the adult public (Wulff 1995). The magic, mystery and exotica of both this

[1] Dylan's lyrics. http://orad.dent.kyushu-u.ac.jp/dylan/timchang.html [Accessed Nov 20th 2002]

liminal state and the transition observed when a child becomes an adult, the *rites des passage* (Turner 1969), has been, if not sole representations of the social life of this group, then at least largely dominating. Rules and strategies for marriages, the establishing of new households, challenges facing groups of young *neophytes* during exclusion from the larger community, and rituals involving tattoos and circumcisions have been discussed to exhaustion by traditional anthropology. Problems of, and for, youths, the way we acknowledge them today, did not become much of a concern for anthropology before the whole discipline turned its eyes on western (and urban) post-industrialized societies, and its post-industrial problems. Additionally, anthropology had been close to mute when it comes to what happens when the neophyte fails in his attempt to become a successful warrior, or the girl refuses to marry her mother's-brother's-son. However, it can be argued that criticism against exoticism, as well as functionalism, is (too) easily available in regards to early anthropological writing, and, also, there are exceptions, like Margaret Mead's study of young girls in Samoa (Mead [1928] 2001). Mead, and her *culture and personality* view, combined current psychological and anthropological perspectives, and used them to argue that personal and societal problems should be increasingly understood within a cultural context, and that the focus should be shifted from one of explanations based on "the nature of adolescence", to one based on the nature of "civilisation" (ibid:10). She compared her study of young girls in Samoa to the problems experienced in and by representatives of the American society, and returned with the conclusion that adolescence does not necessarily have to be stressful, but that what is making this period difficult for kids in America is closely related to an abundance of *choices* available, and conflicting *demands* made from the community.

The same way that early anthropology can be accused of functionalist presentations of societies and communities in stasis, it can be claimed that psychology, and more recently also sociology, have been overly attentive to what happens when things do not go according to plan – emphasizing deviance, resistance and the risks and dangers of growing up in (post-) modern urban societies. Through this perspective, adolescence becomes the last battlefield where your biological-, cultural- and class-dispositions can be addressed. Adolescence is presented as the time when your genotype is transformed and changed to a phenotype, whose nature is reliant on skillful maneuvering between good and bad influences and judgments. It is a crucial time for the individual, as well as for the society that harbors him or her. Even if there are nuances within, and differences between, academic traditions, with the functionalistic and static perspective of early anthropology, and the personal inner-drive

perspective of some biologists and psychologists, the shared view of treating and understanding youth or adolescents both as a largely homogenous group, or category, with distinct shared traits, values and motivations, *and* as a greatly troubled or *at risk* part of any population, is something that has accompanied most (well-meaning) anthropologists, psychologist and sociologist on the journey from the bush and the test-labs to the western urban landscape of inner-city high schools and street gangs.

Historically, age has always been a factor for social differentiation. Looking to the USA, since this is the locus of this study, the post-war period, and especially the 1950'ies and 60'ies, was the time when young people for a number of reasons were most notably being recognized as a demographic group. For one, in 1964, 17-year olds were the largest age cohort in the USA, with the following implications for them as targets for marketing campaigns and their potential as political pressure groups (Lipsitz 1994:212). Young people were, at the same time, fighting for their country in Vietnam, and to stop the war and promote civil rights at home. They were to an increasing degree attending colleges, and this, together with the emergence of the "free love" of the hippie movement, women's liberation and the availability of birth control, young people were seen as both engaging in some adult (sexual) activities, while at the same time delaying others (marriage and work). Young people were increasingly perceived, both by young people themselves and by their parents, as leading different lives, and embracing different ideas and values than that of their parents' generation.

The term *teenager* is originally an American term, even if it is not as frequently used anymore. One explanation for this could be that youths in the western world today usually retain their status as youths for a long time still after their 19th birthday. Youthfulness has become something to be desired by everyone. In this thesis I will usually refer to my informants as *kids*, since this is the term most frequently used both by the kids themselves, and the teachers and social workers working with them. Sometimes I will also use the term *my kids*. This is done primarily because this was how I referred to them, both during and after my fieldwork, but also to separate between my kids, or informants, and references made to kids in general. The term *kids* usually refers to younger youths than those going to college, or joining the army, but with the increased recognition of youth as a demographic category, the dangers, demands and privileges of *youthfulness* have not only extended upwards into the 20'ies and 30'ies, but has also come to include younger kids, who would previously have been regarded as children. Part of the moral panic voiced with regards to the problem of

adolescence is that children are growing up too fast, and thereby needing increased protection from perceived dangerous youth phenomena, for which they are not ready. The kids in this thesis are all 14, 15 and 16 years old. I have not spent much time, space or effort on placing them within any age-specific hierarchy, since this was not a matter of importance to my kids, being quite close in age. If anything should, or can, be said about "kids in general" it is probably that age is usually one of the most important methods or criteria for social stratification. The bypassing of this particular discussion in this (particular) thesis should therefore not be interpreted as a failure to recognize that kids are not just kids, but that they differentiate each other on the basis of several different criteria, one of them being age.

Youth Culture: Youth as Cultural 'Other'

The Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS), University of Birmingham, has published a wide range of research material during the 1970'ies (Hall & Jefferson 1977, Willis 1993). Most of this research sees youth's cultural practices as a societal *subculture,* which can be interpreted into a Gramscian ideological perspective. Youth's cultural production, or better: the cultural production *recognized* as particularly youthful, is through this view interpreted as expressions of working class resistance. Paul Willis (1993), for one, sees working class kids' particular cultural expressions as a more or less conscious way of rebelling against the middle-class establishment on behalf of their working-class parents. He also claims that in the same process the kids, or *Lads*[2]*,* end up culturally and socially handicapping themselves, through culturally and socially *reproducing* the power structure they are opposing. *Youth culture* seen from this perspective becomes a way of addressing social injustice *as well* as natural residing youthful opposition and resistance.

Where *youth cultures,* or *youth sub-cultures,* have been interpreted and explained through concepts of *class* by both the CCCS and other British social theorists (i. e. Brake 1985), youth culture in the USA is more commonly interpreted and given meaning through a debate on *race* and *ethnicity* (Wulff 1995). This is concurrent with other claims made for the necessity of difference in emphasis on *class* and *race* in these countries (Giménez 1992). It will be my argument that to some degree, the concepts of class and race in British and American youth theory are synonyms applied to different cultural settings. They both say something about subordination and marginalization today in these different cultural settings. Studies on *youth*

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[2] This is Willis' name for his group of working-class kids (Willis 1993).

cultures in the USA, somewhat generalizing, can be said to deal with groups of kids who not only belong to ethnic or racial minorities, but also to criminal street gangs in poor, inner-city neighborhoods (see Vigil 1988, Monti 1994, Romo and Falbo 1996). And European youth research is increasingly focusing on immigrant- and minority-status among disadvantaged youth (Ålund 1991). Race, ethnicity and minority status is used to address and discuss inequality and subordination in the USA, which sees itself as a classless society. The exclusion of class as explanatory tool for why some groups experience repeated and reproduced economical disadvantage, calls for other analytical concepts. The difference between attention paid to *working-class* kids in earlier British writings, and to racial or ethnic *minority* kids in American writings can therefore on one level be seen as a pseudo-debate, in that it addresses similar circumstances faced by disadvantaged kids. On the other hand it can be argued to be an important point made, in that it addresses important ideological differences between the British/European and the American society.

Some identities tend to be expressed and experienced as *imperative* identities, through a dialectical process of external and internal ascription (Barth 1969, Jenkins 1996). Age-group identities are usually only considered imperative when kids or old people are considered. This perceived, and expressed, special position of kids as belonging together in a largely homogenous age-specific group also entails a large degree of *otherness*. This perception of otherness, in combination with the proposed common perception of youth as something uncontrollable and as something natural oppositional, takes part in "contaminating" youth-identities with a social *stigma* (Goffman 1990). The term stigma, according to Ervin Goffman, refers "to […] signs designed to expose something unusual or bad about the moral status of the signifier," and also as "the situation of the individual who is disqualified from full social acceptance." (ibid:11, 9). Youth's, or kids', ascribed and experienced degree of *badness* will be one of the core arguments of this thesis.

The argued imperative nature of a stigmatic youth-identity also inhibits adoption or expression of other identities, indicating that youth-identity is similar to what Ulf Hannerz (1980) calls *role-discriminatory attributes* (ibid:152), meaning that this identity, or *attribute,* works so that other identities are interpreted through and into existing categories. They are adopted by, and fitted into an existent set of qualities, or refused on reasons that they do not fit – meaning this is not how kids are. The effect can be that every action any kid engages in, and any expression of culture, is interpreted as *youth culture.* The consequence of this is that

everyday, mundane, non-age-specific activities are undercommunicated in attempts made to understand youth.

The term *youth culture* has been applied in different ways. Michael Brake (1985) claims that *youth culture* is not something monolithic, but rather a "kaleidoscope of several subcultures". In addition to relating it to "class position", he also understands it as an "attempt to resolve collectively experienced problems resulting from contradictions in the social structure" (ibid:ix). In their book *Youth Cultures: A Cross-cultural Perspective* editors Vered Amit-Talai and Helena Wulff (1995) proposes a cross-cultural perspective that addresses common expressions and experiences between groups of youth, or kids, in different societies, and with an increase in attention paid to *cultural agency,* thereby questioning the fruitfulness of perspectives that are exclusively attentive to resistance (Wulff 1995:15, Amit-Talai 1995:226). Additionally, to avoid having kids seen as only incomplete adults, Amit-Talai and Wulff proposes the use of *youth culture* to mean "cultural processes formed by young people" (Wulff 1995:6).

Proposing a view of *youth culture* that better mirrors the view of *culture* in general, rather than that of sub- or counter-culture, best used to describe what separates most kids from most adults, or one social class from another (as in Hall & Jefferson 1977), is a point well made. If, however, culture is to be understood as multiple, and more usefully interpreted through activities than communities (Amit-Talai 1995), indicating that cultural processes formed by young people constitute *youth culture,* the question might be raised of what is *not* youth culture, and if so, what meaning is left in applying such a term. Also, the particular field of interest for this study is the everyday setting of a high school, a setting where adults control most activities. To then apply the term *youth culture* to the ways kids interact with each other and adults, but tentatively separate this from those processes formed by adults might be both difficult and unwanted. In addition to kids *cultural agency* this thesis will also deal with individual strategies for positioning and recognition. Retaining the use of the term *youth culture,* without apparent analytical benefits, might also participate in additional ascription of *radical alterity* (Keesing 1994) or "otherness" to youth as category, thereby increasingly dichotomizing kids and adults. I do not propose to omit the fact that the youth period in any one's life can be one of hardship and turmoil, the bio-psychological changes of puberty and

the challenges and demands connected with creating a successful social identity and status[3] within a complex social arena being some of these trials, situations which indeed most of the youth population have to face. Still, I question the universal existence, and extent, of a generational gap, and propose that the so-called *youth problem* might be understood as just as much an adult-society construction as a natural occurring phenomenon. The very term *youth* has come to naturally trigger thoughts of rebellion and delinquency, and this *sex-drugs-and-rock'n' roll-* image is being reproduced by both the mass media and much of the academic literature published. In this thesis, both in words and in intent, the radically different *youths* are substituted with regular *kids.*

My kids have been categorized as "at risk" kids[4]. Why this happened to them is one important question, but additionally interesting it is to explore how such a label influences kid's identity management. What purpose does such a labeling serve, and what are the personal consequences for kids who grow up wearing this label? I want to argue that the everyday aspect of kids lives needs to be increasingly investigated in order to achieve an understanding of not only the possible extreme consequences of a young life in progress, but also the mundane day-to-day interaction between kids and their families, friends and teachers. Such an insight might both lead to a re-evaluation of the "risks" at hand, and to a new understanding of causes and effects of experienced problems between generations and (sub-) cultures.

Learning to Be: Paul Willis' and Douglas Foley's School Ethnographies

The main reason why this thesis is called *Learning to be Bad and Mexican* is because two of the studies that have influenced my analysis the most have been Paul Willis' *Learning to Labour* (1993 [1977]) and Douglas Foley's *Learning Capitalist Culture* (1990). Emphasis of the word "Learning" both addresses the fact that my fieldwork is done within the context of a public school, as is also Willis' and Foley's, and it indicates that something other than textbook knowledge is taught inside the school. In Anglo High, one of the most important "extra-curricular" subjects taught can be said to be that of ascription and incorporation of ethnic and "trouble" identities to minority kids.

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[3] The term *status* will sometimes be used in connection with, and as a supplement to, *identity* throughout this thesis. It will mean a position or identity that is recognized (or labeled) by certain others, and entailing rights or duties towards these others (Eriksen 1993).

[4] The use and purpose of the term "at risk" will be explained shortly.

Paul Willis's study is well known, and recognized, as one of the first school ethnographies that took working class kids' choices and actions into account when trying to describe and understand why things turn out the way they do for kids who as a group experience little in-school success. Willis, although associated with the CCCS, is also recognized as one of the first important critics of this perspective, which somewhat simplified can be accused of portrayed working class kids' subcultures as both a natural and a futile resistance against class-based domination (see for instance Hall & Jefferson 1977). Willis' see his group of working class boys in an industrial city in post-war Britain, the *Lads,* as indeed experiencing domination within the middle-class institution of the school, but he also addresses how some of the trouble and difficulties they experience are results of the actions they choose, and the counter-school culture they produce. According to Willis, in refusing to value mental labor, as an expression of opposition to the experienced oppressiveness of the school, and thereby embracing manual labor, the Lads also produce what he calls *limitations* that prevent them from *penetrating* the dominant ideology. These limitations are therefore explained by Willis as part of their own culture, and that:

> ”(…) we may say that there is an element of self-damnation in the taking on of subordinate roles in Western capitalism. However, this damnation is experienced, paradoxically, as true learning, affirmation, appropriation, and as a form of resistance” (Willis 1993:3).

Even if Willis recognizes that dominant ideology partakes in reproducing the Lads' subordinate position, he also argues that the Lads' expression of counter-school culture takes part in preventing them from improving their own position, both inside the school and within large-scale society.

Paul Willis' approach to explaining school failure seems initially to be blaming working-class kids for their own misfortune, or the working-class for its own subordination, somewhat along the lines of the disputed theory of Oscar Lewis (1968), who explained economic and societal difficulties experienced by Puerto Rican immigrants in New York, as constituted by elements within their own culture, dubbing it a “culture of poverty”. This is, however, not Willis' main agenda. Through his theory the school is presented as a middle-class institution, embracing middle-class values, and the Lads are refused to participate on their own terms. In having their cultural forms or expressions refused, or disapproved, the kids' reaction is one of opposition and their cultural expressions become counter-school cultural. Seeing the school as

a middle-class institution, providing the boundaries and rules for expression and choice of cultural practices, has a high correlation to seeing the school as what Gramsci would have called a *hegemonic* institution, where subordination is structurally reproduced, and where the only real options presented for working class kids can be said to be one of going down quietly, or of going down while kicking and fighting.

> Hegemony works through ideology, but it does not consist of false ideas, perceptions, definitions. It works primarily by inserting the subordinate class into the key institutions and dominant order. It is, above all, in these structures and relations that a subordinate class lives its subordination. (Gramsci 1978:164)

The "kicking and fighting"-strategy becomes preferable. Doing something is usually preferable to doing nothing. Acceptance of being subordinated is, according to Willis, not something that describes capitalist society, but rather paints a feudal picture. Capitalism is where subordinate groups opposes and re-acts against their subordination. Even if their counter-school culture was partly self-damning, doing nothing would not have provided success either, due to the hegemonic nature of the school as institution, but would rather have created a different form of failure.

Douglas Foley (1990) has taken the scope and theory of Paul Willis, and applied it to a rural, ethnically diverse Texan town, North Town, and its high school. *Learning Capitalist Culture* is both a community ethnography and school ethnography. Foley underlines that even if large portions of the book are devoted to reviewing and criticizing Willis' theory, *Learning Capitalist Culture* is still a book that is greatly influenced and inspired by Willis, who also has written the foreword for the book.

Foley sees American high schools as "sites for popular cultural practices that stage or reproduce social inequality. The school is a cultural institution where youth perform their future class roles in sports, youth groups and classroom rituals" (ibid:xv). Schools are therefore educational institutions in more than one ways to Foley. Both in the traditional scholarly way, *and* in that it teaches American popular *cultural practices* and *ideals*, and enacts future *class roles.* In other words, it is also a "Learning" of subordination. The social scene of the high school is dominated by middle-class White kids who, in Foleys view, have become such skillful impression-management artists that they have lost a little of their

humanity. Foley sees capitalist culture as having a "corrosive effect on human relationships" (ibid:155).

Foley argues that his main informants, who constitute a group parallel to Willis' working-class *Lads,* the Mexican working-class *Vatos,* do not primarily produce a counter-culture that unfortunately results in self-damnation because it produces limitations, but rather that they try to play the game of the American (White) middle-class – and fail. In my experience, with my kids, I agree with Foley in that my group of *Bad kids,* who are similar in many ways to both Willis' *Lads* and Foley's *Vatos,* do not create a separate culture with separate values and practices that leads them to failure, but that their failure is primarily to be understood as a failure to (be allowed to) play the game endorsed by mainstream American culture. Philippe Bourgois (1995) addresses the same topic in his book on crack-dealers in East Harlem, New York. According to Bourgois, the main reason that his subjects are involved in an illegal drug-economy is because they are structurally refused access to the mainstream, legal economy, largely because of their minority and poverty status. Dealing crack therefore becomes an alternative strategy, counter- (or anti-) social in nature.

I do not, however, necessarily agree with Foley that one of the main problems for my kids are that they are "stripped of their ethnic identity" (ibid:161). It will be part of my argument that ethnicity on the contrary can be seen as heavily ascribed and labeled, as well as inscribed with a social stigma. As Goffman (1990) states, "the stigmatization of those in certain racial, religious and ethnic groups has apparently functioned as a means of removing these minorities from various avenues of competition (…)." (ibid:165) Foley's position, urging freedom to, or recognition of, particularity and difference as ways of redressing injustice might be seen as supportive of an *essentialist* argument, which arguably partakes in reifying difference, even if this is not his main agenda. Also, it mirrors the position of many contributors to the *multiculturalism* debate (Taylor 1994, see also Fraser 2001), which I will argue is deserving of much of the critique it receives from Nancy Fraser (2002), when she argues that calls for recognition are mostly different claims for only one type of recognition, that of *group specificity,* which would benefit from being substituted with *participatory parity.* In participatory parity lies a right to not only be "created equal", but to be allowed to partake on equal terms.

I will use Foley's and Willis's theories throughout this thesis to attempt to analyze the different processes involved in the managing of negative or stigmatizing identities, and the role of both kids and adults in the maintaining and reproduction of social inequalities within the school as social institution.

Being "At risk" and Bad

Almost all the kids that I talked to during my fieldwork, at both Anglo High and Charter School, had for one, or several, reasons been identified or designated as "at risk" of dropping out of school by the Austin Independent School District (AISD). The origin and characteristics of this term is described by Harriet D. Romo and Toni Falbo (1996) in their book *Latin High School Graduation: Defying the Odds.*

> In 1984 the Texas 68th Legislature, Second Called Session, passed House Bill No. 72, Chapter 28, which radically reformed education (…). Specifically, the number of courses required for graduation was increased; a program of minimum-competency tests was established, which students had to pass in order to graduate; the attendance requirements for receiving course credit were strengthened; and the "no pass/no play" rule was instituted, which meant that students who failed a course were unable to participate in extracurricular activities. After 1984, school districts complained about the impact of the new education laws on dropout rates. They argued that many students were giving up rather than knuckling down to meet the new standards, and consequently the dropout rates were increasing. In response, the Texas Legislature enacted a dropout law in 1987. Among other things, the law required school districts to report dropout rates according to a common statewide definition, to create a dropout prevention plan, and to designate someone in the district as dropout coordinator. In addition, the law required each district to identify students "at risk" of dropping out according to the common statewide definitions and notify the students' parents of their status and of the programs and/or services which could help the "at risk" student.
>
> (Romo & Falbo 1996: 4)

"At risk" kids are designated as such by the schools and the school districts, on the request of the state, to be able to control and monitor how both schools and kids perform. More kids are dropping out and being designated as "at risk" now than before the passing of the new Bill in 1984, indicating that being "at risk" is not just a product or a result of kids' over all lack of academic skills, but that it is also a results of the demands made by the school and the state. Kids that were passing an acquired number of classes and earning sufficient credits before this Bill was passed might now be "at risk" kids. Parents are notified by letter that their kids are considered "at risk", and with an explanation of what the reasons are for this categorization.

> In order to be designated as "at risk", a student had to possess at least one of the following characteristics:
>
> - Retained at least one grade.
> - Scored two or more years below grade level in reading or mathematics, according to norm-referenced standardized tests.
> - Failed at least two courses in one semester and was therefore unlikely to graduate in four years since beginning the ninth grade.
> - Failed at least one section of the statewide standardized test designated to ensure that all high school graduates have basic skills.
>
> During the three years of our study [1989-1992: my comment], the percentage of students designated as "at risk" of dropping out ranged from 41% to 46% of all seventh to twelfth graders in the school district[5]. A greater proportion of the Hispanic (54% - 60%) and African American (59%-61%) students were identified as "at risk" then were Asian Americans (34% - 40%) or White American (25% - 31%) students. (Romo & Falbo 1996: 7)

With over 40 percent of the student population being designated as "at risk", this is obviously a category that not only includes delinquents, or kids with a long history of complex academic-, family- or community-related problems. Within this category are also many "regular" kids, struggling to live up to the high standards set by the state. On the other side of the spectrum, some of the "at risk" kids do not actually attend school, at least not every day. Some of them have already dropped out, but have yet to be counted as dropouts by the official statistics. The kids presented in this study are all among the 40 percent "at risk" population, but they all attended school every day, with few exceptions. Also, my freshmen[6] kids were 14, and my sophomore kids were 15 or 16, indicating that none of them had been retained for more than maximum one year.

Of the "at risk" population, some but not all were referred to the Social Work Organization (SWO), which had an office that was open every day at Anglo High, until the program closed in October. The women working there, Angela and Faith, would only have case-files on referred "at risk" kids, but would never refuse a kid to just come and hang out, even if he or she was not part of their case-load and might even not be designated as "at risk". Of the kids that were referred to the SWO, some came every day, some came occasionally, some came

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[5] At Anglo High school, the percentage of "at risk" students was just over 40 % in 2000. This web-page reference will not be given, to ensure anonymity of Anglo high school.

[6] High school students are called *freshmen* their first year in high school, *sophomores* the second, *juniors* the third, and *seniors* the last year.

only when Angela or Faith sent out a pass that excused them from class, and some would not come no matter what.

All my kids in Anglo High were Mexican[7], with the exception of one Black kid, Martin, and all but two, Maria and Elena, were boys. In Charter School I got access to White, Black and Mexican students, and also quite a few girls. As can be seen from the statistic presented by Romo & Falbo (ibid) above, twice as many Mexican kids as White kids are designated as “at risk”. At Anglo High, approximately 1/3 of the students were Mexican and close to 2/3 were White. The percentage of Black students was just over 5 percent. Mexican and Black students in Anglo High came from a poorer neighborhood and were generally recognized both by teachers, social workers and students as being poorer and having less academic success. Also, Mexican and Black students had a lower percentage of students who passed the TAAS[8] in the sophomore year.

My main point attempted made in this section is that most of my kids in Anglo High occupied some categorizational middle ground. They are “at risk”, which over 40 percent of all the kids are. They are still in school, but they experience academic difficulties. Even if they have not been retained significantly, either a teacher or a parent has seen the need to refer them to SWO, where they go regularly, but spend much of the time just hanging out, joking and laughing. They are also categorized as ethnic Mexicans, but they are “old” Mexicans, with American born parents and with perfect English skills, and little or no Spanish. They live on the East side of Austin, which is considered the “worst” neighborhood in Austin, but in attending a somewhat high-profile school like Anglo High, they are still seen as being better off than many of their neighborhood friends who attend minority-majority schools. In terms of behavioral or discipline difficulties, my sophomore kids would get in trouble quite frequently, but usually not severe trouble. Some of them claimed to have some experience with the police and the courts, but most of them stayed out of trouble.

In addition to exploring the reasons and effects of falling (or being pushed) into this official “at risk” categorization, this thesis will also deal with a more commonsense use and apprehension of the term *risk* and *trouble*. What constitutes these risks? How is trouble

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[7] The use of the term “Mexicans” for American citizens will be elaborated shortly.
[8] Texas Assessment of Academic Skills, the same as what Romo & Falbo (1996) refers to as “statewide standardized test”.

evaluated? And by whom? Some of my kids, and most of them being part of the first lunch period freshmen students, were considered to be *Good kids,* both by school staff, other students and themselves. And others, the second lunch-bunch sophomores, were seen to generally constitute trouble, or to be *Bad kids.* Part of what I want to discuss in this thesis is how the factors contributing to a designated "at risk" status, school failure as a result of poverty or minority identity, also influences how kids are perceived - and judged by school staff and peers.

Are we currently living in what Anthony Giddens (1991) calls a *risk-society*? Is perceived risk evaluated normatively by mainstream society's standards? And how does this determine the perceived need for surveillance and control? - as addressed by for instance Michel Foucault (1977), Mary Douglas (1992, 2002) and John Devine (1996). This will be discussed at length later in this thesis. What are the differences between normative references of *Good* and *Bad* made by teachers and social workers to identify and describe risk, and the same terms when used as strategies for achieving recognition by kids? What can this dialectic process of identity and risk management tell us about the everyday life of the kids in question?

Being Mexican

I will not discuss at length here the vast differences regarding nationality, citizenship and length of stay in the USA included in the terms *Mexican American, Hispanic, Latino* or *Mexican*. As an outline, I will only mention that most of my kids came from families residing in the USA for at least two generations, and most of them three or four. They all spoke perfect American, and most of them told me that they did not speak Spanish at all. Only a few of them mentioned that they had family in Mexico. Among those who did talk about their family and its relation to Mexico was Esteban. He told me that his uncle lived there, and he and his family often went down to visit during the summer holidays. Anna spoke Spanish at home, and her parents were first generation immigrants.

Attitudes towards immigrants among some of the kids were, at least to me, surprisingly hostile. One day Javier was talking about this *"immigrant that had so much money, it's not even funny".* Even if Javier looked similar to this "immigrant", and would most likely be grouped together with him in the all-embracing categories of being Hispanic or Mexican, he himself made a clear distinction between his status as American, and the status of the (il)legal immigrant. During a different episode, a fight almost broke out between some of 'my kids'

and some other Mexican kids, because the phrase *wet-back* was used, although it was used jokingly. Wet-back is a derogatory term used about illegal immigrants from Mexico, indicating that their backs are still wet after having swum across the Rio Grande. It is quite likely that my kids used this incident to pick a fight with someone they considered less tough, to prove their own toughness, but it is also likely that since they were seen as being more "trouble" and "at risk" than the other group, that they were also more likely to be associated with the "wet-back" term. Length of stay in America therefore obviously has some importance in terms of identifying with different groups and categories. There is an aspect of assimilation and integration as well as purely primordial cultural, ethnic and racial factors.

In everyday speech, as well as in available literature, a wide range of terms and categories are used for American citizens with some kind of real, imagined or ascribed South American or Latin American origin. In Texas, over 90 percent of those officially, and nationally, referred to as *Hispanics* originate from Mexico (Romo & Falbo 1996). Terms often used as supplements or substitutes for *Hispanic* are *Latino, Mexican-American* (with or without a hyphen), *Chicano, Tejano* and *Mexican*. I will try to be consistent in using the latter one when addressing my material collected in interaction with the kids, since this was the one used by my kids – and since it in my view is the most transparent of them when it comes to hiding and revealing reasons for ascriptive characteristics. In addressing official categorization and racial and ethnic identity politics however, the terms are used interchangeably by most, and I have no hope or intention of being the first one to untangle this mess. Therefore, I will use both the term *Hispanic* and *Mexican American* when addressing statistics for instance, and also when referring to other informants who use these terms. The multitude of categories available, and the categorization process as such will be dealt with in chapters to come. Suffice to say for now, is that my kids were *Mexicans*, both as self-ascribed and labeled identity. And that most of their everyday actions either confirmed or challenged the content, expression or fulfillment of this identity, as defined by them or others, but presented very few challenges to the category itself. Being tough, Bad or "at risk" was not seen by most as a direct product of being *Mexican*, but these statuses intersected frequently, and these intersections and the mutually constituting practices involved, provides some of the main focus of this study.

Main Questions Asked – and Attempted Answered

This thesis seeks to explore how school authorities at Anglo High attempt to manage and control kids in general, and my Mexican kids in particular, both through actual surveillance

and monitoring, and through the ascription of negative and confining identities. I want to analyze control as something that is both externally applied, through both a moral and a disciplinary gaze, and as something that is internalized in kids, through execution of the power to either directly label individual or group identities, or that of providing a limited number of options for choosing individual or group identities.

In addition, this thesis also addresses how my Mexican kids interact with each other, and how they react and respond to school staff and their physical surveillance and identity labeling. I want to argue that both the ascription and management of identities and the perceived need for control, should be understood with reference to an American ideological and moral assessment of what constitutes risk – both in dealing with minorities and with kids. Simplified, this thesis deals with relatively poor minority kids, and with how "rich" majority adults treat them. I hope that it will shed some light on questions regarding, both *poverty, ethnicity* and *youth* in America today, and I will go some way in suggesting that these three factors are all to various degrees ascribed with a moral value, and that possession of several negative identities can be seen to have an accumulative effect on perceived and ascribed Badness.

Both the Mexican and the Bad identities that most of my kids possess, I will argue, are to a an extended degree a product of ascription by school staff and peers. And being Bad follows, if not naturally so at least more easily, from that of being Mexican. These ascribed identities are used in further management and self-presentation of other identities. The way I choose to understand construction and management of identity, they constitute a continuous dialectical process where no one identity is necessarily more genuine, or more easily refused than the other, but rather given meaning within the frames of a social situation (Jenkins 1996), thereby giving some identities more weight than others in a given situation. I want to argue that the dual emphasis on ethnicity and risk, or Mexican-ness and Badness, provides a connection between their Mexican identity and their status as Bad, and portrays these two identities as somewhat mutually constituting. Through this, being Mexican becomes somewhat Bad, and Badness appears to be partly attributed to being Mexican. An analysis of this calls for an investigation of power relations and interaction between those who set the rules and those who have to abide by them.

My kids experience an accumulation of several negative, or stigma, identities, primarily ascribed by the school staff. The school staff can be seen as representatives of the American White (moral) majority, and their valuations of risk and danger partake in arguably making Anglo High a *hegemonic* institution, in that minorities are dominated through being inserted into subordinate positions, with few opportunities to improve their position due to the nature of the institution. This subordinate position can then be seen to be reproduced by kids or adults, or both, or by national ideological valuations and their demands (see Willis 1993, Foley 1990, Bourgois 1995). I want to elaborate on how my kids manage and remold their identity to position themselves within the social space, as provided by the school staff, and how their strategies, conscious or not, are expressed, explained and interpreted by both kids and adults.

How to Read this Thesis

Chapter 1 in this thesis gives an introduction to the field. It presents Anglo high school, the Social Work Organization, individual kids and their groups. In addition it provides some insight into the particularities of the fieldwork undertaken, limitations and benefits, as experienced by this particular anthropologist.

Chapter 2 attempts to give an outline to the history of the people of Texas in general, and Austin in particular. Some of the material presented here is meant to give a general introduction to the area, and might not be directly connected to the analysis to follow. Still, the relationship between minorities and majorities, in the role of Mexicans and Anglos or Whites, is first addressed here. So is also the creation of America as a nation, and the constitutional values on which she was erected – and arguably still stands. This chapter can optionally be read before chapter 1, or as it stands, immediately after presenting the field.

The American moral foundation, or *Creed* (Myrdal 1944), and its demand for both individual *liberty* and *equality* will be elaborated on in Chapter 3. Here I also want to examine how the Creed influences how minorities are being viewed and treated within the setting of Anglo High, and also to a certain degree how ethnic identity is, if not constructed then at least shaped and ascribed. The school has an abundance of non-academic activities, groups and clubs, and can be seen as a miniature model of the American society. Within the school, Whites are the majority ethnic and racial group, they are also the most successful group, both in terms of in-school academic results and in being the most economically successful group.

Among the Mexican and Black minority groups, some kids are well-to-do middle class kids, but most are poor, “at risk”, trouble kids. I will argue that ethnicity can be presented as a cultural asset for the first group, while it becomes a stigma and a liability for the latter group, the latter group being the one including “my kids”.

How my kids utilize and manage identities is the focus of Chapter 4. This chapter addresses strategies for achieving success and recognition within the school. The availability of different strategies and their likely positive outcome are presented as largely dependent on the degree of recognition ascribed to these strategies by school authorities and by high-status group students. With some strategies being made unavailable, at least in terms of succeeding within them, my kids choose alternative strategies. The reasons why kids act the way they do, and the consequences of this, are also discussed in Chapter 4, and is analyzed through applying the theories of both Paul Willis (1993), Douglas Foley (1990) and Pierre Bourdieu (1977,1984).

Chapter 5 deals with how adults choose strategies for controlling kids. Theorizing perceptions of *risk* and the need for control, in addition to applying Michel Foucault’s (1977) theory of the *Panopticon* and Ervin Goffman’s (1987) concept of *total institutions,* I want to show how Anglo High as a social system tries to control every kids every action all the time to minimize perceived risks tied to non-compliance to the rules. The rules can be seen as representations of White America’s moral standards, and thus as favoring White Good kids. In providing complete control *almost* all the time, it is my opinion that control is not internalized as it is in Foucault’s description of Bentham’s prison, but rather it is *externalized* – taken away from the kids. Chapter 5 gives a description of a Homecoming event that turned in to a riot-like happening. This provides a good example of how controlling measures can create certain conflicts, which in return works to underline the need for increased and stricter control – and this again spurs new conflicts. The homecoming event also re-addresses topics mentioned in chapter 3 and 4, in that it shows how risks are presented and interpreted as both ideological and *moral* concerns, where ethnicity or minority status represents an element of risk in itself. Also it suggests that monitoring and surveillance works to incorporate risk or stigma identity in my kids’ self-image.

The last chapter of this thesis, Chapter 6, attempts to both draw some conclusion and to leave some questions open. Under the heading “Coping & Hoping” I present some kids who move

outside and across common strategies for achieving recognition and success. Some of these alternative routes provide an opportunity for change that would have been difficult within the ones described in chapter 4. The emphasis put on individual strategies partly reflect the demands made by American ideological demands for the individual to “pursue happiness”, but it is also where the hegemonic influence of the national Creed is challenged. How, or if, social injustice is destined to reproduce itself through social institutions like the high schools constitute the last part of this chapter, and is naturally one of the questions to be left partly unanswered. I do not wish to make any policy recommendations in this thesis, but I want to address some of the dangers involved with in-school adults’ treatment of minority kids – and I want to suggest that even if a society to a certain extent might get the kids it deserves, kids very seldom get the society they deserve.

1. Kids, Adults and the Anthropologist

Field sites thus end up being defined by the crosshatched intersection of visa and clearance procedures, the interests of funding agencies, and intellectual debates within the disciplines and its sub-fields (...) The question becomes one of choosing an appropriate site, that is, choosing a place where intellectual interests, personal predilections, and career outcomes can most happily intersect.

Akhil Gupta & James Ferguson (1997:11).

Introduction

No doubt, what Gupta & Ferguson points out is partly what I experienced when I was in the process of choosing my field. In having the opportunity to go practically anywhere, I chose a place that was within both my academic and geographical area of interest, where I spoke the language and where people took interest in my project. The aim of this chapter is to give a brief presentation of the different actors who provide the main voices for this thesis. It starts with a presentation of the SWO organization and how I got access to Anglo High and the kids through them. It also gives a somewhat thorough description of my experiences during my first visit to the main field site, the SWO office at Anglo High. In most fictional novels or plays it is usually considered important to introduce the main characters early on, and this is what I have attempted to transfer to the initial chapter of this non-fictional thesis. In addition to presenting the different individual kids and adults I also want to provide an outline of the institutional and official framework that sets the stage for this ethnographic "play". The policies and politics exercised by schools and school districts, as representatives of state and federal legislations, are presented as part of this framework. My anthropological *field* is not one exclusively, or even primarily, constituted by either a geographical location, a particular institution or by a single group of informants. Rather, it is primarily an analytical field, where the questions sought answered are a result of my personal and academic dispositions, in combination with the perspectives provided by kids and adults in different school settings. This chapter ends with a presentation of what I experienced as some particularities to my fieldwork, and with two particular conflicts. This aims to describe my position within this analytical field, and how it influenced my access to information. Not only does it address what information was available, and what was not, but it also gives an outline as to what *kind* of information I got, and how it will be used throughout this thesis.

The Social Work Organization

Arriving in Austin in late June, I arrived in the middle of the school's summer vacation. Getting in touch with school district representatives and on-campus administrators therefore proved a difficult and time-consuming task. Initially, this was not a major problem, since I

had to spend the first part of my stay on practical tasks, like locating a permanent place to live, and also since generally getting to know the Austin area was taking up much of my time. I had e-mailed with quite a few people before leaving for Austin, and one of the organizations that had taken an interest in my work was a Social Work Organization (SWO) that catered to schools on all levels in the Austin Independent School District. Their work consisted of providing offices on campus where a social worker would work with kids that had been designated as “at risk” by the school district, and who also had been referred to them by concerned teachers or councilors, and sometimes parents. The SWO social worker would help kids get involved in different programs that could help them with their experienced difficulties, be that a study group, an outreach organization, a teen-leadership program or similar in-school or neighborhood programs. The social worker could also help them get a tutor or an after school job, and assist and accompany them when going to the doctor, or talking to their parents or teachers about difficult things. During the summer, the SWO held a summer school where students could gain credits they had missed during the school year. Most of the time spent in the office consisted of informal conversations with kids during their lunch-breaks, and of practical tasks, like making phone calls and setting up new appointments and activities for the kids. The SWO worked with several different school districts in central Texas, and had offices on several campuses in each district. The reasons why the office at Anglo High was terminated during the time I was there were given to be financial. Anglo High was rated as one of the better schools within the Austin Independent School District, and was seen as having relatively few problems, so the resources were needed elsewhere.

When I called them up, shortly after settling into my new apartment, they were enthusiastically telling me that we should get together, and I got an appointment three weeks later. By the time I got this appointment it was already July, and I felt the need to look into other possibilities as well during the three weeks I had to wait. During the planning of my project, while still back in Bergen, I had imagined that my fieldwork would be focused on white, middle-class kids, since I wanted to study what I in my naivety referred to as “regular American kids”, and was worried that economically marginalized minority kids would provide other, or additional and different challenges that could distract my focus from the general “youth” issues. Since I was a woman, I also imagined that I would probably get in touch with girls more easily than boys. In retrospect it therefore seems somewhat ironic that I ended up conducting my fieldwork almost exclusively on Mexican “at risk” boys, referred to the SWO because of beginning academic and/or behavioral problems. After a short while

working at the SWO office at Anglo High I realized that these kids provided just as good an intake to my study. This was the first step in a not-to-extensive process for me, where I decided to adopt a view that saw kids as both individually different from each other, but more importantly, that also saw kids as not radically different from other age groups in a society. This view has been presented in the introduction.

Before this, however, I started looking into the possibility of getting access to one of the high schools in the Austin metropolitan area that was recognized as being a very good, very rich, and very White school. I talked to both the principal and a teacher who were very eager to have me come, but who referred me to the school district, for formal approval of my project. This was when I first realized that doing a thesis on, and about, White, upper-middle class kids could prove to be difficult, as could any classroom project. After submitting a written request for permission to visit the school, both the school district representative and the principal very politely and apologetically, told me that they could not have me conduct any study at this school without pre-approved questions, and preferably a connection to the University of Texas at Austin.

After the three weeks had passed, I still had no success in coming up with alternative field sites. Through my appointment with the SWO, however, I met with a member of the central staff at SWO, and he invited me to participate in a back-to-school meeting held only a few days later, where I could mingle and talk to social workers in different schools, and as he said, see who would "invite me" to come spend time at their school. This is exactly how my fieldwork progressed from there on – through numerous invitations following this back-to-school meeting. Even if the SWO's work was primarily conducted on campus they would hold several meetings where all the social workers from the different schools would meet and share news and frustrations, as well as being given a speech on a given theme. At this first back-to-school meeting I met Angela. She invited me to lunch that day, and after this lunch she invited me to come spend time at her school: Anglo high school. When Angela got a new job in October, I stayed on at Anglo High with the new social worker, Faith, who filled in for Angela the remaining part of the SWO program's presence at Anglo High. At the same back-to-school meeting I was also invited by another social worker to visit a different school, the Behavior Management Center. This school was a special school, catering to those students in the AISD who were expelled from their regular schools usually because of violent incidents, and had to serve their out-of school detention at this school. This is described in chapter 5.

Angela's position at Anglo High was something in between categories. She worked there every day, which allowed me to come in every day as well, but she told me how she felt that the teachers at Anglo High did not consider her a full member of the staff. For instance, she told me how they had given all the teachers and administrators "T.E.A.M" T-shirts ("Together Everyone Achieves More") to wear every Friday, and she did not get one until she reminded them, weeks later, that she had not gotten one. Admittedly, Angela was not part of either the teaching staff or the administration at Anglo High, and throughout my stay she would regularly give her opinion on both the way the school administrators and teachers were conducting their jobs, and how they were failing to recognize hers.

> *Angela[9]: The staff here is not very helpful. (...) I think all schools in the US should have a social worker. Because kids have problems, right – and [school] is a good place to solve them. I get paid to work with a certain type of students ["at risk"], but if kids need to talk, right???(...) The principal is doing nothing for the Hispanics here – and he's a Latino himself!!*

The kids who used the office were also aware that the SWO office was not fully a part of the school program. Most likely this was one of the reasons that they liked going there. I got to do a little less than three months of everyday fieldwork at Anglo High before the SWO program closed there. By this time I had established contact with an outreach program that also operated on the school's campus, and I had started working at a different school (Charter School) as well. I went back to Anglo High occasionally to visit, but not too often, since it made the kids uncomfortable to have me seek them out outside the office. Talking to my kids in the setting of either the hallways or the high school cafeteria was never very fruitful. Being with me, whom most students saw as either a social worker or a teacher/ teacher's assistant, signaled that they were in some kind of trouble, and even if they were always very polite, I could see that it was uncomfortable for them.

Also, my formal connection to the school was with the SWO, and not the school, thereby theoretically giving me no legitimate reason to visit after the office was closed. As a closing-up session I got to do an interview with the principal. Through my return on "unauthorized"

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[9] All the excerpts from conversations to be presented in this thesis are results of fieldnotes taken during, or shortly after conversations. In this text they are presented as representative of the authentic conversations as possible, including slang, jokes, cussing, and with expressed sentiments and emotions in parenthesis (i.e. "laughter", "very angry"). This form of presentation is chosen to make it more reader-friendly, and to convey the form and intent of statements and conversations as well as the statements themselves.

visits I experienced that I was greeted with smiles by those of the school administrators and teachers who recognized me, and ignored by those who did not, indicating that I probably could have come back every day without any formal reaction. Without the setting of the SWO office, however, I found no reason to make my visits more frequent.

My First Visit to Anglo High

My meeting with Anglo High was one filled with new experiences and impressions. Until then I had never been inside an American school, of any kind. The following section is a description of my first day there. It is written in the present tense; to try to convey more precisely the experiences I had that day.

Angela calls me up on a Thursday, and asks me if I still want to come to Anglo High on Friday, like we agreed on after the SWO back-to-school meeting I attended the week before. She is not going to be there all day, but I can come for the first lunch at 11am, and stay until 2.30pm, when she is having a meeting, which she describes as '*sort of confidential'*. The period between 11am and 2.30pm is the time of day when most of the kids come to talk to her anyway she says, because these are the two lunch periods, so it will be a good time to come.

Initially, I get lost on my drive there, but when I find the right exit, the school is actually quite easy to find. I drive around both a large football- and track-field, and the building itself, to find the visitor parking. All along the way leading up to the school are parked cars. Apparently, quite a few of the students drive their own cars to school. When I arrive, I see that there is quite a lot of construction work going on, and I have to ask some kids where the entrance is, and how to find the library, which Angela has told me is next door to the office. The football coach, a big Black middle-aged man, turns up and shows me the door, and leads me inside, while at the same time shouting orders to everybody we meet on the way. After having entered the school he literally "hands me over" to another man, a young Black man who I later found out was one of the Hall monitors. He takes me through the gym, up some stairs, past the cafeteria, and over to the library. By now, I am completely confused, but I have found Angela. The SWO office is situated on the second floor, at the end of a large open hall. It is next to the library, and on the opposite side of the administrative section. At both ends of the hall there are stairways leading down to the cafeteria and the gymnasium, and up to different classrooms. On the one side of the hall there is a balcony opening, which makes it possible to look down on the cafeteria. All students who come up to this level during any

other period than lunch or passing period have to have a pass that authorizes their visit to either the library or the SWO office. The office in itself is quite small, but it has a desk and a chair by the door for the social worker, a small table with three chairs around it at the center of the room, and a couch and a few chairs at each end of the couch. The walls are covered with posters and brochures, the largest of them promoting “equal respect in relationships”.

When I arrive, Angela is the only one there, but not long after, Esteban, Martin and Anna arrive. Esteban and Anna are Mexican. He is somewhat shy, but she greets me with a big smile, and a hug. Martin is Black, somewhat heavy, and is wearing a matching black Adidas semi-long shorts and T-shirt. He also says *hello* in a very polite way. They have been asked to come here and talk to me, and while we make small-talk, Angela is trying to organize small things, like getting a tutor for Martin, and checking how he liked the meeting at the Latin Club, which he attended the last week. Martin says that he felt very left out, since he was the only Black person there, and everybody was speaking Spanish. Apparently, somebody had asked him if he was Hispanic.

> *Martin: So I said, No, I’m Cuban (laughter from Angela, Esteban and Anna)*
> *Me: Are you?*
> *Martin: No, I was just kidding.*

Anna is not one of Angela’s caseload students. She is really only supposed to work with kids that are labeled *at risk* and referred to her by school staff - and Anna is not. But according to Angela, she just came in one day to talk, and then kept coming back. Anna borrows three dollars from Angela and me to buy lunch. Angela tells her that she usually never lends out money, but Anna promises to pay her back tomorrow. Later, Angela tells me that Anna talked to her about getting some financial help for her family, which, according to Angela, is *really poor*. Anna helps support her family by doing odd jobs and baby-sitting for her younger brothers and sisters. In addition, Anna tells me, she spends much time on her homework, and goes to church two times a week.

Martin tells me that his mom earns very little money, so he can’t always get what he wants, “*and sometimes that’s pretty hard”*. His mom is starting a new job as a janitor in another school, but she would rather be a lunch lady. Anna tells us that her mother is a lunch lady. Martin earned some money from the summer school program he did with SWO, and gave

some of it to his mother. He tells me that *"she really appreciated it, but then she got greedy…."*

Martin is a little upset, because he has a test the next period, and he hasn't been able to study for it yet. He's taking only *honor* classes, which give him more credits for college, even if he admits that he just barely graduated from junior high last year. Esteban tries to tell me that *honor* classes have more work and more tests than other classes, but Martin says that that is not true (A few weeks later though, Martin blew Esteban off when he was trying to explain something to him, with a question of whether he was taking *honor* classes. When Esteban said he wasn't, Martin told him that *"Oh, you see, I'm an 'honor' student, and they expect more from us").* Martin, Anna and Esteban are all *freshmen*. When the bell rings for next period they all leave immediately, so not to be late for the next class.

The next lunch is not until after the next class. Angela and I spend that time talking about the kids that were just in, and she gives me a guided tour of the school. In the administration I get a sticker with my name on it, which declares that I am a visitor to Anglo High today[10]. I also sign my name in at the reception, and say hi to many teachers as they pass, and as Angela introduces me to them. After having had lunch in the teacher's dining room, which is located through a number of doors, up some stairs and through someone's office, and is very bleak and dreary, we head back to the office. The next lunch is coming up, and Angela obviously feels that she should warn me against the next group of kids.

> *Angela: This next group is going to be very different. It's a tough gang[11]. They keep calling each other 'fags', and talking about killing people, and I think it's really horrible.*

Four Mexican boys enter the CIS room the next lunch. They are acting really tough, and enter the room while talking about the movie "The Blair Witch Project". They are loud, and they burst into the room with a short *'Hi Miss'* to both Angela and to me. After that, even when they are talking to me, or Angela, they tend to do so primarily through addressing the group. A question is either asked or answered while facing the other boys. The four are Miguel, Paul, Marcus and Javier. Miguel has a sweat towel, a beeper, and glasses with attachable

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[10] I kept this sticker on my filofax, in case someone was going to ask me why I was there on any of the other days I came back, but no one questioned me – not that day, and not later.

[11] This does not mean that they were "gang-kids". To my knowledge, none of them were involved in gang-related activities.

sunglasses, a motive t-shirt, and a pair of pants with plenty of pockets. He acts very tough, but with a smile and humor that still makes him charming to me. Paul is a bit heavier than Miguel. He is wearing a Nike cap, Kaki-shorts, and black T-shirt. His clothes look very decent and neat, and fairly new. They joke about this too, and call him 'Mr. Clean[12]' when I ask what his name is. He's very quiet, but he is always smiling, even when the rest of them are trying to make fun of him. Marcus looks younger than the rest of them. He is also somewhat heavy, and he is acting really restless and being very loud. He seems less happy to see me than the rest of them. He is not hostile, but he does not talk to me at all, but only to the rest of the group. Together with Miguel, Javier, the fourth boy to enter, is the one who talks to me the most. He looks older than the rest of them, but it turns out that he is only 16. He does not speak as loud as the rest of them, maybe because he does not have to; because when he speaks they listen. Also he gets to sit in the couch even if he is the last one to enter. Paul sits in the corner, observing and smiling, Marcus moves around, restlessly, and Miguel sits in a chair by the door.

Angela: Go talk to Trine. She's here to talk to you guys.
Me: What do you think about this school?
Miguel: Everything is messed up
Me: Who messed it up?
Miguel: They did.
Me: How?
Miguel: By taking away one of the lunches.

In splitting up the lunches, the school has made it difficult for students who are assigned to different lunches to spend time together during the school day, since lunch period is the only real break during a day. They never told me whom in particular it was they wanted to hang out with. These kids act very different from the three freshmen that just left. During this, our first meeting, they talk about drinking, fighting and 'getting in trouble', and there seems to be somewhat of a competition for having the worst stories to tell. Also, they talk derogatory about everybody; including other people in the group[13].

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[12] 'Mr Clean' is a cartoon character, advertising a housecleaning product.
[13] Later I experienced that they also regularly 'trashed' women, gays, Anglos, Blacks, Mexican immigrants, school staff, school police and social workers (and probably Norwegian fieldworkers) not present.

Paul: I've been to 'Juvie'[14] *three times.*
Miguel: I've only been once, and that was only for 6 weeks.
Me: What for?
Miguel: Assaulting an officer. I was in a fight, and I just saw red, and I turned around, and I hit him. I didn't mean to hit him, and he really was to blame, he shouldn't go near me when I am like that.

Just before lunch is over, three more boys enter, Felipe, Tim and Bernardo. They are late because they went outside campus for lunch. This is a violation of school rules, since they are not allowed to leave campus during lunch, only seniors are. Angela says nothing about them leaving the campus, but sends them off to class, and one of them, Felipe, gets angry and shouts profanities to us both as he leaves. Angela says '*I have to be like this'*. After all the boys have left, much less speedily and willingly than Martin, Anna and Esteban did, Angela tells me that Miguel and Paul were talking to her one day about how hard it was not to have their dad around, *"so they can really be serious sometimes."*

After this, my first meeting with the kids at Anglo High, I felt both nervous and excited. In a few hours I had met kids that were both outgoing and shy, loud-mouthed and soft-spoken, tough and sweet, dedicated students and (just as) dedicated "rule-breakers" and class-cutters. Martin, Anna and Esteban had talked about their family, about the experience of being poor, and about their academic efforts and difficulties. Miguel, Paul, Marcus and Javier had talked about getting in trouble much more than staying out of it, and they had also addressed their perception of the school as being unfair, or in their words "messed up". These topics initially addressed by these kids is representative both of the general difference I experienced between these two groups of kids, and also of the kinds of topics they would address in later conversations. The only thing these two groups of kids initially seemed to have in common was that they were all Mexican (except Martin) and recognized as being "at risk" of dropping out of school, and that they were part of the SWO-program (except Anna). Over the next few months I tried to get to know these kids, and to learn about their everyday lives, their hopes, dreams – and fears, and I tried to understand the element of "risk" and "Badness" ascribed to them by school authorities.

Initially, of course, I was dependent on whether they would let me spend time with them or not. To some extent at least they did, and the next three months I saw them every day, within

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[14] 'Juvie' is a general reference to a *Juvenile Detention* facility.

the setting of the SWO office, and occasionally outside, but never at home with their families. In addition to learning more and more about "my kids", I also gained an increased interest, and insight, into the differences between how kids see themselves, and how adults perceive them, and how and why the *at risk* and *Bad* label was applied by adults, and then managed by kids. This thesis tries to communicate the partial insight I got into how adults and institutional authorities try to manage and influence kids, and how kids manage their own identity and sense of self in the space available.

Schools and School District

Anglo High School is a secondary school within the Austin Independent School District (AISD). The school has just over 2000 students in grades 9 through 12. It is one of 12 high schools in the AISD, and the total number of students enlisted in all grades (1st-12th) in the district is more than 77 000. This school district covers most of central Austin.

The Mexican (or *Hispanic)* population in Austin constitutes around 30 percent of the total population[15], making it the largest minority in Austin. Within the AISD however the number of Mexican students was close to 48 percent in 1991, and is now over 50 percent[16]. White students numbered close to 34 percent of the total student body, and Black (or *African-American)* students made up almost 16 percent of the total number. In public schools in Austin, therefore, Mexicans constitute a larger group than both Whites and Blacks seen separately. At Anglo High the ratio was, as mentioned in the introduction, different, with 2/3 of the student population being White.

After the Supreme Court ruling of *Brown vs. Board of Education* in 1954, segregation in schools was declared *unconstitutional*, and in 1955 the court added that the schools should *desegregate with deliberate speed*[17]. In an attempt to ensure diversity and desegregation in the schools, several district school boards, including Austin, initiated forced bussing of students from their area of residency to schools in different parts of town. The residential areas in Austin are racially and ethnically homogenous to such a degree that the school district would not sufficiently satisfy the demands or standards demanded by the federal government

[15] http://factfinder.census.gov/bf/_lang=en_vt_name=DEC_2000_PL_U_QTPL_geo_id=16000US4805000.html [Accessed November 4th 2002]

[16] http://www.austin.isd.tenet.edu/about/factsfigures/index.phtml [Accessed November 4th 2002]

[17] It was declared in violation of the 14th amendment (Appendix II) http://www.pbs.org/homecoming/brownpop.html [Accessed April 20th 2002].

concerning integration if bussing had not been initiated. During my fieldwork I was told by social workers that many of my informants were being bussed in from the East side of Austin to Anglo High. Bussing is not used in the same way as it used to, but the school boundaries are drawn and extended somewhat artificially (or artfully) to attempt to erase some of these ethnic and racial inequalities. As a comment to the later decrease in attention paid to integration, Mauk & Oakland writes that "The Americanization of immigrant children has been discarded", (Mauk & Oakland 1997:310) and that the focus now has turned to advocating *pluralism.* Agreed, the discourses[18] of *pluralism, multiculturalism* and *equal opportunities* has increased in attention and volume, but as will be shown later in this text, the socialization of immigrant kids into the ideological tradition of the white American middle class can still be seen to have a dominating role – especially within the public school system.

Parents and students can still request transfers from their assigned high school to the school of their choice, but the rules governing who can change, and where, are detailed and strict. The first priority reason for change, is a change done from a majority to a minority school situation, meaning that a student who wants a change from a high school where his or hers ethnic/racial group is in majority, to one where it is not, is usually granted – which also partakes in increasing integration within the AISD[19]. Suggestions of placing *Magnet* programs[20] at high schools in minority areas, to encourage an increased and voluntary integration of White majority students to these schools are now alternatives that are being discussed. Many of the areas that were first submitted to forced bussing experienced "white flight", indicating that White people moved away from these school areas to keep their kids from being bussed to what was seen as bad schools.

Anglo high school is by many seen as one of the better high schools in the AISD, even by my Mexican informants. Although they constitute a minority group within the school, they are not so few that they stand out in the hallways or the cafeteria. Many Mexicans participate in in- and after-school activities, like football, marching band, cheerleading and dance groups,

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[18] In this thesis, references to *discourses* will generally mean a reference to one or several academic debates. The term is being defined and used in a multitude of ways, by a multitude of theorists, but I have not regarded this as essential to the discussions in this thesis.

[19] *Information for AISD parents, AISD student transfer information.* (http://www.austin.isd.tenet.edu/k12/parentsinfo/transfer.phtml) [Revised January 28th 2002 Accessed April 20th 2002]

[20] *Magnet schools* are public schools who specialize in certain academic areas to increase voluntary desegregation (Mauk & Oakland 1997, Devine 1996).

but they excel at them in lesser degree than Whites. They make friends within and across ethnic groups and neighborhoods, but more within than across. The school has White, Mexican and Black teachers. Among the non-teaching staff for instance, the two *Hall-monitors* (staff monitoring the schools hallways to insure that proper conduct- and dress-code was followed) were Black men, as was the football coach. The principal was Mexican, and the campus police officer was White. Angela and Faith, the social workers, were both White.

I also visited another high school in Austin during my fieldwork - Charter School. This school provides an alternative educational approach for high school kids in the Austin area. Some parents and kids choose this school over regular public schools when starting high school, but the majority of the students had been enrolled in public schools first, and had either dropped out or been expelled. Some of them had (been) transferred directly from regular public high schools, and some of them had had some time out of school before coming back. A large majority of them were designated "at risk" kids. Charter School was not a private school in the sense that kids had to pay a tuition fee, but it was not part of the AISD administration either. The school received public funding, and had to administer the same kind of standardized tests[21] issued by the Texas Educational Agency as the public schools. Charter School was a much smaller school than Anglo High, with less than 100 students. They focused on what they called "project based education", where kids got to take part in practical projects as part of their class' education. The school was also located in numerous buildings, with very different size and type classrooms. Where Anglo High might come off as partly faceless and cold, Charter School to me seemed as a very pleasant, but very un-organized place to study.

As mentioned, the original reason for this expansion of my initial field was that the SWO was in the process of closing down its program at Anglo High, and I needed to find a place to continue my observations. Initially I wanted to do this in any other high school in the AISD, but for several reasons this proved to be somewhat difficult. Both Angela and Faith ended up getting new jobs outside the SWO, and although I made some efforts to get connected with other employees within the SWO, working in different high schools, it proved to be quite difficult. Many of them were happy to meet with me for one day, and show me around, but most of them were also too busy to see any possibility for me to hang around every day. And

[21] Among them, the TAAS, as previously mentioned.

even if they wanted to let me in, it was never their decision to make, and the one who could make the decision was never around.

I was also hoping to visit a school that had a Mexican majority next, to see how, or if, being a majority would influence the way kids saw themselves in comparison to others, both within their ethnic group and in inter-ethnical relationships. This was the case in Charter School. Mexicans were in the majority, and they also had quite a few Black students.

The Charter School was presented to me as a possible field site by one of its employees, Mike, who I met through friends of friends – and who invited me to come visit. Mike was working at Charter School as a member of the Americorps. This is a program that recruits young Americans to do community or social work within their own country, as an equivalent to the Peacecorps. Mike introduced me to several members of the staff at Charter School, among them Tom and Jenny, who were teaching classes in English and Drama. Their classes were where I spent most of the two remaining months of my fieldwork. I met a larger number of students here, and I got to participate during classes. Because of the greater number of students encountered, I did not get to know them as well as I did the boys at Anglo High, but as I will show later, I got quite different information from the kids at Charter School. Both the difference in school size and educational approach and what I experienced as a difference in kid's experience of their in-school identity or status, made them communicate different opinions and sentiments to me, which provided me with contrasting material from that I got at Anglo High. Also, while in Anglo High I was associated with the SWO, while at Charter School I was participating in regular classes. Therefore, my stay at Charter School did not only tell me something about the kids there, but it also gave me new perspectives to understand Good kids and Bad kids at Anglo High. Information from Charter School will be used explicitly in some sections of this thesis, but it will always be part of my way of understanding my Anglo High material.

"Miss Norway": the Anthropologist-cum-Social Worker

Limitations to a method that involves meeting quite a few different kids, and partly kids in different schools, are obvious. Among other things I had to decide where to follow my kids, and where not to go, with the result that there are large portions of their everyday lives that I only got second hand information on, the most important of these being family- and home life. Some of the benefits were that I got to talk to a wide range of different people, and

people in different positions of, for instance, authority, within the school. On most topics of interest I had the benefit of being able to get different perspectives from kids, social workers and administrators.

I do not think that my position as either Norwegian, female or relatively young (age, sex and nationality commonly being expressed and experienced as primary identities) restricted much of my access to information. Many people I met, I am sure perceived me as being different and therefore, at least initially, interesting. My overall difference was partly due to a difference in both appearance and behavior. The behavioral differences were likely a result of a combination of difference in cultural dispositions and habits, my personality in general, and the fact that I was only visiting for six months, and like most anthropologists, therefore found *everything* interesting. When reflecting on the influence of the anthropologist on his or her material gathered during fieldwork it is important to not only analyze personal and cultural dispositions, but also to pay attention to the fact that the anthropologist is in a unique position, usually being far away from home, and exposed to an array of new impressions and experiences.

I think my appearance and personality influenced situations in the periphery of my study more than it did my interaction with the kids and the social workers. Of all the things that were overwhelmingly different to me in Texas, working with kids was something I was familiar with from Norway. I like it, and I am good at it. Meaning that I am good at getting kids to like being where I am, or at least not minding that I tag along. Not that I have any real way of assessing my ability to extract information from this interaction. I can only say that if they would have opposed my presence, it would have been much more difficult. From reading female anthropologists, as well as anthropology regarding gender in general, before I left, I assumed that I would most easily get access to the women's spheres, or the girls'. This turned out to be completely opposite of what happened. For one, "at risk" kids in the SWO office were almost exclusively boys, even if close to half of the total "at risk" population were girls (Romo & Falbo 1996). And secondly, again not knowing if it was being *'Miss Norway'*[22], or just being a woman, the boys were much more interested in talking to me than the girls were.

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[22] Anglo High kids would use the term *'Miss'* when directly addressing a female employee both inside and outside the school, and *'Miss'* in combination with first or surname in referring to someone. For some reason, *'Trine'* was too hard to remember so they settled for *'Miss Norway'*, not after any encouragement from me, but I cannot say that it bothered me much. Kids at Charter School would use first names on both teachers and me. This can be seen as a sign of differences in relationships between adults and kids in the two schools.

Evaluating every way I influenced my own ability to access information, and informants, is not possible. It is impossible to realize all the things you do sub- or unconsciously, before they materialize themselves in either lucky breaks or unbelievable stupidities, both of which I had many.

My position within the SWO influenced my fieldwork situation in several ways. I was there as an observer, and the social workers, as well as the kids, had as thorough knowledge of my project as I was able to convey, but still I often found myself in a position where I had to choose between nodding my head and taking notes, or acting as a social worker and reprimand what was generally recognized as unacceptable behavior. Mostly, I did the first of the two. But sometimes I intervened in the conversation, and told kids off when, for instance, talking derogatory about other people, or being noisy and loud inside the office. This was probably most a spontaneous reaction, because of my many years of working with kids in Norway, in a situation partly resembling the one in the SWO office. But it was also a conscious choice. When the kids came to the office, knowing that this was a place where they could get advice and help, as well as hang out with their friends, they also expected Faith and Angela to sanction certain statements or behavior. For me to sit there and smilingly accept what the social workers did not would have made Angela and Faith's job more difficult. They included me in most of their work and often used me as an assistant, in that they would let me talk to the group while they took care of individual requests or problems. My position within the SWO was very beneficial for me. I had the freedom to do whatever I wanted, and was at the same time included in almost every part of the social worker's job. I even wrote a pass for Miguel once. He was late for class after having been really upset and stayed behind to talk to me some more after the others left the office. I wrote the pass because he said that if he did not have one he would get in trouble for being late, and would rather skip the entire class. The pass was accepted, even if I had no formal authority to write such a pass.

Generally, I believe that when doing research on kids who might not understand the full extent of tentative impartial observation – it is any adult's responsibility, including a fieldworker, to give advice and guidance – at least in situations where this is one of the parameters for interaction. My position as part social worker and part observer was the only way I could, and wanted to, position myself in relation to both kids and adults. This in between position was, however, also what caused my two main conflicts during my fieldwork period. The first one was with the tough sophomore kids, and the second was with Faith.

Bad Decisions, Good Fieldwork

One day, Angela and I are sitting inside the office, waiting for the guys in the second lunch to come in. The second lunch is when the tough sophomore kids have their lunch-break.

They start coming in, first one and one, and then in twos and threes. Immediately, a tense atmosphere can be sensed. Marcus is more hyper than ever, and Miguel is in a really bad mood. I try to talk to him about it, but the only thing he tells me is that he needs to go to court, and would rather not talk about it. Other people in the room are Felipe, Javier, Pablo, Paul, Tim and Bernardo.

While I am talking to Miguel, Felipe says something that Angela will not accept, and she asks him to leave. I sit back and try to observe what is happening. Both Miguel and Felipe act really angry and aggressive. Felipe is yelling at Angela, for having been asked to leave.

> *Marcus: Man, everybody's leaving. I would have wanted things to be cool today.*
> *Felipe: If I can't say what I think and feel, I'm not fucking gonna stay. And I ain't coming back, 'cause this place sucks.*
> *Miguel: (screams to me and Angela) This is our room you know. Our place. I'll go talk to the principal, and soon we'll be kicking you guys out of here. I can't wait until you guys aren't here anymore, and we'll have this place to ourselves (he knows that the SWO's work is closing down at Anglo high soon).*
> *Angela: When the project here closes down, you won't be allowed in here at all. There's no way they're going to give you guys a room just to hang out in.*

This is where I made a bad decision, and realized that bad decisions can be good fieldwork. I was getting really irritated, because I realized that the boys were already ticked off before they came to the office, and Angela and I just happened to be the ones they took it out on. At the same time I momentarily forgot that I was, at least partly, an observer and fieldworker. I thought that this might be a good opportunity for me to set my foot down, to show them that I was to be taken seriously, and to be respected as an adult in-school authority (which, paradoxically, I was really not). In retrospect, I have no logical explanation for the decision made, but in that moment, I decided that it would be a good decision to scream at them (!).

> *Me: (really loud) Who do you think you are? Do you think that you can come in here and just act however you want? Don't you think that Angela and I deserve to be treated with the same kind of concern that you treat other people? We sit here and wait for you to come in, and talk to you, and you just decide that you're going*

> *to take whatever bad mood you have out on us?? Get a grip will you. How old are you?*
>
> *Felipe: Fuck this man. I'm leaving.*
> *Angela: But I do want you to come back tomorrow Felipe. (he doesn't answer)*
> *(Javier, Felipe and Miguel leave)*

I realized, of course, that this was not a good decision at all. Not only did I ignite the already tense situation. I also totally ignored Angela's authority in the office (where I am just a guest). Half the kids left, and the other half stayed behind, wondering "what was eating" me. I had to do damage control, so I ran out the door, trying not to let the hall monitor see that I totally lost control of the situation, and begged the guys that just left to talk to me. Miguel said he couldn't stay, because he had to go to court. Javier wouldn't stop and talk to me, no matter how much I begged. Finally, I got Felipe to stop and talk to me for a few seconds.

> *Me: Hey Felipe. I don't want you to walk away angry. I am sorry if I blew up in your face, but if you cut me some slack this time, I'll do the same for you another time.*
> *Felipe: I really have to go, Miss*
> *Me: I know. I just don't want you to be mad. And I really want you to come back later.*
> *Felipe: Yeah. All right, I'll be back, but I really do need to go now.*
> *Me: OK, I'll see you tomorrow then?*
> *Felipe: (walking away, mumbling) yeah, sure.*

Back in the office, Angela was talking to Pablo and Marcus. (Paul was also still there, but he was as always very relaxed, and did not seem to be bothered with what just happened at all). As I came walking through the door, I heard Marcus say:*But why did <u>she</u> start yelling, and stuff?* Obviously, he did not mean for me to hear that, but I used it as an opportunity to appologize, since he and I did not connect too good in the first place.

> *Me: I am sorry if I overreacted, but I get mad sometimes too, you know. But I really appreciate that you tell me when you think I am being unfair, and I hope you'll tell me the next time too, and I'll appologize right away. OK?*
> *Marcus: (very reluctant) mhmm*

After this, and after the kids left, I had to appologize to Angela for stepping outside the boundaries of my role as an observant, and practically taking over her office. She was very understanding, and did not blame me at all, but I think everyone left in a somewhat lesser spirit than usual this day, and especially I.

This conflict originated in part because both the kids and I had had a bad day, but mostly because I got my roles mixed up, and they got confused as to what my position inside the office was. What had happened was totally my fault, but luckily the kids forgave me the next day. Of course, kids that old understand that other people can be tired and unfair, so it was never a question of it really having jeopardized my fieldwork. My next conflict was also related to my in-between, Anthropologist-cum-social worker position, and it was much more disturbing to me. This was my conflict with Faith.

Faith transferred to Anglo high from Mexican[23] high school when Angela got a new job and left the SWO. The same way that my loyalty was with Angela and the kids at Anglo high, Faith's was undoubtedly with her previous work and kids at Mexican high. She would constantly be on the phone with them, and would talk about the people there, and how much she missed both the staff and the kids at this school. Our conflict started after she told me that she had had some of her position transferred over to Mexican high, to do some follow up work there, since we had already lost some of the office time at Anglo high.

> *F: So I am going to be spending Tuesday mornings and Wednesday afternoons at Mexican high. And I hope that's OK with you, since we're not going to be able to use the office Wednesday afternoon anyway[24]?*
> *Me: Well, as long as it doesn't hurt the kids here at Anglo high…*
> *F: What is that suppose to mean?*
> *Me: I'm just saying that whatever time you spend at Mexican high is time that the kids here won't get.*
> *F: (very angry) Do you honestly think that I would do anything to deliberately hurt the kids here at Anglo high?*
> *Me: That's not what I am saying at all*
> *F: I don't know what your problem is, but I feel as though your implying that I am not doing a good enough job here, and that your supervising me, like your my mum or something, and I won't have it.*
> *Me: (very upset) I'm not saying that at all. I am very grateful that you're letting me come here, because I wouldn't be able to do this without your permission, and I am not a social worker, so I have no reason to correct you on anything. I'm just a bit worried that these kids are getting ignored, but that's just as much the program manager's responsibility as yours (trying not to start crying, because*

[23] Like in Anglo High, I also use the names Mexican High and Black High to indicate the majority student populations in these schools.
[24] Another social work group had been assigned the use of the SWO office on Wednesdays after lunch. The office was used by the SWO every day, except on Tuesday mornings, when a student group from the school was using it.

she's really upset, and I feel as though I just got my head bit off. At the same time realizing that if we have a falling out, I might not get to come back here).
F: I just wanted to let you know, because that's the kind of person I am
(getting ready to leave. I walk out the door, to leave before her. As I am leaving…)
F: Are you going to come tomorrow?
Me: I don't know

This conflict was much more stressful to me than the one with the kids. Here, I did not realize that I was doing something wrong or upsetting, or what it was that I did, until after I had left the office and returned home. Also, Faith was much more in a position to refuse me to return to the SWO office than the kids were. Again, the conflict more than likely originated in the fact that I was a fieldworker with social work experience, and that I had developed an affection for "my kids" at Anglo high, and saw her as not making a sufficient effort or commitment towards them, while she still had concerns for "her kids" at Mexican high. The fact that Faith felt that she was being unfairly judged and corrected by me indicates that she saw me as a colleague, or at least as someone who participated in the work at the SWO office. In retrospect I can see why she got upset, but my intentions were just as good as hers, only with different allegiances. I got my roles mixed up, with the result that I confused both the people I worked with and myself.

Being somewhat in-between categories both made my fieldwork experience more difficult and more fruitful. Since I had worked with kids in Norway, both Angela and Faith were eager to discuss problems concerning the kids with me, and to elaborate on both reasons and solutions. The kids also felt that they could ask me "social work" related questions, even if they recognized that I could not provide the same kind of help that Angela and Faith could. The conflicts in themselves are hard to interpret as something that was beneficial to the fieldwork situation in itself, but they did make important methodological contributions, in that they helped me realize the particularities of my position in the office, and how they influenced the kids, the social workers and me.

"Is this going in the Book?…..": Evasiveness, Deception and Disbelief

When answering a survey, or one of the "test-yourself" quizzes in any glossy magazine, most of us feel a need to answer something. The "I do not know" response is inadequate. Kids are the same way. When asked, they will usually answer. I could have conducted my entire study through solely asking questions on "at risk" behavior, like drug- and gang-affiliation, or of

self experienced ethnic identity and its content, but the material presented would have been quite different. Much of the literature dealing with kids give the impression of having mainly been conducted this way. Having kids explain *why* they are what is normatively seen as bad and trouble should have obvious methodological pit-falls. Not to say that I did not ask any questions, or that all my questions were answered. I think maybe especially the tough sophomore kids' refusal of taking me too serious has been an asset to my analysis. Some of the questions answered with the shrug, and the *"It just is, Miss"* probably were perceived by them as unworthy of an answer – and I found this to be useful information too.

Frequent answers to questions asked by me would be either in line with the one just mentioned, or similar, like the *"I don't know"* or *"you don't want to know".* When asked who was to blame for something, or who did something, the answers was just a plain *"they did, Miss"*. "They" often meant those who were White, Adult or School staff, and often all three. Since I did not spend much time with kids outside school, even if I did go to both some open-school nights, a football match, an after school tutoring session and made several visits and trips together with the outreach organization, my analysis is mainly dependent on what kids and adults told me, and my ability to decipher what they said, and those questions they refused to answer.

I have chosen not to believe everything told to me. This might seem to be bordering on arrogance, since I have just admitted this to be my main, if not sole source of information. Everything they told me of course contains important statements, and conveys important *meaning*, which I have not discarded, but that does not mean that I have taken it to be representative of these kids' personal experiences. Much of the conversational pattern inside the office has been interpreted and understood as part of individual and group self-presentation, as explored by Ervin Goffman's (1992) dramaturgical approach to social behavior. People in general, and maybe kids in particular, choose situational-specific ways of self-presentation. Some events are exaggerated, some are under-communicated, and some are even invented, and often immediately contested by others present. Stories of drinking and drug-use were common. I have no way of assessing to which extent the statements made were true or false, but they were both frequently contested, and representative of commonly voiced attitudes.

Miguel: I don't drink every day
Paul: You're such a liar
M: I don't drink every day. Only on special occasions like weddings and funerals.

Another story included a long elaborate description of how some of them once killed a gay man by running him down with a car, and then backing up over him. I take this statement the way I think it was intended; as an expression of dislike of gays and a display of their own toughness and ruthlessness, but I do not see it as, nor do I think it was ever intended to be, an admittance of being guilty of murder. On this occasion the social worker was also present, and just shook her head in disapproval. In chapter 4, Javier tells a jail-story, starring himself, which others told me was really from a movie. The telling of a good, and often outrageous story, and being recognized as a skillful orator was highly valued by some of these kids, and the truth was not that important. On a different occasion Javier also went on at length about how he was definitely going to Norway to kill our President (!), since jail-sentences were so lenient in Norway.

As will also be discussed in chapter 4, the kids would use an abundance of jokes and insults containing what would usually be seen as "bad language". When the over-achieving anthropologist would write this down, they would be both surprised and thrilled. Statements like *"watch it guys, she's writing this down"*, and *"are you writing this?"* would also occasionally produce situations where I was being led to believe things that weren't true, and were I was offered supplementing bad words for me to write down. The telling of stories that were either largely exaggerated or untrue can be interpreted as both an attempt to shock me, as well as being mere entertainment and/or self-presentation. I tried to tell them why I was there, and what I was interested in, and I think that all in all they had a reasonably good understanding of who I was, and why I was there. Kids who had a more peripheral affiliation to the SWO office, however, often asked me if I was a teacher-assistant, or a social worker, and sometimes I would just answer that I was something along those lines.

As Helena Wulff (1995) states, there is no apparent reason why those who study youths should be young in appearance, but she also claims that the ability to identify or sympathize with kids' problems, and maybe occasionally going native, is an asset when hanging out with kids. I do not think that any of my kids mistook me for either being or trying to be anything other than an adult, but I think that to do a project on kids, you need to *like* being with kids. Thinking that only young or youthful researchers have the ability to extract information from

kids contributes to the ascribing of "radical alterity" (Keesing 1989) to kids in general. Where other researchers might be guilty of portraying kids as worse (off) than they see themselves to be, hence demonizing them and ascribing them with such alterity, I may probably sometimes be charged with giving a too rosy-red description, or of having a pollyanna attitude, in that I perceive "my kids" to generally not be as bad as others claim. It is a choice I stand by. In the foreword to Daniel J. Monti's book *Wannabe: Gangs in Suburbs and Schools* (1994), Edwin J. Delattre praises Monti for having "acquired a discerning eye for recognizing the youngster who is pathological, psychopathic, potentially murderous. He has the respect for reality that enables him to face up to genuine evil when he encounters it" (ibid:viii). Even though this book is about gang-activity, somewhat anti-social in nature, and the praise was given to Monti for *both* being able to see the good and the bad in kids, I prefer to keep some of my pollyanna attitude, with regards to both kids and adults, instead of undertaking a search for pathological traits. Trouble and risk/bad behavior should not be ignored, but I do not see the need to classify deeds or human nature with regards to *evilness*. I developed, and still feel a personal commitment and emotional bond to all of my kids, which is probably to become evident throughout this thesis. Not to say that it was *all* fun and good times however. As Monti chooses to start his book: "It really helps to like young people when you do research [on them], because sometimes teenagers are little shits" (ibid:1).

2. Texas and Texans: a historical outline

What a rich heritage Texans have. Throughout the state are vestiges of an American Indian culture influenced strongly by that of the Spanish people who came to dominate the land. Upon their arrival, Anglo Americans attempted to impose their own customs and institutions upon those they met in Texas, and for a time they all but sublimated the Spanish/Mexican culture. But life in Texas never stopped changing – especially in light of continuing migration of people from Mexico and the infusion of still new peoples from European and African cultures – so that the heritage of Texas, a state under six flags, is unique among the nation's fifty states.

Ben Procter & Archie P. McDonald (1998:x).

[25]

Introduction

The geographical area that today constitutes the second largest state in the United States of America - Texas, is one with a history of contested borders and multiple historical sovereigns. The common expression "six flags of Texas" refers to how this area has been claimed by six different nations, and has seen eight changes of sovereignty[26]. People living in Texas -*Texans*, are by no means a homogenous group. Among them are the dot-com Austinites, old-money Dallas moguls, big business Houstonites and ranch-owning West Texans, but also single mothers and lunch ladies, construction workers and checkout clerks. Texans are Blacks,

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[25] Map source: http://www.texasrebelradio.com/texas_map.htm [Accessed Dec. 9th 2002]

[26] These six flags are the Spanish (1519-1685, 1690-1821), the French (1685-1690), the Mexican (1821-1836), the Republic of Texas (1836-1845), the United States of America's (1845-1861, 1865- present), and the Confederat States's flag (1861-1865). "Texas Flags and Other Symbols" *Texas Almanac, 2002-2003.* http://www.texasalmanac.com/texasflags_2000.shtml [Accessed February 7 2002].

Whites and Mexicans[27] – the latter, including both those groups of people who have been living in Texas since long before it achieved statehood, but who still do not qualify as true Texans in the eyes of many, and those Mexicans who came yesterday or last year, legally or illegally.

In this chapter I want to give a brief presentation of important historical events in the region, and approaches to these. This is done in part to provide an introduction to thoughts to be elaborated on later in this thesis, but mostly to provide the reader with a basic understanding of, and introduction, to historical and cultural influences shaping and influencing both what today constitutes the state of Texas, and the different groups of people living there. Scale-wise I try to move down, or in, on my field site through times and stages of history that are still seen as important to people in Austin.

Mythical Texas

The word *Texas* derives from the Caddo Indian word *tejas* or *techas*, which means "friends" or "allies" (Webb, 1977). Descriptions of Texas are both plentiful, and sometimes mythical in nature. Michael Collins describes antebellum Texas as "a lusty young giant", and adds that Texas is "more than simply another state in the Union, Texas represents an idea and an ideal, indeed a state of mind" (Collins, 1998:51). I hope to be able to convey if not exactly these sentiments, so at least a partial understanding of what has inspired these passionate statements. Even today, Texas and Texans are perceived as something out of the ordinary by both its own inhabitants, as well as by domestic and international visitors. Norwegians have a saying that describes a wild situation as "helt Texas" ("Completely Texas"), and in Texas, the "Don't mess with Texas" is a slogan that started as a state campaign against littering, but is now a favored T-shirt and bumper sticker slogan.

Fredrik Barth (1969) argues that differences and change originate at the borders between cultures, and not in the center of them. Few areas within the USA can compete with Texas in its history of extensive movement of borders over groups of people, and of these same groups of people over the same borders. Agreeing with Barth, this chapter goes to show that Texas,

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[27] This is somewhat simplifying, but these three constitute the major ethnic/racial groups in Texas. In addition to other immigrant minorities not included in the scope of this thesis, I also want to make it clear that my primary emphasis on these three groups does not imply that I am unaware that Texas, like the rest of the current USA and Mexico, had already been populated for centuries when the first European explorers arrived.

through being a historical borderland, is not just geographically a periphery, it is also the center of many events – and much attention.

The questionable fame and glory of including into the colonial reign of New Spain what is now known as Mexico, and defeating the kingdom of the Aztec, is usually attributed to Hernán Cortéz. His successful conquests inspired a number of expeditions by fellow Spaniards and Conquistadors, quite a few of them heading north towards the northern Mexican region of Texas[28]. Texas in itself does not seem to have been a highly desirable area for its different rulers. It was scarcely populated, warm and arid, and inhabited by fierce *Indians*[29]. The size and position of Texas, in relation to the three major European colonial forces in the Americas: Spain, France and England, was probably of much greater importance. Texas, and the surrounding areas, was used as a buffer zone, and to balance and reflect power gained and lost both in Europe and on the new continent.

The Republic of Texas

I write this on the nineteenth of February 1836, at San Antonio. We are all in high spirits, though we are rather short of provisions, for men who have appetites that could digest any thing but oppression; but no matter, we have a prospect of soon getting our bellies full of fighting, and that is victuals and drinks to a true patriot every day.

David Crockett at the Alamo (Crockett 1988:68).

Even while Mexico was still part of New Spain, the arrival of citizens from what in 1776 had become the United States of America, was not only accepted as inevitable, but also to some degree encouraged. The thought was that incorporating the *Anglos*[30], and making them Spanish vassals, would be easier and more beneficial than trying to keep them out. It would increase the population in the region; strengthen the borders towards the USA, and thereby manifesting Spain's, and later Mexico's claim to the region (McDonald 1998a). The new settlers swore allegiance to the Spanish crown, but they never did become the faithful vassals

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[28] "Cortés, Hernán, Marques Del Valle De Oaxaca" *Encuclopædia Britannica Online* http://search.eb.com/bol/topic?ew=2686&sctn=3 [Accessed February 7 2002].

[29] In many early written sources (i.e. Webb, 1977), the original population of Texas, and the rest of the Americas, are referred to as *Indians*. Currently the name *Native Americans* is the most commonly used. I will refer to *Indians* when talking about historical events, since that was the name ascribed to them by their European invaders. In later references made to current minority groups descending from this indigenous population, I will use *Native Americans.*

[30] Anglo originally referred to an individual with English heritage. After the constitution of the USA, Anglo also refers to a White citizen of the USA. After the inclusion of Texas into the USA, terms like Anglo-American and Mexican-American are found here. A thorough discussion of terms used, and expressed meaning of and reasons for the labeling of ethnic-, racial- or group-identity follows in the next chapter.

that the government had intended. Already in 1813, a number of Texan citizens declared themselves independent of Spain for the first time, but were easily defeated (ibid).

In 1819, Moses Austin, and after his death, his son Stephen F. Austin were given permission by the last Spanish governor in Texas to establish a colony of three hundred American families in Texas. The new Mexican government upheld this permission after the independence of 1821, and with this, Stephen F. Austin had initiated the first organized settlement of Anglo-Americans in Texas. These settlers declared statehood for Texas within Mexico in November 1835 (Siegel 1998), but shortly after, on March 2nd 1836, Texas declared itself an independent republic. On March 6th 1836, an entire group of Anglo defenders were killed at the battle of Alamo. Among them were legends like Davy Crockett and Jim Bowie. Shortly after, on April 20th, Sam Houston defeated the Mexican general Santa Anna at the Battle of San Jacinto, encouraged by the now so legendary battle cry: “Remember the Alamo” (McDonald 1998b: 38).

Already from the outset of Texas’ period as an independent republic, a majority of the people in Texas favored an annexation of Texas by the United States. The question of allowing Texas to join the union as a slave state quickly turned into a tug-of-war in the USA, between both North and South, Democrats and Republican, and it also caused some conflict within the Democratic party (Morrison 1995), since accepting Texas would without doubt infuse the conflict between northern abolitionists and southern slave-owners. Those favoring annexation claimed that, in refusing the acceptance of Texas into the union, one was refusing the people of Texas the right to the American ideals of freedom and liberty (Morrison 1995). And after ten years as a republic, on February 29th 1846, the Lone Star was lowered and replaced with the Star-Spangled Banner (Siegel 1998: 49) – and Texas became part of the United States of America.

Texas Rangers and Mexican Bandits

Texas did not see peace with Mexico until after the annexation of Texas into the United States of America in 1846, and the following war between Mexico and the USA (1846-1848). Even while Texas was still a republic, however, the conflict receded to incidental aggression between Mexican forces and the *Texas Rangers* in the southernmost parts of the Republic of Texas.

The Texas Rangers were first informally introduced as a state law-enforcement agency by Stephen F. Austin in 1823, and then officially constituted in 1835 (Webb 1977 and Procter 1998). The Texas Ranger's task was to protect the *Anglo* Texan from "the outlaw breed of three races, the Indian warrior, Mexican bandit, and American desperado" (Webb 1977:xv). Even if the *American* is mentioned here as one of those who could, and would, feel the sometimes brutal justice of the Rangers, it is probably worth noticing that not all *Americans* (here meaning *Anglo-Americans*) were desperados, while Webb, in his book first published in 1935, describes Indians living in Texas, as being "all more or less warlike" (ibid: 6).

> "Without disparagement it may be said that there is a cruel streak in the Mexican nature, or so the history of Texas would lead one to believe. This cruelty may be a heritage from the Spanish of the Inquisition; it may, and doubtless it should, be attributed partly to the Indian blood." (Ibid: 14).

There is nothing that would suggest that attitudes towards Native Americans, or Mexicans, living in or close to Texas were any *less* prejudiced around 1835 then they were in the words of a renowned historian a hundred years later. It is therefore likely that the term *"los Tejanos Sangrientos* – the bloody Texans*"* (Procter 1998:212) used to describe the Texas Rangers by Mexican inhabitants of the Rio Grande Valley around the time of the Texas Independence war, and later the Mexican-American war, was a term the Rangers deserved. The Texas Ranger in many ways represents the ideal Texan of that time. Like any western hero he was strong, silent and just - but merciless towards evil, here in the shape of Mexicans and Indians.

The United States of America: Independence and Civil War

We hold these Truths to be self-evident, that all Men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness – That to secure these Rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just Powers from the Consent of the Governed, that whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these Ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its Foundation on such Principles. And organizing its Powers in such form as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness.

Declaration of Independence (1776)[31]

No declaration of independence made by a new nation speaks softly - and neither does the American one. The Independence War was fought against the British colonial regime, and its regent, king George III, and much is written on the *who's*, *what's* and *why's* of this war. The

[31] "Thomas: legislative information on the internet" (http://lcweb2.loc.gov/const/declar.html). [Accessed January 5, 2003]

who's and *what's* I shall leave to the historians, and I will try to make my point on the relative importance of the *why's* a tangent one to this thesis.

The "Founding Fathers" of America were the authors of what was later to be national iconic documents, *the Constitution* and *the Declaration of Independence*. Among them were Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, George Washington and John Adams. Francis Jennings (2000) makes a convincing argument in his book "The Creation of America", on how the leaders of the fight for independence did *not* primarily set out to separate from Britain because they wanted to create a nation to be a free haven and democratic role-model for other nations, or to fulfill a god-given plan where democracy is the ultimate goal, but rather acted on a motivation more familiar to history – Power. Jennings describes what happened to the British colonial rule as something close to a spin-off effect, where the areas furthest away from the center were torn loose. He also argues that because the dominant motivation was that of control and domination of the new empire to be, America, leading revolutionaries never intended to include All Men in *Life, Liberty* or *the pursuit of Happiness*.

The original colonies were not united in their reasons for demanding independence, and initially not even in the demand itself. The stories concerning the signing of the Declaration of Independence tells of delegates refusing to sign, and hence other delegates substituting for them, in order to give the document the look and feel of unity it needed to convince both domestic allies and international adversaries that the claim was legit (Jennings 2000:166-168). In 1787, delegates to the Constitutional Convention submitted the newly written Constitution to the states for ratification (Tindall & Shi 1997), but it was not ratified by *all* states until after the submission of ten amendments, constituting "The Bill of Rights" in 1789, amendments that gave specific instructions to the rights of the individual[32]. Before the new union was a hundred years old however, the American Civil War broke out.

> The soil of our beloved South will drink deep the precious blood of our sons and brethren. (…) I cannot, nor will I close my eyes against the light and voice of reason. The die has been cast by your secession leaders, whom you have permitted to sow and broadcast the seeds of secession, and you must ere long reap the fearful harvest of conspiracy and revolution.
>
> Sam Houston, March 31st 1861 (Houston 1988:84-85)].

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[32] Appendix II.

Former war hero, first president of Texas, and Governor of Texas in 1861 - Sam Houston, was opposed to Texas joining the Confederacy in the secession that would lead up to the American Civil war - with the Federal forces of the North facing the Confederate forces of the South. Even if many Texans did share his view, most did not[33]. The decision by Texas to join the Confederacy was the result of such a proposal being made by the state "secession convention", and then supported by 75 percent of Texan voters (Barr 1998), causing Houston to be expelled from his position as governor, after having refused to swear his allegiance to what he called the "so-called Confederate Government" (Houston 1988:82). Even if Texas was a slave state, which caused a lot of the skepticism over the annexation of Texas in 1846, less than five percent of the people in Texas owned slaves, and less than ten percent of those again owned more than twenty slaves (Collins 1998).

In terms of war history, Texas is therefore definitely a part of the South, with the South here being the alliance of the 11 confederate states (Barr 1998). In addition, it is geographically the state located furthermost to the south in the USA. Ironically the traditional South ran all the way up to the Mason-Dixon line between Maryland and Pennsylvania, while the current South is usually seen as bordering to the *south* at the Texas-Louisiana border. Even those who still think in terms of traditional regions in the USA, with lines being drawn between the Northeast, Midwest, West and South, the South being defined on the previously mentioned basis of ex-confederacy states, have to make some exceptions for the state of Texas (and Florida).

> Today the urban South and the states of Florida and Texas have lost much of their traditional character because of their rapid economic transformation, the migration of people from other parts of the nation, and large-scale immigration from Spanish-speaking countries and Asia (Mauk & Oakland 1997: 40).

The "traditional character" presented here as "lost" through economic transformation and large-scale migration is partly that which constitutes the traditional *southern* character. The South in the USA has traditionally been linked to notions of racial segregation and rural areas, but also to a cultural uniqueness. Many see the southern conservatism and traditionalism as providing a valuable counterweight to the liberal American ideas and ideals of progression

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[33] He ran for governor as a unionist, defeating the current governor Hardin R. Runnels, a secessionist, but his victory was largely ascribed to his status as war hero, and not to his unionist ideas representing those of the majority (Collins 1998).

and liberty, significantly different from that of the progressive and liberal Northeast (Genovese 1994).

Introducing the Field: The Presentation of Austin in Everyday life[34]

Austin is like a part of Oregon that tore loose, and landed in Texas Ziggy (personal communication)

Austin is seen as being noticeably different from other cities and areas in Texas, both by people living in and outside Austin. It is seen as being more liberal and progressive than any other area in Texas, including larger cities like Houston, Dallas and San Antonio. Leaning on Genovese (1994), this should imply that Austin is more comparable to mainstream USA than it is to the rest of Texas, or the South, having lost the particularities of the Southern tradition (ibid). This is however not the view presented by residents and visitors to Austin, who in general describe it as a place that combines the South and the rest of the USA in a way that makes it a special place to both live and visit.

The question most likely to be asked when two people meet each other for the first time in Austin is that of “where are you from?” The city has seen irregular, but large, increases in its population size throughout the last thirty years – both from people inside the USA, and from immigrants, mainly from Mexico. Austin is the capital of Texas. It is the administrative and governmental center and the location for both the Capitol and the Governor’s mansion, within a hundred yards of each other in downtown Austin. In addition, Austin is on its way to becoming one of the nation’s largest centers for information technology. North Austin is the base for both companies like the Texas Company Dell Computers, and national and international companies like IBM. The University of Texas has its main base in Austin, and occupies a whole section of the downtown area. The Austin population is younger than the national average and it has a higher level of education. Austin has a total population of just over 650, 000, of which, as mentioned in chapter 1, around 30 percent are Hispanic. Around 10 percent of the remaining population is Black, and just over 50 percent is non-Hispanic White[35]

The Interstate 35 (I-35), running north south through the city, replaced the old East Avenue, and currently constitutes a division within the city of Austin. The section east of this road is

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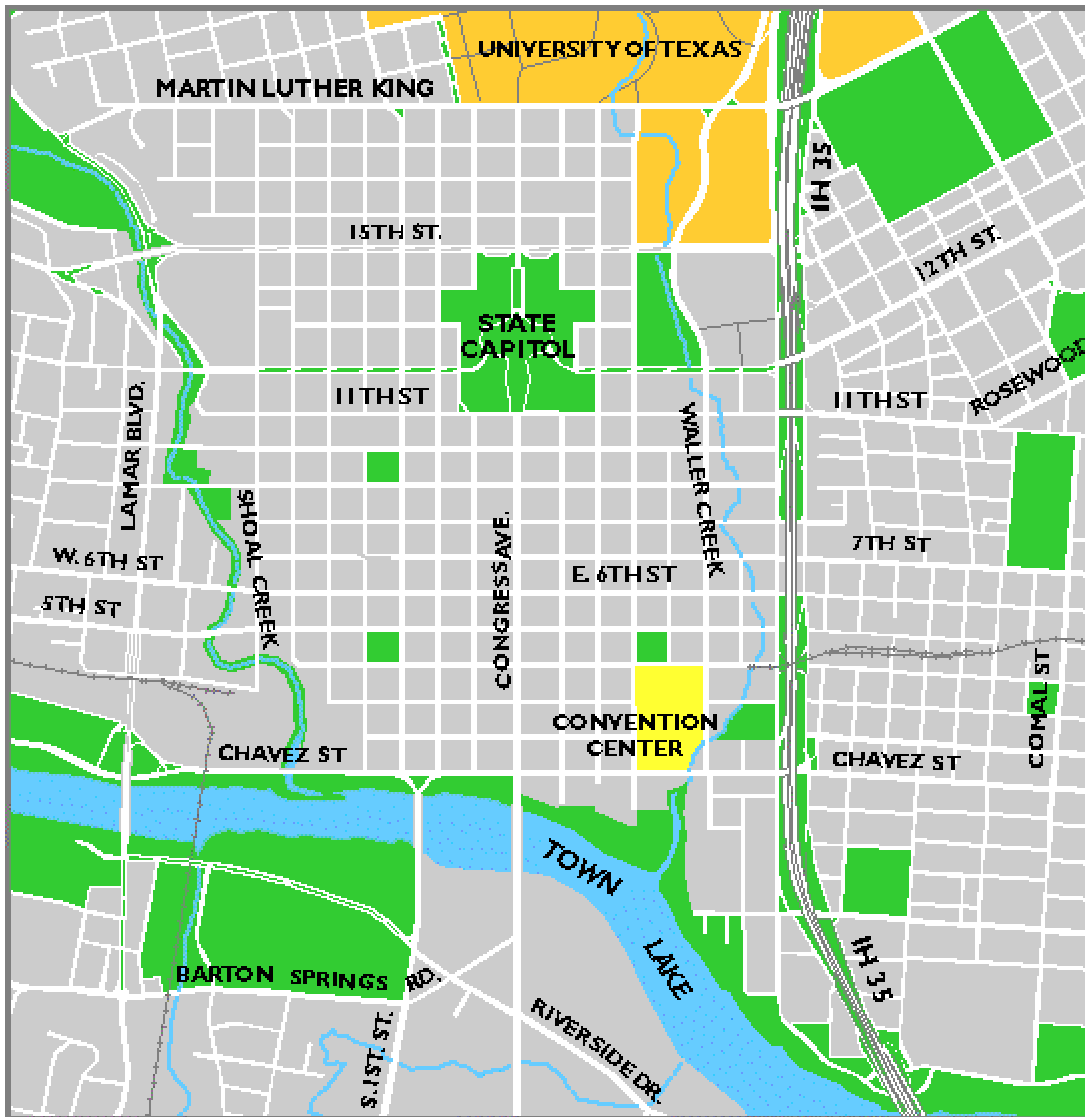
[34] Paraphrasing Erving Goffman ”The Presentation of Self in Everyday life”([1959] (1992), Norwegian ed).
[35] The meaning of the prefix “non-Hispanic” will be addressed in chapter 3.

called East Austin, and this is the part of Austin that has the most predominantly Black and Mexican population. Through the Master Plan of 1928, a plan that presented an outline for provision of public services, the City of Austin decided to make this section of Austin a "Negro-district"[36], encouraging both Blacks and Mexican-Americans to relocate to this part of town by "the selective provision of city services and utilities. Real estate and banking practices also helped concentrate people of color there" (Schott 2000: xi).



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36 http://www.weeklywire.com//ww/06-29-98/austin_arts_feature1.html [Accessed 9 March 2002].

37 Map source: City of Austin – Downtown Map (http://www.ci.austin.tx.us/downtown/p1080196.htm) [Accessed December 6. 2002.]

Interstate 35 marks the eastern border of the city center. The center is limited to the south by the Colorado River, referred to as "Town Lake" as it runs through Austin. To the north, the city center turns into the University district at 19th street, now renamed Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd. And finally, the western border to the center is provided by both the old West Avenue, Lamar Blvd, and Shoal Creek.

Austin was founded and planned on the commission of Mirabeau B. Lamar, then president of the Republic of Texas, in 1839[38]. Already from the beginning it was laid out in a simple grid pattern, a single square-mile in size, and with 14 blocks in each direction. The Capitol was erected, at the end of Congress Avenue in 1853[39], a street built in enormous width for that time (it has not been expanded since, and is still the main street of downtown Austin), providing an axis in the middle of the city center, leading up to the impressive Capitol, being both a monument and a center for the city structure at the same time. The streets running north-south, or up-down, are named after the Texas rivers (with the exception of Congress avenue), and are positioned in the same order as they are positioned accordingly in the geographically landscape of Texas, starting with Rio Grande and ending with the Sabine river. Initially, the streets running east-west were named after Texas trees, but they were replaced with numbers in 1884.

Minority Representations in Street Names

Texas was scarcely populated for a long period of time, and to an extended degree still is. Historical records make frequent references to rivers, when geographically locating events, instead of cities. The importance of the land in Texas, or the nature, is present through the streets named after rivers. In doing so, a connection to the geographical region, and the rural and mythical part of Texas is confirmed. In looking at a street and road map of Austin today, the state's history is also presented. Important figures to the history of Austin and the independence of Texas, among them Lamar, Waller, William Cannon and Burleson, serve to present a patriotic scenery or backdrop to Austin as a city. The Capitol, and the Congress Avenue in the center of town, provides a reminder to the centrality of the government and the legislative powers – and to the immediate presence of the government and the Governor of Texas, represented by the Governor's mansion, located next to the Capitol.

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[38] http://www.ci.austin.tx.us/library/ahc/streets/default.htm [Accessed 18 February 2002].
[39] http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/print/AA/hda3.html [Accessed 14 January 2002].

In 1975, 19th Street was renamed Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd, after the African American civil rights activist - and in 1993, 1st street was renamed César Chávez Street, in honor of the Hispanic rights activist, and founder of the "United Farm Workers" who had died that same year[40]. With these final additions to the structure of the city of Austin, the current form of the downtown is presented. The latest addition of Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd and César Chávez Street gives Austin two largest minorities an official representation in the city structure. The structure of the city center of Austin is still close to the original outline from 1839. Buildings have changed, but the street names are the same, with the important exception of the 1975 and 1993 renaming of 19th and 1st street. The late Black civil rights leader constitutes the city center's border to the north, or the top, while the late Mexican civil rights leader provides the southern border, running parallel to the Colorado River. In altering the city's center to incorporate the voices and history of the two most important minorities in Austin, they are given a visible recognition or representation. Other streets have also had their names altered since 1839, but streets within the central grid of the original 14 blocks of Austin downtown area have not, with the exception of East Avenue being incorporated into the interstate highway, I-35. Renaming 19th and 1st street is a choice made, not a random act, and it is significant in the way that it symbolizes not only the population make-up of Austin today, but also shows an attempt of providing current and historical recognition to minorities living in Austin. It presents a picture of a city where minorities are represented in important and central positions, as mirrored in central city streets, but it can also be argued that this picture presents a paradox, in that the minority representation in street names brings attention to the *lack* of representation or recognition in real-life situations.

Other streets provide a different picture of the minority-majority relations in Austin. A close to waterproof separation between West and East Austin is provided by the I-35. This separation, initiated by the Master Plan of 1928, marks both an ethnic/racial and economic border or barrier, however symbolic, between White and Black/Hispanic, city and slum, and prosperity and poverty. Where the renaming of 19th and 1st streets provides legitimization, and "invites" minorities to be part of the center and the history, the East/West separation keeps them out. Both contribute to the current make-up of the city of Austin, and its self-presentation, and in many ways it pinpoints some of the problems that many of my "at-risk" kids encountered. Minorities are portrayed as valuable assets, who need to be recognized and

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[40] http://www.ci.austin.tx.us/library/ahc/streets/default.htm [Accessed 18 February 2002].

included into multicultural America. The renaming of the two streets represents complying with demands made for increased minority, and ethnic/cultural *recognition.* Steps taken to redress social injustice can, however, not only center on this aspect, since it will not help those suffering economically. In addition to recognition, there is also a need for *redistribution* (Fraser 2001). The success, or chance, of a solution proposed in terms of solving a problem will be dependent on the ability to identify the problem. Many of my "at risk" kids are probably quite correctly identified as at risk of failing to succeed or prosper, both in terms of in-school success and in terms of social status or prestige. Talk of inclusion and strategies for integration are not always addressing what is seen to be the problem by those occupying marginalized or subordinated positions. The question can be raised as to what strategy is more appropriate; that of arguing for the need to include my kids as *equals* in the current educational and social system, or that of advocating their right to be *different.*

Questions addressing *equality* and *difference* in the light of the American ideology, with reference to both race, ethnicity, culture and economy will be addressed in the next chapter.

3. Born Equal?: Race, Ethnicity and Culture

I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands. One nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

The Pledge of Allegiance[41]

Introduction

One of the main reasons that Austin became the final destination for my fieldwork was that I got in contact with a Humanist Group there whose members showed immediate interest and enthusiasm for my project. Just a few weeks after my arrival in Austin, on the 4th of July - the American Independence day, this Humanist Group held a meeting on "How to be an American?" Different members told stories of their own, or their ancestors', arrival in the USA, their hopes, dreams and fears. After these stories were told, the members discussed different aspects of American ideology and the American way of life.

> *P[42]: We're talking about the institution of Texan culture. Texas has been the biggest melting pot for the last 150 years. Maybe freedom can't be appreciated unless you've lived in another country? Here we have complete freedom. You're never stopped and asked for papers….*
> *R: Unless you're Black*
> *(everybody agrees)*
> *E: But ethnic diversity makes it – I won't say "great", it sounds pompous – such an interesting place to live.*
> *K: Diversity forces change. The common religion in America is change and progress.*
> *O: This country was basically founded on the idea that we don't trust anything that is organized. The bureaucracy in Europe is much worse. Here it's either not that bad – or there's a way around it.*
> *F: The American religion is The Bill of Rights – how we treat each other.*
> *(…)*
> *P: (addressing the trade embargo towards Cuba) It's not as though we don't like dictators in general. But if we don't approve of the dictator in question – THEN it's time to introduce democracy.*
> *K: There's a great difference between short term and long term boycott. We're stuck just saving face now.*
> *J: (jokingly) Cuba has nothing we really want except cigars…*
> *K: It's what we're talking about today – that Americans are "morally superior"*

What does it mean to be an American? Is it a feeling, a state of mind, subscribing and belonging to a cultural heritage or an ideological tradition? Or is it a sum of everyday

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[41] http://www.homeofheroes.com/hallofheroes/1st_floor/flag/1bfc_pledge.html [Accessed January 8th 2003]
[42] The voices here will be marked with initials only. They will not appear individually later in the text, and providing them all with pseudonyms is therefore not necessary.

practices? Can being an American in any way be reduced to a common denominator, where lack of those qualities excludes you, while additional qualities cannot jeopardize your inclusion? Is there an ideological core to be disclosed? And is this national identity, or group membership, of imperative importance to everyday life in the USA, and if so why? These are important questions, addressed and debated to exhaustion by both scholars and laymen. It is neither possible, nor desirable, for this thesis to address every aspect of these questions, which have been debated since before the American Independence in 1776. This chapter will explore the use, and importance, of some key ideological points of reference, as addressed by my informants. The two main interests will be firstly how agreed upon ideological ideals of *equality* and *liberty* are being utilized and distributed differently, to serve different political agendas, and secondly, how this categorizing of individuals into different groups, ascribing them with individual and group identities, influence their expressed and experienced identity.

Throughout this thesis I will make occasional references to both “Americans” and “the American society”. “America” in this thesis will mean the USA. This is done to reflect the terms used by people I met in Austin, and does not indicate that I do not recognize that South- and Latin American countries are also part of the “Americas”. Also, making general references to “Americans” and “the American society” is done to explain common practices resulting from shared national ideology, and of course does not suggest that Americans are all the same, or that the American society is in any way homogenous.

Being American: National Character and Key Symbols

We speak of the American Way of Life as though it involved the ground rules for the governance of heaven. A man hungry and unemployed through his own stupidity and that of others, a man beaten by a brutal policeman, a woman forced to prostitution by her own laziness, high prices, availability and despair – all bow with reverence toward the American Way of Life, although each one would look puzzled and angry if he were asked to define it.
John Steinbeck (1970)

Sherry Ortner uses the term *summarizing key symbols* to describe those symbols “seen as summing up, expressing, representing for the participants in an emotionally powerful and relatively undifferentiated way, what the system means to them” (Ortner 1973:1339). Some of the most powerful and frequently used American key symbols are the written words in The Declaration of Independence, The Constitution, with its amendments: the ten first of them constituting The Bill of Rights, and The Pledge of Allegiance. These documents proclaim every American individual’s right to *Equality, Liberty, the Pursuit of Happiness,* and *Government on consent,* as in Democracy – and attributes these valued rights to a necessary

commitment to national *Unity and indivisibility,* and to the *Creator*. They address the individual's rights *and* his or her obligations to the nation – as well as celebrate the greatness of America and its people. Through this, these key symbols can be seen to contribute to a sense of shared national identity or community, be that an *imagined community* in Benedict Anderson's term (1996) or not. Phrases like "taking the fifth[43]", advocating the "right to bear arms" and claiming a search of your car to be "unconstitutional", all refer to different amendments to the Constitution[44], and is part of everyday speech, indicating that their value is not purely symbolic, but rather, as Ortner claims, "emotionally powerful"(Ortner 1973). Where the rest of this chapter is committed to debating the negotiation and management of experienced and ascribed *difference* in the American society, it is first worth proposing that as a foundation to the debate concerning individual and group difference, lies some largely undisputed core, or key, values – constituting an at least partial demand for national unity, and an experience of a shared national identity.

Different writers use different terms for this unity or identity. Erik Erikson uses the term "American Identity", and he describes it as a "*national character*"(1963: 285). Philip Gleason (1982) reflects on Erikson's definition, but expands the term to be used "interchangeably with American nationality and American character" (ibid: 57). Gunnar Myrdal (1944), in his book "An American Dilemma", addresses how Americans often reflect on their way of life, the American Way, but usually without challenging the foundation of it. The *American Dilemma,* he claims, is that different, and often conflicting opinions or practices, are derived from values that are not only experienced as shared, but also as having pan-human validity, like ideals of equality and democracy.

> "(…) [T]here is evidently a strong unity in this nation and a basic homogeneity and stability in its valuations. Americans of all national origins, classes, regions, creeds and colors, have something in common: a social *ethos*, a national creed. It is difficult to avoid the judgment that this "American Creed" is the cement in the structure of this great and disparate nation" (Myrdal 1944:3).

The American way of life constitutes, and is constituted by, a "unity of ideals and diversity of culture"(ibid), a shared ideology, or Creed, and diverse practices. One problem largely resulting from this proposed national unity of ideals, expressed through diverse practices, is of

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[43] To "take the fifth", is used in referring to the individuals right to not give testimony against oneself, as stated in the 5th Amendment, Appendix II. Refusing to say anything that might result in anyone to "be a witness against himself", usually in a court of law.

[44] Respectively: amendments 5, 2 and 4. Appendix II.

course those incidents when ideals contradict each other, or when the obtaining of one excludes the other. For instance, how is one to cater to someone's special needs, to insure his or her *pursuit of happiness*, without simultaneously discriminating against someone else, thereby challenging the ideal of *equality*? And how does one insure the constitutional rights, or *liberty,* of a small group that either disputes the word of *God*, or the will of the *Democratic* majority? Disputes arise when contradicting practices, or strategies, both argue the same constitutional right. In this chapter, the different ways of viewing and promoting *equality* are addressed in particular, but the same kind of disputes and debates exist in relations to the "unalienable" right to *life, liberty* and the *pursuit of happiness.*

There is a core to the American national character, and it is largely an *ideological* core. Philip Gleason (1982) points out that, in setting out to create a new nation after the Independence War, what separated Americans from their previous colonizers was not language, religion or race, but their belief in, and compliance with, those "unalienable rights (…) endowed upon by their Creator" (the Declaration of Independence, p. 47, this thesis). The American national identity was therefore founded on ideology; and not on ethnic origin, cultural heritage or religious unity, making it a *Creed,* in that American's professed shared valuations are what unites them. This national Creed has been ideologically and culturally reproduced since the constitution of the USA, and can now, although somewhat polemic, be said to, in addition to being founded on *ideology,* to also be founded on a shared American cultural heritage, Christian religious unity and Anglo-American ethnicity, indicating not only the content of the ideology, but also which group has been most successful, or dominating in maintaining it.

Being "un-American" still remains as a possible outcome, when not only producing different practices, but in actually disputing the core valuations, and hence the American ideology. There are moral and societal sanctions to such perceived pathological elements, or non-compliance, and there are the historical records of McCarthyism to prove it. The view that the American religion is founded on the Constitution, and its amendments, thereby constituting a civil religion, is shown to be voiced by members in the Humanist Group, and this view is also supported by Robert N. Bellah (1970) in his article "Civil Religion in America". Bellah argues that this *civil religion* is not something removed from Christian religion, however, but rather constitutes a parallel to it. The "sacred" constitutional texts, the key symbols, the shared valuations, somewhat *doxic* in nature (Bourdieu 1977), and the moral sanctions for non-compliance together might propose a picture of the American way of life as a sum of

semi-religious practice. It can be argued that in the American way of life, different practices all propose a commitment to the same ideals. In this thesis the scope will be that of how the teachers, hall-monitors and social workers try to manage or control these different practices. Either as a way of ensuring that the unity of ideals is maintained, or – the ideals are used in justifying and ascribing negative identity, which attempts to control practices.

Understanding "Equality"

All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others. *Animal Farm,* George Orwell (1971).

The term *equality* is somewhat deceptively easy to grasp. "All Men are created equal" (Declaration of Independence, p. 50, this thesis) – this seems easy both to understand, and to agree upon. No individual is born with a higher, or lower, social status position or class, than any other, and all individuals are "endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights" (ibid). As mentioned in the first chapter, even as these words were composed, *All Men* did not include all individuals in the proposed new American nation. Why, when and how to ensure these rights is still a topic of much discussion, both in the USA and in the rest of the world.

The American equality is not one of promoting *all Men* to end up equal; its goal is not an *egalitarian society*. The individual equality is given, or defined, at the outset of arriving in the USA, either through birth or immigration, and the result is thereafter in the hands of the individual, making it an *individualistic society.* Individualism in the contemporary world is linked more with the idea of *progress* than with that of *equality* (Béteille 1986:127).

Industriousness and being self-made becomes the proof of success, prosperity and morality. I once overheard one of the teachers at Charter School telling a girl who was "getting herself" into a lot of trouble, that *"trouble does not come looking for you, you know."* This might seem like a trivial point to make, but it illuminates how the responsibility for both actions and results lie with the *individual*, and not with circumstances. The *equality* of the American society is one of attempting to provide *equal opportunity*, and not results, and as André Béteille points out, equality of opportunity "represents equality in one sense and not in every sense" (Béteille 1986:124). Where a common claim proposes that the *ends justify the means*, in this case – the opposite is true. Non-equal results are often justified by referring to equal opportunities.

Three main pairs of oppositions can be deduced from current discussions of *equality* in the USA. The first one is already mentioned, that of *individualism* vs. *egalitarianism*. This addresses a discussion of which ideological goals should be sought; group goals or individual goals. Secondly, within a discussion of individualism there is also the need to address the difference between the ideal of e*qual opportunities* vs. that of *"parity of participation"* as proposed by Nancy Fraser (2002) and to be discussed at length throughout this thesis. This discussion does not address goals sought, but rather preferred ways of achieving or ensuring these goals. The last opposition to be mentioned is that of *similarity* vs. *difference* or *particularity*. The individual's right to equality in spite of difference can result in a disproportionate ascription of group *specificity,* and a refusal of not only participation, but also of self-experienced similarity. These oppositions, or discussions, will be used to address different aspects of interaction and conflicts between kids and adults, minority and majority, and Mexican and White in this thesis.

Schools and Equality: Leveling, and "The Robin Hood Act"

Not only are non-equal outcomes justified with reference to equal opportunities, thereby leaving the blame for experienced misfortune with the individual, but there is also a noticeable opposition among some groups and individuals in the USA against efforts made to ensure an equal outcome, due to restrains thereby inflicted on the "pursuit of happiness". These efforts are being referred to as redress or "leveling" (Béteille 1986). Max Weber ([1904-1905]1989) argues that *capitalism* is founded in the Protestant ideal of industriousness as a confirmation of a moral way of life, and hence that the accumulation of capital is fueled by a need to prove moral superiority, and closeness to God. This would imply that richness is a sign of morality, and that robbing (!) anyone of the opportunity to prosper economically, is to deprive them of not only the fruits of their success, but also of their individual morality. Even if the Declaration of Independence talks of equality for all men, it also declares individual "liberty" and the "pursuit of happiness" as two other unalienable rights.

Texas legislators have attempted to demand a degree of combined economical and educational leveling however, through what has been known as "The Robin Hood Act"[45], invoking notions of taking from the rich, and giving to the poor. School funding is partly based on taxation of local property-value, one out of several aspects of the *localism*

[45] See for instance: EANES Independent School District's web page (http://www.eanes.k12.tx.us/CA/superintendent/column0502.htm) [Accessed 14.05.2002]

encouraged in past and present day American educational politics (Mauk & Oakland 1997). The taxable value cap is however state ordered, and is 1.50 USD per 100 taxable USD in Texas[46]. This means that not only do residents in property-rich areas experience that they are paying tax to other school districts, but in addition they are not allowed to increase the portion used on schools, to insure a preferred standard of their public schools, beyond the 1.50 per 100 USD. What to some is perceived as *redistributing* wealth to those less fortunate, can be argued to be highly unfair, and *unconstitutional* by some property-rich Americans, in that it is interfering with the freedom of the individual, to spend his or her money in whatever way desirable, and it is financially "punishing" the property-rich, thereby limiting their pursuit of happiness – in this case: Money.

Schools and Equality: School Districts and School Assignment

> *Martin: I can't wait to get out of Austin. You see, I've been living on the east side all my life. When I was born we used to live in this little pole-house, and we were kinda' poor. That's why I'd like to be an only-child, because only-childs get everything they want.*
> *Me: But you'd be spoilt then.*
> *Martin: Yeah. I'd like to be spoilt.*

Even if it can be argued that the American society values and protects the individual more than it does groups, an argument that will be presented shortly, it is still a community, or more correctly *a number of* communities. Often, equality is a case of equality and community within groups instead of between them. Two examples of such *equal communities* are residential and religious communities – where you live, and where you worship. In both these areas Americans are largely segregated with regards to economical, social and racial status. I once asked a member of the Humanist group why there were no Black or Mexican members. He told me that they *wanted* a more ethnically diverse group, but that "America is never as segregated as on Sundays at 11 am." Residential areas are similarly segregated by income level and race. This has consequences for most school districts in areas where there are both racial/ethnic and economical differences.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the Austin Independent School District, as well as other school districts in areas where residential patterns are homogenous to such a degree that they for all practical purposes are racially segregated, were instructed to desegregate their schools.

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[46] See previous footnote for reference.

This shows that a decision to insure *equal rights* to education is tied to ideals of integration and heterogeneity – or difference - in Texan public schools. In Seattle, Washington[47], however, a local court declared that assigning students to schools on the basis of race was in violation of a state initiative from 1998, because it favors one group over another, and hence violates the ideal of *equality*. Positive or reverse discrimination - which term feels right is probably in the eye of the beholder - is used to achieve *diversity* as a measure of *equality,* by "not only taking collective identities into account but assigning them a certain pre-eminence over individual identities" (Béteille 1986:122). Affirmative action laws and Civil rights acts have been introduced and disputed since the 1960'ies[48]. Common for these legislative attempts is that they all argue the case of ensuring *equality.* The demographic minority situation in Austin is very different from that in Seattle[49], hence making the basis for the perceived need for actions taken to insure equal opportunities, different as well.

My kids at Anglo High had to travel quite far with bus, to get from their East side homes to Anglo High. Faith once said that she thought much of the reason that many kids felt miserable at Anglo High was that they felt "different" from the other kids. She herself felt strange while walking in the hallways, because she had worked at another high school which she said *"if I should guess, I would guess that it was 95 percent Hispanic[50]",* and therefore she was used to racially being a minority in that school. She said that she thought it must be really hard for someone to have a school next door, but still have to get on a bus for 30 minutes to go to your assigned school. The explanations for this school bussing given to me were quite diverse. Some social workers told me that kids were being literally torn up from their neighborhood, and bussed to far away schools, in a strive for some sort of racial equilibrium, while other school staff saw it as a necessary extension or manipulation of school boundaries to ensure equal opportunities for minority kids[51]. My kids were all pretty much from the same neighborhood, and most of them claimed that even if things were "all messed up" at Anglo

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[47] The Seattle Times (http://seattletimes.nwsource.com/html/localnews/134444174_race27m.html) [Accessed 27.04.2002].

[48] *The Colombia Encyclopedia* (http://www.bartelby.com/65/af/affirmat.html) [Accessed 17.01.2002]

[49] Washington state has a 81 percent white population, while the national average is 75.1 percent. Texas has a 71 percent White population, but since Hispanics are not seen as a separate race, most of the 32 percent Hispanics in Texas are counted as White, making the non-Hispanic whites count only 52.4 percent. Washington has only 7.5 percent Hispanics, so 78.9 percent whites are non-Hispanic white. *U.S. Census Bureau* (http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/53000.html).

[50] The percentage was actually just over 70 percent, but I find her experience of the school as being "95 percent Hispanic" just as important as the real number.

[51] The AISD web page has announced its intention of posting updated maps over school boundaries for months, but has yet to do so. (http://www.austin.isd.tenet.edu/k12/schools/school_boundaries/) Accessed Oct. 7th 2002.

High, they were much worse in other schools. A few of them did, however, want to transfer to different high schools. Both Martin and Enrique spent many hours in the SWO office, arguing why they needed to transfer to this and that school to get a "new start", which will be addressed in the last chapter. Even if both of them claimed that their minority status had nothing to do with them wanting a transfer, Martin requested a transfer to a school with a large Black population and Enrique to one with a predominantly Mexican population.

Class and Race: Addressing Inequality and Subordination

As I have mentioned in the introduction, the analytical terms *class* and *race* are largely substituted for each other in much European and American writings on social injustice or cultural oppression, with Europeans embracing class and Americans race as prime explanations. This thesis is not primarily about neither class nor race as such, since both should be treated as analytical tools only, even if they frequently are presented as intrinsic qualities. Rather, this thesis is about a group of boys in a public high school, subjected to both self-experienced inequality and ascribed with negative differences, or better, with societal and institutional "otherness". Choosing terms and defining their meaning is important (only) as an attempt to disentangle the conceptual mess I initially experienced, as a result of different opinions and explanations, and their meanings, as presented to me by different people during fieldwork.

My kids would refer to themselves as Mexicans in contrast to those who were White or Black, and would convey this difference as substantial. This is a *racial* categorization. Mexican social workers, a generation older and more (ethno-)politically active, would refer to my kids and themselves as being Mexicans in contrast to *Anglos,* and belonging to a group that had suffered from centuries of cultural and political oppression. Still containing a certain reference to physical and racial features, this can, and will, be argued to constitute more of a categorization on the basis of *culture* or *ethnicity.* Both racial and cultural or ethnic categorization emerges from an understanding of difference and social injustice as being somehow originating in the historical oppression of racial minorities, and are being suggested solved or redressed through recognition of autochthony claims, or of faults within the ideological premises for organization of America's cultural pluralism and racial diversity.

Parallel to this, my kids, the social workers and the school staff would also talk about *poverty* as a reason for lack of *participatory parity* (Fraser 2001) and difference in outcome.

Minorities in the USA constitute groups that are recognizably poorer than the White majority. The emphasis on economical status as reason for societal stratification echoes the class theory of Karl Marx, which Douglas Foley (1990) suggests is Paul Willis' (1993) main inspiration in analyzing the inequalities experienced by his *working-class* kids. Marx described two main oppositional classes in a capitalist society: those who control the means of production, and those who work to produce a surplus for that first class. The first mentioned class' control also involves control over *ideological* or *cultural* production, and therefore results in an ideological domination of the first over the latter (Foley 1990:169, see also Willis 1993). A more commonly applied use of the term *class* in recent works, dealing with matters of social identity and status, is however that of Max Weber. He substituted (or extended) Marx' view of classes as being primarily economically constituted, with one of viewing classes primarily as social or cultural *status groups*.

> "Weber's notion of status groups shifted the discussion of social classes from groups with different positions in the production system to groups with different lifestyles and status displays of consumption. In effect, this view of social classes emphasizes the question of a public social identity that marks a person's group." (Foley 1990:169)"

Relying on Weber, then, class belonging and inequality should be understood primarily as a consequence or symptom of someone's social identity or group membership with reference to status or lifestyle. This would imply that my Mexican "at risk" kids, through their racial or ethnic identity, their "at risk" status and their "lifestyle", whatever that should mean, could constitute a status group, and therefore a social class. I support this to the extent that I agree that the combination of my kids' social identities or statuses makes them a group in the eyes of both themselves and others. No one identity is predominant or works independent of the other in assigning my kids to a position within the social status scene of Anglo High. If that was the case, middle-class, or socially prominent Mexicans could have been grouped together with my kids because of a shared ethnic or racial identity, and poor or "at risk" White kids could have been grouped together with them because of economic or academic status. In a society like the American, where cultural or racial minorities as a group occupy the lower sections of an economic stratification, race and class operate together. A position within one system can often be explained, or equated, with the other. As Paul Willis says: "where two sets of divisions are lived out in the same concrete space, they cannot remain separate" (Willis 1990:148). However, to just explain and address the structural subordination of some groups through how they are categorized by others in terms of recognized social status or expressed

social identity is too easy. Being poor is of course also experienced as a real disadvantage, not just a social stigma.

Both Fraser (2002) and Foley (1990) argue the need to take both the degree of economic disadvantage and status subordination into account when addressing matters of social justice. Foley refers to the construction by mainline sociology of a "false dichotomy" between cultural status groups and economic classes. He promotes Pierre Bourdieu's effort to combine attention paid to both capital (both cultural and economic) and status, making "status groups (…) part of the cultural reproduction of capital that perpetuates class inequalities " (ibid:170). Fraser accuses efforts that are singularly attentive to either *recognition* or *redistribution* as explanations for injustice, for taking part in the construction of a "false Antithesis", even if she argues the need to still view the analytical terms of *class* and *status* separately.

> "To say that a society has a class structure is to say that it institutionalizes economical mechanisms that systematically deny some of its members the means and opportunity they need in order to participate on a par with others in social life. To say, likewise, that a society has a status hierarchy is to say that it institutionalizes patterns of cultural value that pervasively deny some members the recognition they need in order to be full, participating partners in social interaction" (Fraser 2001:42).

What constitutes a class, and/or a status group, and whether my kids constitute such a class in itself, or for itself, is not the main point I wish to make. What I experience as important is to show through the progression of this thesis that the American society has both such structural "economical mechanisms" and "institutionalize[d] patterns of cultural value" that work together in ascribing my kids with a social and moral stigma. In being both economically marginalized, or poor, and ascribed with a cultural minority status, my kids face a dual subordination and participatory imparity. In addition, both being poor and Mexican is not only a question of assessing the relative position of this group; it is also a matter of morality, assigned on the basis of the mentioned *patterns of cultural value.* Being poor in the USA is a moral matter, in that it indicates failure or misused opportunities. Being Mexican or Black is also a moral matter, both as judged on the basis of still present racial antipathies, and in that addressing minority problems has become a euphemistic way of addressing crime and poverty. My kids are both poor and Mexican, and this dual subordination or disadvantage entails an initial *moral* stigma.

Pluralism in America: the Politics of Group Identity

*"*David: *Yes, East and West, and North and South, the palm and the pine, the pole and the equator, the crescent and the cross… Here shall they all unite to build the Republic of Man and the Kingdom of God. Ah, Vera, what is the glory of Rome and Jerusalem where all nations and races come to worship and look back, compared with the glory of America, where all races come to labour and look forward!…"*

The Melting-Pot, Israel Zangwill (Schlessinger 1992:33*)*

Israel Zangwill introduced the expression "The Melting-Pot" in the play with the same name from 1908 (Schlessinger 1992). America was to be the land where all races were to be melted together, and emerge from the mold as Americans, and nothing else. In the same pompous language as Zangwill's play was written, the then president, Theodore Roosevelt supposedly shall have stated that: "We can have no 'fifty-fifty' allegiance in this country (…). Either a man is an American and nothing else, or he is not an American at all." (ibid:35), thereby arguing for *assimilation* and elimination of cultural difference as the preferable way to build a new nation from immigrants. The impossibility of a fifty-fifty allegiance has been argued in a previous section, with reference to the negative sanctions resulting from being perceived as un-American, but the claim for a homogenous American identity for all citizens was soon reputed and challenged by advocates for the importance of preserving cultural and ethnic identity through a process of *integration* that would be sensitive to both group identity and overarching national identity. Among them is Horace M. Kellen, who in his book "Democracy versus the Melting Pot: A study of American Nationality" from 1915, argued that a strive for unity instead of harmony would violate the American democratic ideal (Gleason 1982), showing again how the same ideological foundation is invoked to argue separate positions, or *unity of ideals and diversity of culture* (Myrdal 1944:3), here the opposition between *assimilation* and *integration* as ideal for social organization. Assimilation never included everyone. Neither Native Americans nor African Slaves were to be assimilated into the American antebellum society. The fact that the recognized population exclusively consisted of White European 'some-generation' immigrants, made the introduction of *integration* as a different approach than assimilation, possible. The advocates of this view argued for the importance of cultural diversity. It was argued that Americans should be able to hold on to their native national identity, as a cultural asset, and still have a hundred percent American allegiance. Erik Erikson (1963) addresses this interplay of different levels of loyalties, and refers to the American identity as a *superidentity,* overarching different ethnic group identities (Gleason 1982).

The assimilation ideal represented by the Melting Pot was an important one in reputing the "then-prevalent nativist and racial assumptions" (Landsman and Katkin 1998:2) that racial and ethnic groups were unchangeable and could never be included into American society (ibid). Even if the result was one of attempting to adapt all white "others" into a British and Protestant, or in Texan terms: Anglo, mold. With a change in focus towards anti-assimilation views of *cultural pluralism,* the rights of groups to retain their *culture* and *ethnicity* upon arrival in the USA, thereby cultivating different levels of identities, as mentioned argued by Erikson (1963), became the object of academic discussions. Pluralism has forked into several different discourses later, some promoting the right and need for recognition of ethnic and cultural particularity, as in Charles Taylors proposed *multicultural* approach (Taylor1994). Some, like David Hollinger argues the need for a *post-ethnic option* (Hollinger 1998), where the individual can also choose *not* to be "ethnic", thereby refusing any claim for ethnicity as primordially given. (Neo-)Marxist theorists sees class domination or economic marginalization as the main reason for adopting and ascribing minority-identity status, a view that can be seen as presenting ethnic identity as either a form of false consciousness or a canalized class struggle (Willis 1993, 1990), and Nancy Fraser, as already argued, announces the need for a combination of these two discourses (Fraser 2001).

Groups of individuals, and their right to a group identity, do not have the same constitutional protection in the USA that individuals have (Katz 1998). Both assimilation and integration or pluralism views can, when promoting a certain group's values or culture over others, or the majority individual's right over that of minority groups', utilize the democratic principles to such an extent that Alexis de Toqueville's predicted possibility for a "tyranny of the majority" (Toqueville 1969:250) becomes a real threat. When pluralism has a cultural preference, it can be used to explain lack of *participatory parity* (Fraser 2001) through the individual's constitutional right to choose[52] to participate in and (re)produce a group identity, even if this is an identity connected to a lower social status. Oscar Lewis argued the need to see some group's culture as a "Culture of Poverty", where cultural preferences and choices made, contributes to a marginalized life (Lewis 1968). According to Lewis, the content or foundation of some minorities' cultural heritage and practice is what is preventing them from

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[52] Only when White kids are being bussed to predominantly Black or Mexican schools is group identity recognized as something that is not necessarily "chosen". David Hollinger (1998) argues that there exists a "bipolar construction" in the USA that makes only one distinction, that between white and non-white (ibid: 61) According to this one can argue that Whites are Whites, while Others are Ethnic.

attaining equality in outcome. Theories of *social reproduction* have some of the same message today, but it is more often a top-down argumentation, where the "blame" for the reproduction is usually allocated to dominant groups in society who create and preserve the social order that reproduces inequality (Bourgois 1995, Foley 1990, Willis 1993 and Hall & Jefferson 1977).

Tocqueville's "tyranny of the majority" is a result of the ideal of Universal suffrage in the USA (Tocqueville 1969). Where every branch of the government, both the legislative, judicial and executive, is elected and controlled by democratic principals, and for limited periods of time only, the effect can be that the majority will deafen, and completely ignore the minorities. Robert Bellah proposes that a democracy is founded on trust (Bellah et al. 1991). Meaning that even if you loose the election to a majority of the population, you have to be able to trust that majority to not prosecute you or punish you for supporting the minority (ibid). Adding to this the prevalent assumption that racially and economically marginalized individuals are less likely to participate in the democratic process, the "majority" in power to exercise the tyranny might not even be a numerical majority – but merely a median group who, assuming that this could be a homogenous group, can act in its own interest. Tocqueville's concern was that those who are elected to govern are not necessarily those best qualified, but those that can appeal to the largest number of people (Tocqueville 1969). Heavy emphasis on both individual freedom and on the constitutional quality of democratic ideals can lead to a misrepresentation of certain groups and/or ethnic minorities in elected positions. And even if the minority group has a proportionate representation in elected organs, it will still only be a minority, and the very definition of minorities in a democracy is that they are representatively outnumbered.

Social injustice might therefore be experienced in cases where minority status is not primarily culturally experienced, but rather created and maintained by a dialectical process of categorization and self-ascribing of group- or social identity. In his book *Social Identity,* Richard Jenkins (1996) shows how all identities, both those experienced individually and through groups are best seen as *social identities,* and that they are both created and maintained through a continuing process of internal and external ascription. In a political struggle towards majority or median influences that are experienced by minorities as being disproportionately powerful, minority politicians can both attempt to address positive or genuine particularity, or to shed this particularity. One approach is that of emphasizing and preserving cultural

heritage, addressing primarily the way minorities are treated or fail to be recognized. The other is to question the category itself, and explain its purpose as one of labeling minority or stigma identities on minority groups, or influencing and extending the group dynamic and group-composition itself. Both these attempts shall be addressed next - the latter first.

Hispanic, Mexican, American: Official Categorization of Race and Ethnic Origin

As mentioned in the Introduction, many partly overlapping terms are being used to identify and classify individuals living in Texas who have some sort of real or imagined connection to Mexico, or other parts of Latin America. There are basically two initial positions to assume in debating a society's ethnic categories and expressed degrees of otherness: One where difference is seen as either biologically or culturally determined, and where the responsibility of any plural or multicultural society is one of acceptance, respect and understanding of the "other" (i.e. Foley 1990 and Taylor 1994). The other view is one of critical theory, where difference is seen as either culturally or socially constructed by a Eurocentric (and Androcentric) hegemonic system, and that the deconstruction of categories explaining and reproducing difference is needed in order to achieve social justice (Fraser 2001, see also Moore 1988, 1994).

According to such a division, ethnic or racial identities should be understood either as somewhat primordially provided, and therefore inescapable, or as labeled identities sometimes containing a social stigma, and therefore having victimizing consequences, or as a combination of the two, in that experienced genuine cultural heritage can be externally inscribed with a social stigma (Eidheim 1969). Where ethnic identity can be strategically utilized by minority or ethno-political activists, and presented as a cultural asset, the process of *official* categorization and grouping, as undertaken for example by the US Census Bureau, must also be understood as a process of grouping and separation for a *reason.*

The reasons or rules for ascription of certain racial or ethnic identities, and thinking in terms of race and ethnic origin at all, signals an official attitude that holds racial and ethnic background to be important. Regardless of whether difference is primordial or constructed, experienced or labeled. The criteria used in assigning race or ethnic origin sometimes seams randomly set, and sometimes even ridiculous. Especially so in the case of Hispanic or Latino categorization:

> **"How Should Hispanics or Latinos Answer the Race Question?**
> People of Hispanic origin may be of any race and should answer the question on race by marking one or more race categories shown on the questionnaire, including White, Black or African American, American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, and Some Other Race. Hispanics are asked to indicate their origin in the question on Hispanic origin, not in the question on race, because in the federal statistical system ethnic origin is considered to be a separate concept from race." [53]

The official census statistic, provided by the U.S. Census Bureau, provides information on population numbers, both nation-, state- and city-wide, linked with statistical information on age, race, ethnic origin and economy[54]. Claims have been made that the Census Bureau's "[d]ata about Hispaincs are at best meaningless (…) and at worst only create and reinforce racial stereotypes" (Giménez, López and Muñoz 1992:3). As shown, Hispanics, recognized as an *ethnic group,* may be of any of the five races approved by the federal statistical system, plus the category *Some Other Race*. The majority of people with Mexican or other Hispanic origin select the White race; and some choose to select the Some Other Race*,* marking that Hispanic should be a separate option in this part of the survey as well. In separating race from ethnic origin the Census can be accused of embracing a view of race as a purely biological factor. Even if most people will have to agree that biology (read: looks) plays a part in initial racial categorization, the argument that racial categories are much more a cultural construction than a biological reality is now more the norm than the exception within social science. There seems to be little biological logic to why a person historically has been forced to identify as Black, through a contamination theory of "the one-drop rule" (Waters 1998), while a dark-skinned Mexican is first generously accepted into the White category, and then gently refused in the next step of the process, where the "Non-Hispanic Whites" are selected onwards from the White category, which has become too inclusive. It is even hard to find a social or cultural logic to this process.

Changing political trends and demographic composition creates a demand for frequently substituted terms. Post-World War II-Europeans supposedly feel uneasy about applying *racial* labels in general (Rex 1995), and substitute these labels with new ones, describing national-, ethnic- or regional origin, and more recently (and this applies to the USA as well) also *cultural* ones (Viesweswaran 1998), without necessarily substituting the contents of the

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[53] http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/race/racefactcb.html [Accessed Oct. 7th 2002].
[54] www.census.gov "U.S Census Bureau. – United States Department of Commerce"[accessed Nov 5th 2002].

categories. In the USA, racial- and ethnic terms are applied quite frequently, but the categories and their limitations change. One of the classificatory tools used to group together what is now seen as “Hispanics or Latinos” has been that of “Spanish origin”, or “Spanish speaking”. Peter Skerry (1993) makes a convincing argument in claiming that Hispanics have never been discriminated against because they were of Spanish descent, but rather because they are of *Indian* descent, thereby reconnecting the Hispanic group with racial characteristics, and maybe questioning the validity of the statement presented above from the Census form that to “the federal statistical system ethnic origin is considered to be a separate concept from race”.

Angela: Why don’t you all go to the Latino Club?
Pablo: We don’t speak Spanish, Miss.
Beth (Social Worker): It’s an odd spot to be Latino in the US, and not speak Spanish.

Many of my kids spoke no Spanish: Indicating, or proving, that you can self-identify as Mexican and be categorized as Hispanic/Latino without speaking Spanish. As was shown in chapter 1, Martin once went to this Latino Club, and felt very left out because he did not speak Spanish. Somebody asked him if he was Hispanic, and Martin answered that he was Cuban. Black Cubans are generally seen as being racially Black and ethnic Latinos, but they are usually not counted as Hispanics, since they have (or appear to have) African origin instead of Spanish. Martin is Black, and not Cuban, but some Cubans are Black, and hence are Latinos. I will stop yanking this polemic chain, after I have made a final attempt at showing how the Census’ categorizing of largely *labeled* (Raybeck 1991) group identities and categories is to such an extent removed from the self-ascribed and experienced identities held by my kids, that I find it to be almost useless. It is however good at showing the preference for ascribing identities on the basis of race or ethnic origin/culture as held by the American society, and some of the following paradoxes involved in categorizing people on the basis of both biological and cultural origin, and self ascribed group belonging. The official categorization is accused of providing “racial ethnic labels (…) used as code words for behavioral patterns associated with poverty, destitution, and deviant/criminal behavior,” (Giménez 1992:37) thereby ascribing negative characteristics to minority groups. Simultaneously, identifying inside this group is necessary to qualify for special financial assistance (ibid).

Summing it all up: The Hispanics and Latino category is largely overlapping, but there is a difference in than most Hispanics self-identify as Whites, and even if most Latinos do too, those from the Hispanic/Latino category who self-identify as Black usually also self-identify as Latino, and not Hispanic. Hispanics/Latinos who do not speak Spanish still regard themselves as Hispanics/Latino, and then, finally, you have the Spanish, who speak Spanish, but are not Hispanic. In addition to race and ethnicity, surnames have also been used in categorization and in assigning minority status, even if this will not be addressed at length in this thesis. This categorizing-dance can be seen both as an attempt to deal with a new immigration situation, where the new type of immigrant is harder to define by old standards, or it can be seen as a euphemistical, or political correct attempt to place individuals with a Mexican decent within categories of race and Whiteness – and social status, without using those terms. Sometimes the euphemisms say so much more however; few things specifies being Rich and White like the term Upper-middle-class Non-Hispanic-White.

"Why are all these people White bitches?" : Everyday Perceptions of Race and Culture

Javier: And why do you think I know how to Salsa, Miss? Because I'm Mexican?

My sophomore kids talked in a tough way. It was probably one of the ways they upheld their internally- and externally-ascribed in-school status as being "Bad" or "tough". They made fun of each other, talked derogatory about other people, and groups of people, and used a wide range of profanities and racial and sexist slurs. Even if they would sometime say horrible things to each other, it was always followed or accompanied with a laugh however, and I never saw them fight or argue much within the group. As mentioned previously, they were always somewhat amazed that I would write everything down, and they would also find much amusement in helping me get bad words down, both those just used, and those offered as supplements when realizing it was "going in the book". The verbal harassment would usually target one or several of four main groups or categories: *Women, Gays, Whites* and *Blacks*. Not only would they voice dislike of people from these groups, they would also apply these labels to people to signalize dislikes. I was told that both Angela and Faith were lesbians and that they did not like Mexicans, because they were White.

One time when Javier was sitting in the office he looked at Angela and me, and suddenly turned to the others and said: "*Why are all these people White bitches?*" The others laughed, and Angela told him off for referring to women as bitches, but he had a point - in that most of the social workers I met through the SWO were White women, working with Mexican boys.

The outreach organization that worked with the same kids had quite a few Mexican men in their staff. Angela would express certain ambivalences towards these men, and their methods. She said that their approach to youth work was “outreach”, and that they would spend a lot of time just hanging out with the boys and talk about this and that. She felt both that what the boys needed more than this was a lot of practical help with their everyday life, and also that some of the outreach workers were not very good role models. Taking into consideration that most of the time the kids spent in the SWO office was also spent “just hanging out”, and not necessarily with the social workers giving them help with practical tasks, Angela’s antipathy towards the Mexican outreach workers can be seen as an antipathy towards somewhat tough Mexican men teaching the Mexican boys what to do and how to be. The boys experienced the attitudes and ideals tentatively distributed from these well-meaning White women, as being very much both White ideals and School ideals. Any authority’s disapproval or reaction towards them was usually interpreted as being founded in racism or in “not liking Mexicans”. It is possible that these feelings were somewhat mutual, in that Angela might have felt that the last thing these boys needed to improve their in-school effort and skills, which can be seen to be predominantly White skills, was the Mexican influence provided by the outreach organization. Racial labels were being used more by my kids to describe the difference between them and others, and particularly others in positions of authority.

The Mexican outreach workers were very popular with the boys. And the kids talked to these men about things that they would not talk to Angela, Faith and myself about. This was probably partly both because we were women, and because our time with them was spent in a school situation, while the outreach work was mostly conducted after school, in their own neighborhood - And probably also partly because the men from the outreach organization were more easy-going, and less concerned with sanctioning what they experienced as bad language and inappropriate jokes. One indication of this was given to me when I talked to one of the Mexican outreach workers at a community event one weekend. When I told him I was from Norway, he exclaimed: *“Ahh. So you’re Miss Norway. I’ve heard about you. The boys talk about you all the time”*. Somewhat pleased with this, I soon got my feet back on the ground when Felipe, standing not too far away, declared: *“And it aint all good, Miss”*. To do a tentative analysis of this, I assume that the boys probably did talk about me more to these outreach workers than they would like me to know, hence seeing Felipe’s comment as an attempt to conceal this interest. But I also think that it probably was not “all good” either, what they did say, and that he would like me to know that too. Being associated with the

SWO office, and Angela and Faith as strict, White women, I was probably not seen as as much *fun* as the outreach workers.
One of the outreach workers was White, and this is how he was described on one occasion:

> *Marcus: Who do you mean, Bill?*
> *Felipe: You know Bill*
> *Marcus: No, man*
> *Paul: Yeah, you know. The White guy who thinks he's Mexican.*
> *Marcus: Oh, yeah.*

I found this very amusing. One of the reasons I assume he was seen as "thinking that he was Mexican", was because he acted very similar to both them and the other Mexican outreach workers[55], even if he was White and lived in North Austin. He also told me that he was going to move to East Austin, because it had much more of a community feeling. He voiced a clear antipathy for politicians, the police and the school administration, for being unwilling, or incapable, of dealing with minority problems in a satisfying way. One day when he and I were taking all the kids to my apartment for some pizza, as a thank you from me before I left, the school police officer stopped Bernardo on the school's parking lot and searched his pockets and accused him of carrying drugs. While my reaction, as an adult that was, or felt, partly responsible for the kids was to talk to the police officer about where we were going and why, Bill never got out of the car. My assistance did not help either, but while I was probably trying to solve the problem in a White woman way, Bill sat with the other kids in the car, said nothing, averted his eyes and just waited until the police officer let Bernardo go. After we got to my apartment he participated in their discussion on what a racist idiot the police officer was. Bill's position in the outreach organization probably seemed as half amusing because the kids never saw him as the same as the other Mexican social workers, indicating that there are fundamental differences between Whites and Mexicans that can not be overcome no matter who you hang with, where you live, what you do or how you feel.

Angela and Faith were never taken for "thinking they were Mexican", they were stuck being "White", and sometimes "(lesbian) bitches." The antipathies voiced were not representative of most daily interaction in the office, however. Conversations were usually always pleasant,

[55] It is hard to explain why a characterization or description is fitting, but when I heard the description made by Felipe to Marcus, I found myself immediately agreeing to his description.

and the kids kept coming back to the office every day. The office provided a place to hang out, in the company of your friends, the social workers – and the anthropologist.

The reference made to Bill "thinking he was Mexican" lead to a discussion on what it meant to be, or not be Mexican. They explained that it was not a problem to "act White" or "act Mexican"; unless it meant that you were "dissing"[56] your own culture. In trying to have them explain what this *culture* consisted of, they did not know how to explain, or did not want to. They did, however, agree that it was more of a cultural "crime" to act White than it was to act Mexican or Black. In addition to the previously mentioned trashing of newly arrived Mexican immigrants, they also occasionally made fun of their own "ethnic group". Miguel for instance once claimed that Mexicans and Irish got along so fine because they both liked to drink too much. But mostly they would emphasize the perceived shortcomings and inferiority of Blacks, and the malevolent intentions of Whites.

Since there were fewer Blacks working in, or attending Anglo High, there were fewer encounters that made their attitudes observable to me, but they talked about their resentment frequently. For instance, one of them told me that Javier trained his dog to attack Black people. Being, or looking Black or White was also used as a way of making fun of each other. At the same community event as mentioned above, Felipe showed up later than the others:

> *Javier: Where were you, man?*
> *Felipe: I was asleep.*
> *Javier: oh. Okay.*
> *Felipe: A Black guy and a White guy came to my house and woke me up.*
> *Javier: Who? Police?*
> *Felipe: No, man. Paul and Miguel.*

Paul had a darker complexion than the other kids, and Miguel could probably have "passed as" White, as far as skin color was concerned. On another occasion, Felipe would repeat the joke, or insult: *"Paul is Black. He's African American. He's mixed, man."* Paul always smiled, and never answered these comments. I asked Angela if he indeed was "mixed[57]", but she did not know. This kind of ridicule is similar to the one that Bill was made the subject of.

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[56] "dissing" = disrespecting.
[57] Meaning a "mix" between two or more races. Both official and common sense perceptions of racial categorization in the USA can give an impression of people in the same racial category as being biologically 'pure' or homogenous. One must assume that this view is largely simplified, or even false.

There was no doubt with the kids that Paul and Miguel were indeed Mexicans. In making a joke that refers to someone as being racially different from what they really are, Felipe and Javier is toying with moving Paul and Miguel from one racial category to another. To my kids this is impossible – you are what you are – and therefore it is funny.

Talking to the kids, I got the impression that being both Black, White and Mexican was seen as a permanent feature, best explained through concepts of *race*, even if the Census Bureau states quite clearly that Hispanics are not a race. This is not for them to decide single-handedly, of course. To my kids, being Mexican consisted mostly of racial characteristics. How you express this identity, or better said: trait, is something you can choose, but it is not a status that you can opt to change or forsake. The kids almost exclusively used the term *White* as an opposition to *Mexican* and *Black,* rather than the term *Anglo,* which is used both historically and currently to make a distinction between people with English, and later American, origin and those with Spanish or South American origin. My kids see Mexicans as being a heterogeneous group, but they also acknowledge that they are all Mexicans, and that this is unchangeable. In their opinion, and regardless of what the Census Bureau claims, Mexicans are not White. They use both biological features and cultural heritage to explain differences, but even the reference to *culture* was made in terms of something that "just was". The complex rules for ascription of ethnic and racial group membership was not addressed by my kids, but the emphasis on racial categorization in itself influenced both how they saw themselves and others, in that any dislike voiced was usually voiced in terms of race or gender. My kids therefore frequently use racial and cultural characteristics of each other, but as will be shown next, they utilize them differently than some groups of politically active Mexican adults.

"Don't let those Anglos tell you that they were here first": Autochthony Claims.

Practically all anthropological reasoning rests on the premise that cultural variation is discontinuous: That there are aggregates of people who essentially share a common culture, and interconnected differences that distinguish each such discrete culture from all others. (Barth 1969:9)

The Mexican adults that I talked to during my fieldwork, most of them being social workers, teachers or outreach workers, had a largely different approach and attitude to the importance and the management of a Mexican identity, than my kids did. My kids usually did not activate or address their ethnic origin or minority status except from when they were using it to explain why "others" treated them badly, or disliked them, or why they disliked others. As

mentioned, these sentiments, or "trashings" were not exclusive to ethnic or racial categories, but would also be used in referring to homosexuals, women, police officers or school employees. The reference was therefore seldom made to their own culture or Mexican-ness, but to other's Whiteness, Homosexuality or position of authority. This does not say that they had no concept or feeling of relatedness or sameness, just that it was not expressed frequently, or that sympathy was expressed in other terms than racial ones. Racial categories had largely negative connotations to my kids, while racial, or rather; cultural characteristics and heritage were attempted positively emphasized by the Mexican outreach workers.

Chicano is a term adopted and applied by political activists as well as left-wing writers, advocating civil rights and affirmative action laws for Mexican Americans in the late 1960'ies (Muñoz 1989 and Skerry 1993). The Chicano term has lately been largely substituted with Mexican American, Latino or Hispanic, visible signs of a turn in the national political current, in increased attention paid to both the right to ethnic particularity and at the same time social equality, and decreased emphasis on historical injustice and suppressed minority status. Special for the Chicano term is that it is special for Mexican decedents, whereas the Latino and Hispanic term has come to have quite different sectional and regional composition and meaning. In Florida, the Cuban immigrant society constitutes a large portion of the Hispanic or Latino "ethnic group", in New York, the Puerto Rican immigrant community is dominating, and in the southwest, and particularly Texas and California, Hispanic or Latino means almost exclusively Mexican. Within the Chicano tradition the previous injustice against the Chicano population, similar to those against the African American[58] population, is emphasized, and the attitude is one of how education in cultural heritage can partake in creating an ethnic assertiveness as an asset for individuals with a minority identity. The ability to utilize the "positive" effect of ethnic identity has however been argued to be easier for some groups than others (Giménez *et. al* 1992). Highly educated, upper-middle-class Hispanics are more free to choose to embrace and express their experienced ethnic identity – or not, in quite a different degree than Hispanics with lower social status positions.

As stated, the Mexican adults were trying to convey some positive experience through different aspects of what was seen as part of the Mexican cultural heritage to the kids. Their

[58] The same way that *Chicano* was and still is by some, preferred to the term Mexican, Mexican-American or Hispanic/Latino, *African American* was launched as a replacement for both Negro and Black, by among others Jesse Jackson in 1988. The affiliation with Africa was meant to provide a cultural belonging and unity for the American Black population (Martin 1991). The majority of the Black population in the USA now, however, prefers the term Black, but African American is still frequently used.

success in this must be said to have been very limited. One day in the SWO office I was asking them if they had gone to see a movie that they had talked about seeing for a long time. The movie, "The Blair Witch Project", was advertised as being the "scariest movie" ever made, and they had talked about it non-stop for several days.

Me: did you guys go see the Blair Witch project?
Felipe: no. We went up to this Indian camp where they tried to make us be all intellectual, and all.

Even if they were not very willing to elaborate on where and what this "Indian camp" [59] was, or what they had to do that was so intellectual, I was told that they had had a field-trip together with the outreach organization. I do not have any detailed information of this trip, since I did not go with them, but the main point here, as communicated by the kids afterwards, was that *they* wanted to participate in a common American ritual of popular culture, the horror movie, while the Mexican outreach workers took them to an Indian camp to educate them in "their" tradition and cultural heritage. My kids associated this kind of Mexican cultural heritage, the Indian one, both to intellectualism, and to a different generation's values.

Another field trip was made together with the outreach organization, which I did participate in, to mark the upcoming *Día de los muertos*[60] and the American Halloween. We started out from a Community Center in East Austin, and traveled to the outskirts of town, where there was a center consisting of several small houses, a main building and a creek, closely surrounded by heavy vegetation. Even though it was not very far from the main road, it provided a distinctive "country side" feeling. The evening was spent with the kids running around, joking and laughing, still acting out, but, in my eyes, less aggressively so than I usually saw them inside the school campus. Several activities were being offered, among those opportunities for face painting and pumpkin carving, and later on, an Indian spiritual and religious ceremony, involving a staircase-altar, symbolizing all ages of man, including the afterlife. Before the main activity could start, involving storytelling and a spiritual ceremony, there were some preparations to be made, including putting up a big, five-piece Mural[61],

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[59] Here "Indian" is referring to *Native American.*
[60] In English: 'Day of the Dead'. A day to commemorate the dead, marked in all of Latin America (http://www.prensalibre.com/app/pls/prensa/imprimir.jsp?p_cnotica=39429&p_fedici… [Accessed 28.10.2002]
[61] Murals are wall-paintings that narrate a political story/history, or conveys a political or historical message, often associated with Mexican culture in the USA.

which was painted on large wooden plates, and needed to be set up along the wall to resemble an ordinary wall Mural.

The syncretism involved in combining the all-American tradition of pumpkin carving for Halloween with the face painting and religious ceremony involved in the Mexican *Día de los muertos* celebration, *and* the politically powerful Chicano symbolism of the Mural, can be seen as an expression of the multitude, and partly hyphenated identities that these kids are seen as possessing. They are at the same time Americans, Mexicans and Mexican-Americans, and they are presented with cultural practices which at the same time address both their Indian heritage, the political activism of the Chicanos and, again an American popular cultural practice – pumpkin carving. Alexandra Ålund would call this a *cultural bricolage* (Ålund 1991), where the merging and combination of at least two different cultures is a way of dealing with cultural or racial minority status, and that the dangers are that this cultural bricolage is not recognized by others as a complete and valid identity. Quoting James Diego Vigil (1988) in the book "Barrio Gangs", one of the reasons for initial marginalization is that "such persons became alienated from both Mexican and American ways of life." (ibid: 36). This shows the perceived danger of identity confusion involved in being culturally hyphenated. The question is whether this hyphenated situation, or bircolage, is initially experienced as such by my kids, or if such proposed confusion would be a result of conflicting external demands made. Hyphenation might be seen as largely ascribed by others, both White and Mexican. This ascription can also involve an ascription of social status subordination, or stigma, with regards to the perceived content of both ethnic and racial identities.

The Chicano-generation outreach workers are providing them with autochthony claims for *cultural recognition.* They are being what Fredrik Barth (1969) refers to as *cultural innovators,* in that they are trying to use and communicate aspects of a cultural heritage, or ethnic identity, to improve and promote their position as an ethnic group. One of the Chicano women was inquiring about my work, and, making sure I had the "right" perspective, insisted to me: *"Don't let those Anglos tell you they were here first, Miss."* Two things are worth noticing in this statement. First, the not surprising claim for autochthony as also voiced by an employee at Charter school: *"It's bizarre. My family was living right outside the Alamo at the time of the battle. We've always been here. And now, when I answer the census, I am counted as an immigrant minority".* Secondly, and more surprisingly to me was that I, the White

anthropologist, clearly was not an Anglo. This distinction shows how oppositions between *Anglos* and *Mexicans* were seen as cultural, and not racial, by the Chicano adults, while "my kids" were racially categorizing me as one of the well-meaning *White bitches.* Whites are primarily perceived as Anglos only in Texas (Hollinger 1998), indicating that the label Anglo only makes sense when held up against the Mexican identity.

As a Norwegian fieldworker I was positioned outside this dialectical process of cultural heritage. Racially however, I was not a *tabula rasa,* my skin and hair color, as well as my "White" social work approach, positioned me as both culturally and racially White. My kids were using racial differentiation while the Chicano outreach workers were talking in terms of cultural significance. The difference in expression and emphasis shows how different groups choose and embrace different symbols, but it also provides a convincing argument for how positioning yourself outside, or rejecting the notion of any *ethnic, cultural* or *racial* discourse is probably not an option for my kids. They simplify the arguments, and operate with fewer variables than the Chicanos. To my kids, it is not necessarily experienced as a political agenda, but rather as a personal and individual strategy for positioning inside the local social structure of the school and the neighborhood.

The fact that "troubled" kids are being taken on outings that are not always what they themselves would have chosen to do, but rather seen as something that "is good for them", is not something that is particular for American, or Texan, youth workers. The agenda for this fieldtrip was, however, clearly also ethno-political, and represents similar views as those voiced by the principal in the next section. Ethnic identity is experienced as something fundamental by most of my informants, both kids and adults, but *how* it is experienced, and also expressed, differs. The ethnic identity is ascribed and incorporated as part of my kids' experienced identity, but it should also be understood through my kids' re-interpretation of this identity. This re-interpretation results in the identity being inscribed with new and additional meaning.

Culture and Economy: the Principal's Perspective

So far I have presented some of the views and opinions given to me by kids and different social workers with regards to what it means and should mean to be Mexican. The kids primarily see their racial or ethnic identity as something inescapable and as something that provides a supplement to their American identity. Being Mexican is different from being

White, but it does not mean that they do not see themselves as Americans. Lastly, being Mexican is not necessarily good or bad in itself, since it "just is", but it results in their stigmatization by school staff and social workers, because they do not like Mexicans. The Mexican outreach workers express a view that sees the Mexican identity or heritage as a cultural asset that should be encouraged, and also as something that provides some kind of cultural foundation or an autochthony claim and a counterweight to the White American identity. These two views are representations of two different generations of Mexicans in Texas, and their views on questions regarding racial minorities and cultural heritage in the USA.

Angela and Faith were White social workers, working with Mexican kids. They expressed concern and critique of both the way the outreach workers and the school staff dealt with the kids. In some way therefore, they occupy an intermediate position. They are critical towards the Mexican outreach worker men for being too "Mexican" role models, and at the same time they are critical towards the school for what they might experience as the school's unwillingness to acknowledge the presence of the Mexican minority at Anglo High, making it too much an "all-White" school.

The school staff's perspective has yet to be presented. At the end of my stay at Anglo High, I asked for an appointment to interview with the Principal. He took the time to both listen to me, give thoughtful answers, and even to engage in a little bit of small talk and mutual concern for 'our' kids, and kids in general. As mentioned, the Principal was Mexican.

> *Me:* *You have quite a large minority of Hispanics*[62] *at this school. And it's mostly those I have been working with through the SWO. Do you think they add anything to the school? Both plus and minus? Do they in any way have special needs?*
> *Anglo High Principal:* *It has been a great challenge to make them part of the school environment, and be part of the decision makers. It's become sort of a culture among many of these kids that gets bussed in from the East side that they don't really want to be seen as smart. And some of these kids are really bright, but they start cutting classes, not coming to school, and soon they don't earn enough credits. If we can get a kid to earn at least 4 credits per year until they finish the 9th grade, then we can do something, but when we have some students that maybe just pass one class per year, then it gets really difficult. (...)*

[62] When I conducted this interview I was still going back and forth with regards to which term I would use in addressing "Mexicans" or "Hispanics". School officials usually used the term "Hispanic", and I assume that was why I used this term when talking to the principal.

And even in the sports arena you see it. Some of our kids have parents that can afford to send them to camp in summer, so they spend the entire summer just to perfect their skills. And of course the kids from the east side can practice as well, but having your own coach really make a lot of difference, and some of these kids do. We have kids that have their own personal coaches. And the kids see that when they want to try out for the team. They might be talented, but they see these kids, and see all the skills they have, and see that they don't have these kinds of skills, and they give up. Economics is a really big issue here. A big, big issue.

Me: *Do you think that making high school optional for instance would hurt the minority kids more than the rest?*
AH Principal: *It probably would. But we also realize that the traditional high school is not for every kid.*
Me: *Yeah. Because this is really more of a mini-society, with the football team, cafeteria and clubs.*
AH Principal: *Exactly. And we have tried to arrange special projects. (...)but they just don't show up, and then what can we do? (...) I think we really need to do something at a very young age. I believe that if a child does not read well by the 3rd grade it's going to be very hard. Because everything depends on reading. (...) It's all about the experience you give your children, and that again has a lot to do with economics. But you know, a lot of parents just don't have the time. I think it's a matter of having availability to books, and a lot of these parents are just so busy working to survive. They have several jobs, and they just have no opportunity.*

Me: *I realize that it is very much a matter of economics, but do you think it could at all be somewhat connected to a "Hispanic culture"? That they have different values or something?*
AH Principal: *It could be. I don't know. Again, I can just refer to my own experiences. In my family, and we were not rich, but there was always talk about education. We always knew that high school was not the end. The expectation was always there.*
Me: *Do you think that these groups of second and third generation Mexicans fall between categories? Seeing that they're not Mexican, and not quite American, or do you think the American society is good at integrating?*
AH Principal: *Most of these kids are really integrated in the [American] culture. As you said, most of them don't even speak Spanish. They never learned, I guess, because their parents thought it would be good for them. I think that bilingualism is good for a child. Then you have an identity, and that will give you self-esteem. That's so often the problem with the minority kids. They have a lack of self-esteem and they get real timid, and then they feel intimidated.*
Me: *Do you think you have problems with racism and prejudism here at Anglo high?*
AH Principal: *Oh yes. We have some. But it's like the rest of society, you know. And that's a matter of modeling too you know. Kids listen to what their parents say. I believe that children in many ways are a mirror of their parents.*

As shown here, the Principal attributed most of the educational and behavioral difficulties that the Mexican East side kids got into to economic difficulties, and not to racial or cultural

determinants. Being poor makes it both difficult to succeed in competition with very rich (White) kids, with regards to for instance sports skills, and it makes it more difficult for parents to have the time and the opportunity to be good influences in their kids' lives. The principal at Charter school, who I also interviewed, was even more categorical in refusing that lack of in-school success was race or culture related.

> Charter School Principal: *It is a matter of economic differences – there's no cultural reason. In Texas, if you look at the population, Hispanics are the poorest, and they are the fastest growing population.*

Even if my kids did not act or dress in a way that made them seem very poor, both teachers, outreach- and social workers told me either about how some of them had requested financial aid for their family or how their parents were single providers, working two low-paying jobs. Many of them held part-time jobs after school both to get some personal money, and to help support the family. Martin, who frequently talked about how his family had very little money, describes how the class-term is usually applied in the USA: *"my family isn't really rich. We're more like middle class."*

Quoting Trond Sirevåg; "*Classlessness* is one of the most typical middle-class notions in the United States" (1994:222. orig. italics). Terms like *upper-middle-class, lower-middle-class, blue-collar* and *white-collar* attempt to differentiate the all-embracing category of the middle-class. In my experience, the terminology of *rich* and *poor* were being used when referring to particular individual's economic or financial situation, while *cultural* and *minority* status, and residential specifications, i.e. *East side kids*, were used in explaining economic marginalization of groups. As Martha E. Giménez (1992) observes: "The United States is silent about class, but obsessed with racial/ethnic politics"(ibid: 7).

This emphasis on racial or ethnic identity as reasons and explanation for lack of both in-school and societal success can therefore be seen as partly being a strategy for addressing those structural economical differences that are not supposed to exist in the USA, proposed as being a land of *equal opportunities*. Being *Black* and *Mexican* becomes euphemisms for being *Poor* and *Unsuccessful*, at least with reference to the American Creed, and its demand made for every man to *pursue happiness*. Extending this argument further, it can also be proposed as one explanation for why ethnic and racial minorities in the USA, as have been argued, are ascribed with a certain moral stigma. Blacks and Mexicans as a group are poorer and have

less educational and occupational success than Whites. This can be taken to mean that they are not fulfilling their individual opportunities; they are not being all they can be. To the school staff therefore, being Mexican becomes a sign or a symbol of a set of unfortunate circumstances, both economic and cultural – and moral. A suggested approach to both understanding and redressing the disadvantaged situation of racial and ethnic minorities in the USA is presented next.

Redistributing Recognition: Turning "Multiculturalism" Upside-Down

There is no single side of the Negro problem (...) which is not predominantly determined by its total American setting. We shall, therefore, constantly be studying the American civilization in its entirety, though viewed in its implications for the most disadvantaged population group." (Myrdal 1944: liii)

Nancy Fraser proposes a two-dimensional approach to claims made for what she calls social justice – two-dimensional in the sense that it needs to include claims made both for *redistribution* and *recognition* (Fraser 2001). Where previous perspectives have either seen the need for *redistribution* as a consequence of failure of *recognition,* as in the multiculturalism approach, or as lack of *recognition* resulting from economical *mal-distribution,* as found in Marxist perspectives, Fraser claims this to constitute a "False Antithesis" (ibid:6). Fraser's theory provides insight to my fieldwork in two main areas. For one, she addresses the need to see the *racial* or *ethnic* problems in Austin as closely connected to economic mal-distribution, and not only a denial, or failure of recognizing ethnic identity. Secondly, and more importantly, she also addresses the problem involved in equating recognition politics with identity politics, in that it "reduces (…) a plurality of different kinds of recognition claims to a single type, namely claims for the affirmation of group *specificity.*" (ibid:6-7, my italics) Affirmation of *specificity* can in some cases be mostly, or solely, a process of labeling and categorizing that does not serves the claim for justice made by a minority or marginalized group, but rather the current establishment or hegemony, in allocating reasons for *inequality.*

Kids I talked to and observed during my fieldwork seldom saw themselves as particularly *ethnic*. In describing their situation, and their aspirations the way I was able to conceive them, I want to retrace the tracks of the current multiculturalism debate (Taylor 1994), with its claim for recognition and participation founded on an acceptance of group *specificity* or *difference,* and propose to turn this argument upside-down: My kids are not frustrated because they are refused the right to be Mexican, indicating a denial of expressing something that is

"naturally" residing within them. On the contrary, I will suggest that what they are denied is being treated as *similar* to their White American peers. They want to be recognized as Americans, not as Mexican Americans. The obsession with racial categorization serves mainly the "upper-middle-class non-Hispanic Whites".

This poses a question as to whether it is the Anthropologist's task to declare their view of themselves, or their self-identity, as any kind of false consciousness. I think that it is not. My point is merely that the kids do not communicate their ethnic or racial identity as entailing a specific primordial or cultural/traditional core that makes them different from others, but rather that their Mexican identity is constructed through a discourse of *difference,* and the sharing of an economical status and inhabiting the same impoverished residential area in Austin. The category is there for them to occupy, and adding meaning and cultural expressions to the category becomes their main task. Richard Jenkins claims that in addition to focusing on processes of identity formation, it is vital to separate between the *nominal* and the *virtual* aspects of identity (Jenkins 1996:24). Herein lays the difference between the ethnic name, or *label*, as categorized and sometimes also self-ascribed, and the experienced identity within this label.

Jenkins also points to what he sees as a commonly agreed upon notion - that especially *ethnic identity* is, if not essentially shared, then at least a resource for the group in question (ibid). With that as premise for debating freedom and equality, the only aspect addressed could be the importance of removing the *stigma* of a certain identity from the identity in itself, leaving the "natural essence" or particularities of *ethnicity* or *culture*. I do not challenge the fact that ethnic identity can be of great importance to an individual or a group, as it is shown to be for the adult Mexican outreach workers. I merely want to address the fact that this primary position should not be taken for granted, and hence excuse a lack of attention and effort from institutions or societies in redressing injustices. Finally, there is an important difference to be noted between talking about *similarity* and *equality.* Ideologies promoting *equality* are often used as justification for *difference* in outcome. Equal opportunities do not necessarily entail *parity of participation* or similarity in outcome, and; "Recognition should be a matter of justice, not of self-realization" (Fraser 2001:41).

A high degree of internal identification within a group[63], centered on similarity and sameness, or difference from others, results in what Jenkins calls *social groups*, while predominantly external identification by others, or *categorization,* constitutes *social categories* (Jenkins 1994,1996). Jenkins claims that where early anthropological writing was almost exclusively attentive to issues of external identification, *post-Barthian*[64] (Jenkins 1994:201) anthropologists have gone the other way, focusing on group identity, and thereby ignoring or under-communicating processes of categorization.

I follow Jenkins in his claim that there are inescapable dialectics between the external and internal processes of identity management. Essential to this argument is that when external and internal ascription appears largely disproportionate, attention should also be paid to the relationship between those who ascribe a characteristic and those who are ascribed with one. As Jenkins states: "[t]he capacity to act successfully upon other people's lives implies either the power or the authority to do so" (ibid:199). Where the one process is executed in such a way that it leads only to a feeling of difference in the labeled group, without a proportionate feeling of similarity or community, or when experienced similarity is founded more or less exclusively on ascribed differences, there is also the issue of the *power to name* as Henrietta Moore (1994) calls it, to be taken into consideration.

> "[Sometimes] social definitions of identity are based on ascriptive characteristics which themselves form the basis for power relations and institutionalized inequalities. (…) The power to name, to define a social identity and to ascribe characteristics to that identity is a political power" (Moore 1994:92)

When there is a discrepancy between the political power held by those who categorize, and that of those who are being categorized, the categorization – or *labeling* – limits or determines the space, or *field*[65]*,* within which self-ascribing must take place. Seeing and understanding identity management only as an oscillating movement does not pay enough attention to this aspect. "One result of the labeling process is often to place deviants in the position of "outsiders" where their ability to interact with and influence the wider society is limited" (Becker in Raybeck 1991:52).

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[63] However, it is a matter of *degree,* and not a black-and-white separation. (Jenkins 1994: 201).
[64] Contributions made after, and building on, Frederik Barth's *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* (1969).
[65] As in Pierre Bourdieu's *social fields,* to be explored in the next chapter (1977).

Replacing the term *deviants* with *minority,* this can be descriptive of what happens when minorities are ascribed, or labeled, with ethnic or cultural identities while the White/Anglo majority retains an American identity, free of sub-group connotations. The dialectical interaction of social identity management is still present, but it is disproportionate. In these cases, those labeled by those in *power to name,* and usually with identities that entails a *stigma* (Goffman 1990) no longer interact – they re-act. Expressing and utilizing social identities and statuses within the social setting, or arena, of a high school is the focus of the next chapter.

4. The Good, the Bad and the Popular: Dialectical Identities

Lil'B's Rap

Niggas Hate on me.
Cause I'm just A(G)
Ain't no love for LiL' B
But these Boy can't see I'm
About Papper
All about my Papper

You can Hate, But Really
ain't no need for the
plex' while talking down on
me I'm pimpin Hoe's
And Baget's. Me And Harold's
Like Vets. We don't Be
trippin ya'll. We just Ball
stand tall. and shop for
shit mall. you can't wait
till I fall. Cause I'm
playa young nigga. Papper
stacking for figures. Bitches
giving pitures. yea I got
it like that. name and
number Back. Signed to Big
daddy Mack

A(G) = a gangster
LiL' B = little Ben
papper = paper (money)
plex' while = holding a grudge
Hoe's and Baget's = Girls and Diamonds
Vets = Veterans

Introduction

Social identity is the game of 'playing the vis-á-vis' (...). Social identity is our understanding of who we are and of who other people are, and, reciprocally, other people's understanding of themselves and of others (which includes us). Social identity is, therefore, no more essential than meaning; it too is the product of agreement and disagreement, it too is negotiable. (Jenkins, 1996:5)

Lil'B was one of the students I spent the most time talking to at Charter School. He was a young Black man attending Charter School as, he told me himself, part of the conditions for being released on parole after being convicted of drug dealing. Lil'B was very charming. He always had a smile for everybody, or a quick remark, which probably got him out of trouble more than it got him into. He was also a very good rapper, and when I asked him if he would write a rap for my thesis, about himself and his life, he returned the next day with the rap presented above. The text shows that Lil'B is "A(G)", *a gangster,* or at least that he is so in the eyes of other people, with the result that they "hate on him", or disapprove. In the text Lil'B does not seem to question the fact that he is a gangster, but he challenges the meaning of the term, or at least the negative moral implications of it. What to others seems to be "Bad" is to Lil'B just a result of him and his friend Gerald pursuing what they find to be of imperative importance – money and girls.

This chapter is concerned with *identities* as experienced and expressed by my kids in school, understood in relation to both the school's adults and to the other kids. In addition to attempting to understand the content and meaning of these different identities it also addresses the everyday influences and negotiations through which they are created and maintained. I choose to see identities as predominantly *dialectically* constituted. This suggests that how my kids see themselves is a process of constant flux, or as Jenkins claims in the quote above: It is "the game of 'playing the vis á vis'" (ibid).

In claiming that identities are being constituted and maintained through a process of negotiation of meaning, two things are important to emphasize. Firstly, that an identity is just as reliant on recognition from other people, as it is of the individual's self-perception. Secondly, through the process of negotiating meaning, other's opinions are being remolded and given new meaning by the individual, at the same time that the individual's self-expressed identity is being given new meaning by others.

In this chapter I will first present some questions regarding the term *identity* in general, and its connections to youth in particular. Then I will address three commonly used in-school

identities found at Anglo High, which obviously had strong moral implications – that of being Good, Bad and Popular. Through presenting Martin, Javier and Elena's perceptions of their own in-school identities, I want to show how these terms have different meaning to different groups of students and teachers, but how the result is an at least somewhat agreed upon position, or status, within the school system. These kids therefore can be seen to be using a recognized and agreed upon set of identities, but also that they apply them to different strategies to achieve different forms of in-school success. Last, these kids' everyday practices and ways of interacting with each other will be presented in order to see how and why they negotiate their social identities inside the school.

Youth and Dialectical Identities: Who and What I am….

The growing and developing youths, faced with this physiological revolution within them, and with tangible adult tasks ahead of them are now primarily concerned with what they appear to be in the eyes of others as compared with what they feel they are (...). The sense of ego identity, then, is the accrued confidence that the inner sameness and continuity prepared in the past are matched by the sameness and continuity of one's meaning for others (...). The danger of this stage is role confusion (Erikson, 1963:261-262).

The term *identity* has been commonly accepted and adopted into everyday language, as well as that of professionals and academics. It is an academic tool that is applicable to problems or discussions concerning everything from an individual's internal self-perception to the previous chapter's focus on group identity and emphasis on *similarity* and *difference,* and whether group formations and loyalties are strategically constructed and utilized, or primordially present within a person or a group.

The current American society focuses on the individual in a way that supersedes not only perceptions of traditionally community-centered non-western societies, but also most other post-industrial western societies. As addressed in Chapter 3: from the constitutional right to liberty and equality for all Men, the voiced ideal that the government is best who governs least, combined with the moral demand put on every one of pursuing happiness through individual industry, comes a strong *Individualism* (Bellah et al. 1985, Toqueville 1969, Weber 1989). This moral *demand* put on individuals resonates what is by many writers seen as a modernity-influenced emphasis on the individual's *rights,* and is described by among others Thomas Ziehe (1989). He argues that when societies move or change from one of geographic and social stasis to one of mobility, the result is not only a drive towards upward mobility, but also a risk of, and negative sanctions connected to *not* fulfilling your potential, thereby experiencing a downward mobility (Newman 1989). Where everybody can be *what ever* and

who ever they want, the result is also that if you do not – there is no one to blame but yourself. Creating and managing the individual, through achieving a successful recognition of identity, has the result that maintaining and re-creating this identity becomes a question of success and happiness, and vice versa.

Erik Erikson (1963) presents in the quote above *identity versus role confusion* as the fifth stage in the *Eight Ages of Man*, the core theory of his psychosocial approach to human development. With this approach he links the process of creating a *final identity* to the adolescent period. He addresses the dialectic relationship between how we see ourselves and how others see us, and the individual's consequential search for *consistency* between these two. To Erikson therefore, identity formation or management is primarily an internal process, even if it is subjected to external influences. The adolescent period therefore ends with the development of a *final identity*, or in failing to do so - a sense of *role confusion* (Erikson 1963: 261-262). I will choose to subscribe to Erikson's view of identities as dialectical, and I appreciate him linking the youth-period to that of establishing an identity that is sought recognized by others. I do not, however, necessarily agree with viewing identities as either primarily or exclusively connected to the youth-period, or as something that eventually becomes final or unchangeable. Negotiating an identity might be particularly important to kids, since they in many ways are establishing an identity outside the family for the first time, but as mentioned with reference to Ziehe (1989), what constitutes modernity in general, and I claim the American society in particular, is the demand put on everybody to keep creating themselves.

As previously mentioned, Richard Jenkins (1996) underlines that all identities are *social identities,* which are created, and exist only within the process of internal and external definition. I will use Jenkins' theory of viewing social identity as a "flow of practices and processes" (ibid:4) to explore how my kids manage their group- and personal-identity in an effort to negotiate meaning. Whether an identity is essentially primordial or constructed lies somewhat beyond the scope of this thesis. How it is managed, controlled and utilized however, does not. I think it is essential to view social identities as not only externally observable ascription-inscription patterns, but also to recognize the way identities are interpreted by different kids. I want to start with presenting three different kids, and their predominantly ascribed in-school identity: Martin – the Good, Javier - the Bad, and Elena - the Popular.

Martin, The Good

Martin was a frequent user of the SWO office. He would come in almost every day, usually together with Esteban and Anna, and together with the social worker and myself they would discuss issues relating both to school, families and friends. Martin talked quite freely about both the problems he experienced in relation to his brother and sister and those relating to school.

> *Martin: I tell my mother to send [my brother] somewhere where they can keep him until he's 21. Because my brother is Bad. He's been in gangs and stuff. He's kind of a wannabe, but he's been in every gang you can name. (...) He even tried to get me in a gang.*
> *Faith: Why didn't you join?*
> *Martin: Because I was a schoolboy. I used to do mine, my brothers and my sisters homework. (...) [My brother] told me a lot of stuff though……*
> *Faith: Did he ever ask you to help him [get out of the gang]?*
> *Martin: Yeah. Lots of times. He was very confused(...). My brother has been in several [drive-by-shootings].*

Martin is, or used to be a schoolboy, in contrast to his brother and sister, who were *Bad*, and were involved in gangs. Being a schoolboy does not only mean to do your homework, it also means staying away from trouble and being a *Good* kid, a term that Martin also used about himself if not that frequent. Martin and most of the other freshmen kids in the SWO office were seen and referred to as *Good* kids by teachers and social workers. Martin is Good both in contrast to his brother and sister, and in generally being well behaved. Academically he is struggling however. He admitted to having just barely graduated from middle school after having completed a summer school program hosted by the SWO. This summer school specializing in providing students going from grade 8 to 9, from middle school to high school, with extra credits, to make sure that they are not retained in middle school. Angela, as well as other employees at SWO told me that this was the time when most students were retained, and where being retained was most likely to lead to dropping out of school. Even if he was having problems with passing his classes, Martin still tried to be, and saw himself as being a *schoolboy* after starting high school. As mentioned, he took only honor classes, classes that are aimed at preparing students for college, and that were generally, if not by all, recognized as being more demanding than other classes. In conversations with Anna and Esteban he would emphasize the fact that he was in these classes, and that they were not, thereby

positioning himself in relation to them. Initially, this might have been a successful strategy, but not long after the semester had started, Martin was already falling behind academically.

Being Good is not dependent on academic results. Many of my kids, who were "at risk" of dropping out, were seen as Good kids by teachers and social workers, and would also use these terms in describing themselves. Being Good is therefore at least initially an ascribed identity. Goodness is related to behavior, and conformity. Martin, however, still emphasizes his academic history when he expresses his own experienced, or desired, in-school identity as a schoolboy and a Good kid. One explanation for this could be that the term *Good* generally only has a value in itself for school officials who are trying to control and manage a large group of students. When kids referred to themselves as Good they usually did so as a contrast to Bad kids, or in disputing being labeled together with kids recognized as Bad. I heard kids several times say that *'I'm really a Good kid",* or *"I am the only Good kid here".* In attempting to position yourself inside the social hierarchy of a high school, only being Good is going to put you in the "great silent majority", but it is not going to provide recognition. Where school staff hands out the status of being Good to kids who do not cause trouble, and with few or no apparent demands to achievements or academic success, kids rate each other on different scales of success – *as well* as those of the school staff.

Kids who use the ascribed identity of being Good therefore usually take adults' and authorities' labels and reinterpret them, or inscribe them with new meaning. In Martin's case, this can be taken to mean for instance that not only is he better behaved than his brother and sister, because so is Anna. But in addition he emphasizes that he is taking different and more difficult classes than most other kids. Martin might need this academic strategy more than Anna and Esteban, since these two kids talked more about their family, and about doing things together with their siblings and parents than Martin did.

The first time I met Martin he was happy and optimistic about starting high school. Not long after, however, he started coming in to the office with a new complaint every day, and had to be persuaded into going to class. His attempts at being a *schoolboy* were failing, and seeing him being so miserable was painful to both the social workers and myself. From time to time he was trying different strategies, to gain status in different fields, but they were never very successful. By the time the SWO office at Anglo High closed, in the late fall, about 3 months

after I started working there, Martin seemed generally unhappy, and had also gained quite a lot of weight.

> *Martin: I want to try out for basketball……or maybe football. But I'm not real good. (pause) Everybody says that I've gained a lot of weight, and that worries me (pause). But when I get depressed I just eat and eat. (...) I'm in choir.*
> *Faith: Do you enjoy it?*
> *Martin: Yeah, but they want us to get a lot of stuff. And I'm not a really rich person. I'm more like middle class. They want us to get 25$ for a uniform, 10$ for the audition, 165$ for a trip, 20$ for something else, and on and on.*

Martin's identity or status as a schoolboy is dependent on recognition from others, both kids and adults, as well as a certain self-experienced success. Also, it is not a set status which once achieved becomes a permanent personality trait. Like any identity it is continuously negotiated. With the new challenges of high school, Martin is finding it more and more difficult to retain an identity as a schoolboy. Some of the hopelessness experienced by him relating to this failure might originate in a perception of a lack of other alternative identities. What Martin sees as keeping him from succeeding in other arenas is a combination of lack of skills (as in sports), and money (as in the choir). The "others" that Martin is relying on for recognition of his identity might be both adults working at Anglo high and other kids. His choice, among few options, and expression of personal identity might be interpreted both as a way of being different from his sister and brother who are both subject to sanctions from society because of their lack of conformity to mainstream values, and at the same time it might be interpreted as orientating towards adults and authorities more than his peers, in that he emphasizes his commitment to school.

Javier, The Bad

> *Me: So, you never went to BMC[66], did you Pablo?*
> *Pablo: No.*
> *Me: Do you know if any of the other kids did?*
> *Pablo: Javier probably did.*
> *Me: Javier went?*
> *Pablo: Probably*
> *Felipe: Javier is Bad. He taught [his dog] to attack Black people.*

Even if the group of tough sophomore kids did not have any leader, they all had different positions and individual identities within the group. Pablo and Felipe are seen as the *bright*

[66] BMC refers to the Behavior Management Center where kids who are suspended from their original schools go to serve their out-of-school detention. This school will be presented in chapter 5.

ones, with Pablo being the *better kid* and Felipe the *hot-headed* one, attempting to be a leader. Marcus is the *hyper* one, and the *clown*. Paul is the *calm* and *quiet* one, without really being shy. He observes and smiles, but he still has kind of a quiet authority. Miguel is the *tough* one, with a taste for accessories, like sunglasses, beepers, knives and the occasional sweat-towel – as well as an interest in women. Even though they talked about women a lot, Miguel was the only one who talked about having a girlfriend, and he even brought her to the office on one occasion[67].

All these different positions and identities were to some degree agreed upon by the kids and the social worker, even if their evaluation of them differed. Javier held a special position, as described in the introduction. He looked older, and he had an out-of-school job where he spent some days of the week. He also was the only one to have his own car. Javier's brother was in jail, and was part of one of the gangs there. He was serving a long sentence for "*almost killing a policeman".* Even if Javier was maybe the *toughest* one of the boys in this group, and the one seen as most likely to have been to BMC, he was also the only one who I never saw really angry, and who was always polite with the social workers and me. One time he even frustrated himself with his politeness, when trying to talk to, and show romantic interest in a girl that was just a few years older than him, and inadvertently constantly addressed her as "Miss". Javier never talked about classes or tests. What he did address often was the importance of being a real man.

> *Me: So what's important to you, Javier?*
> *Javier: Nothing's important, miss*
> *Me: Well, there must be a reason you're here? [in school]*
> *Javier: No, I just go because they fine you if you don't go. And they can even put you in jail if you skip school too much.*
> *Me: So that means you appreciate your freedom then, and that it's important for you not to go to jail?*
> *Javier: No. It just means that I don't feel like going to jail right now.*
> *Me: So you're not afraid of anything?*
> *Javier: No*
> *Felipe: You're afraid of turning gay, man.*
> *Javier: You're damn right I am*
> *Me: So, your sexuality is important to you then?*
> *Javier: Yeah*

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[67] Both Miguel and Felipe asked me out on dates regularly. I tried to let them down gently by referring to how my boyfriend probably would not like it. When a friend of mine from Norway visited, and I brought her to the office, Felipe immediately dumped me for my friend. Telling Felipe that I was somewhat disappointed by this, Miguel announced that: "you're still my favorite, Miss". Thank you, Miguel.

Me: But that's the only thing?
Javier: Aha.

I choose to assume that telling me that there was nothing he felt had any importance, and that there was nothing he was afraid of, was Javier's way of *self-presentation* (Goffman [1959](1992)), to both me and the rest of the gang, in a careless and cool way. Still, I found it interesting that the only thing he found important, when reminded, was not to "turn gay". Apparently, this was something that could happen to you at any stage of life, if you did not watch out. On our field trip on *Día de los muertos*, another boy told me, quite seriously, that I should not participate in carrying pieces of the mural, because this was not something *"ladies should do"*. I told him that I was not a "lady", and gave Javier my purse for him to hold, while I helped in the carrying of the picture. Javier rigorously refused to carry it, holding it at an arms-length distance. *"I don't want to carry your purse, Miss. It's gonna make me turn gay!"* Javier's positioning effort in relation to the others is therefore one of calm toughness - and Badness, and being a straight (as in heterosexual) man. He was also one of the worst, or best – depending on preference - "trashers" among the Bad kids. This verbal "trashing" of Blacks, gays, Immigrants and women to be presented shortly, was used as a source of entertainment by the kids, but is was also one way of negotiation and self-presentation of your status as Bad. Self-experiencing yourself as being Bad, tough and heterosexual probably have little value if you do not also have these statuses or identities in the eyes of others. Identity is dependent on recognition.

Most of the sophomore boys in the second lunch were seen as being somewhat *Bad* by school staff and social workers. Again, being Bad usually referred to being involved in behavior that is seen as Bad by the school, or one could infer – seen as Bad by White middle-class adult Americans. The sophomore kids would use this ascribed identity and add new meaning to it, for instance that of being *tough, (hetero)sexual,* and being a good *storyteller.* When the guys would laughingly tell each other that *"man, you're Bad,"* they were in some way complying to moral demands for behavior made by school staff, but also valuating it differently. This identity was being ascribed to them as a negative label, but some of them would adopt it and use it as a sign of something that is high in prestige within the group. The social worker would sometimes refer to some of these kids, and especially Pablo, as being *"really Good kids"*. This indicates that while some kids are seen as just *being* Bad, as an identity that is somewhat primary, other kids are really Good, but tend to (unwisely) get involved in Bad

behavior. Where Martin experiences failure in trying to be a Good schoolboy when his grades fail, the Bad sophomore kids are able to experience some in-school success, even if they too are unsuccessful academically and in, for instance, sports and other extra-curricular activities.

Elena, The Popular

One day, Angela is sending out passes for kids to be excused from class to come to a study group that she is tutoring that day. It takes a long time before anyone shows up, and Angela is getting upset because the teachers will not let the kids be excused from class, even if she handed in the passes in advance. She sees this as another proof of how little respect she gets for the work she does. Finally, Elena shows up. Elena is a freshman. She is a very beautiful Mexican girl, and she is somewhat upset because Angela took her out of dance-class, where she is training to be in the dance squad. Soon after entering the office she cheers up however. The dance-squad performs on football matches, and similar occasions, and the dance squad at Anglo High has won several competitions throughout Texas. She explains that it is not the same as being a cheerleader. While the cheerleaders support the different teams at sporting events, the dance-squad has a program of its own.

> *Me: Why do you want to be in the dance-squad[68]?*
> *Elena: 'Cause then I get to be on TV.*

To her, the question was probably naïve, and the answer equally obvious. She wants to be a successful dancer, and she wants to experience the fame that comes with it. Being on TV would insure that both people inside and outside Anglo High would recognize her talent. Elena's outspokenness and secure behavior was quite a contrast to that of Martin, Anna and Esteban, mentioned previously, who are also freshmen.

> *Me: How do you feel about being new at this school – a freshman?*
> *Elena: I'm new, but I'm still Popular though. Because my brother is Popular, so that means I am too.*
> *Me: What does it mean to be Popular?*
> *Elena: It means that you're part of the cool people, the 'Skittles'-crew that hang out over by the big stairs.*
> *Me: Skittles?*
> *Elena: You don't know what Skittles are??? I'll let it slide, since you're from Europe and all. It's a kind of candy, in different colors, you know, the way they have their hair in different colors.*

[68] The dance-squad has its own name, which I have left out to try to ensure anonymity for teachers and students at Anglo High.

Elena is Popular because her brother is. Being *Popular* is therefore partly dependent on knowing someone else who is Popular, on how you look, where you *'hang'* and with who. Being successful in sports, cheer leading and the dance squad is also recognized ways of becoming Popular, both from my experiences and observations at Anglo High, as well as from the multitude of movies and TV-shows in the "high-school-genre", where the homecoming queen typically dates the football captain.

Elena does not have her hair in different colors, and she is not a part of the dance-squad yet, but since her brother is Popular, she assumes and experiences this as her in-school identity. Seeing herself as Popular also probably makes her worry less about being in the study-group, which could be a stigma in some respects, both with regards to the fact that she academically needs the tutoring, and that she has to spend time together with students where some are seen as dull, Good schoolboys and others as troubled Bad kids – or in her term: *crack kids*[69].

> *Elena: What happened to the other 'crack-kids'?*
> *(nobody else has arrived for the study-group even though the class is almost over)*
> *Angela: Don't say that. That's horrible.*
> *Elena: No, I'm just kidding. I am Bad too. I've never been to BMC or anything though.*
> *Me: Why is that?*
> *Elena: I don't know. I guess I just don't do the Bad things guys do.*

As shown here, Elena juggles many identities. She experiences, or at least; presents herself as being Popular, even if it can be assumed that since she is a Mexican, "at risk", freshman student, without the multi-colored hair who is yet trying out for the dance squad – her status as Popular is probably not agreed upon by all, or it is primarily provided by her brother. In addition, she sees herself, or agrees with the external characterization of her as being Bad. However, she is not as Bad as the Bad *guys.* Identities and their successful presentation and recognition are experienced relatively to others, and their perception and ascription of identities to you. This means that compared to Bad kids, Elena is quite Good, and compared to Good, dull kids, Elena is both quite Bad and Popular. Again, self-presentation is directed towards someone or some group. Fellow students in many groups are Elena's audience, while

[69] I only heard this term used this one time by Elena, and she said it jokingly. "Crack" is a highly addictive and relatively affordable cocaine-related drug, commonly associated with poor people and poor neighborhoods, where houses that sell crack are called "crack-houses". See for instance: Philippe Bourgois's (1995*) "In search of Respect: selling crack in El Barrio"*.

the Bad sophomore kids usually perform for each other and the Good freshmen kids perform for teachers, social workers and their families and Good friends. Where Martin has only one strategy for being successful, both in his own eyes and in the eyes of others, that of being academically successful, Elena has several. Elena therefore probably does not risk the same kind of overall feeling of failure as Martin does.

Goodness, Badness and Popularity: Negotiating Status and Identity

Martin, Javier and Elena are here representing three different in-school identities, or statuses - that of being Good, Bad and Popular. As have been tentatively shown, being Popular is mainly dependent on, and given meaning through negotiation of status recognition from other students – which goes a long way in being concurrent with the commonsensical use of the term "popular". Populars are therefore recognized as such by fellow students because they are successful in presenting this identity and having it recognized by those other students whose opinion they value. This does not necessarily only mean other Populars, because to be admired by those who are not Popular is also something that is desired, in the sense that it confirms a relative superior position in the social status hierarchy of the high school. The majority of high school kids are "regular kids", both because they are not seen as particularly oppositional by school staff, and because they are not recognized as neither particularly tough, cool, and successful, nor as failures by other kids or the adults. Douglas Foley refers to this group as the *Great Silent Majority* (Foley 1990:78).

Few of my kids saw themselves, or were acknowledged by others as being Populars, maybe with the exception of Elena. I will argue that the hierarchy of a rich white high school is likely to be dependent on factors relating to money, race or ethnic origin, academic success, sport and club-skills, and to how one relates to and behaves towards one's peers and teachers. My kids have little or no capital[70] in any of these fields. Most of them are therefore occupying the lower sections of such an imagined social hierarchy, both in the eyes of fellow students and teachers – and, I think, also in their own eyes. Most of my kids want to be able to participate in the social arena with less of a stigma or ascribed subordinate position. Claiming that they are subordinate to rich white kids in their own eyes too does not mean that they agree, or think that this is right. School staff, usually referred to as "they", are being blamed for much of the lack of parity of participation that my kids experience, and in seeing the school staff as

[70] The use of the term "capital" will be explained in the next section.

representing the normative views of White middle-class America, this blame might have the right address.

My "at risk" kids can be divided into two main categories: *Good kids* and *Bad kids.* These identities are ascribed or labeled by school authorities, and then adopted and incorporated into the identity of the kids in question. One might also argue that minority kids are labeled with negative moral identities long before they start school, because of utilizations and interpretations of the American national Creed that disfavors individuals who are poor and belong to ethnic and racial minorities. The school will be the focus of this discussion however. Being Good in the eyes of school authorities means at least partly conforming to a mainstream perception of acceptable behavior, and staying out of *trouble*. Being Bad is failing to do so. Both in assuming that degree of trouble-involvement is a matter of choice, and in part through defining trouble as lack of conformity to a proposed behavioral ideal, there is clearly a moral valuation involved in defining the *Good* and *Bad* statuses - as is indicated by the words themselves. As Elena stated, there are several ways of being Bad. She is Bad, but she does not do the bad things that guys do. It seemed to me that when kids were seen as Bad by school staff, this labeled identity took control over the formation of other identities, or they became *role-discriminatory attributes* (Hannerz 1980), so that how you were Bad, or to which extent, was subordinated to the moral judgment of just being plain *Bad.*

When negotiated and utilized by the kids', with reference to their valuation of *importance,* these identities are given some new *meaning* (Jenkins 1996:4). The interpreted meaning of these terms is not necessarily the same in interaction between kids as it is in relations to adults. Being Good can be quite boring and dull in the eyes of fellow students, and perceived as a lack of social success. Being Bad, on the other hand can be a sign of social success through signalizing non-subordination and *toughness*. In the process of appropriation and giving of new meaning, the normative content, and the status positioning of these identities might change. The labels stay, because the school staff is dominating in its power to assign these labels, but the content is reshaped, so that sometimes Bad actually means Good, and Good is somewhat Bad. Invoking Henrietta Moore's claim presented in the last chapter, in that sometimes those "ascriptive characteristic [which identities sometimes are based on,] themselves form the basis for power relations and institutionalized inequalities." (Moore 1994:92) The labeling of these morally charged identities may in themselves influence how kids see themselves, and will in some way influence the way they create and manage other

identities. My Bad Mexican kids can therefore, following this type of reasoning, be seen to be subjected to a double labeling process, in that they are both assigned an identity as *Bad* and *Mexican.* In both these cases the identities can be negotiated and inscribed with new meaning – but the label itself largely provides the space within which this can happen.

As noted by Foley (1990) in his analysis of another Texan high school, student status groups are *flexible* and *loosely knit;* hence they are not equivalent to friendship groups. Also there is frequent disagreement among kids concerning who belongs to which group, or qualifies to what status. Suggesting that not only is the meaning of the identity and its valuation subject to negotiation, but so are its borders *and* its members. Elena claims to be Popular, but since she is also both Bad and Mexican, it is likely that at least some of the Good White Populars would see her status position as subordinate to theirs. Other Bad Mexicans who are not seen as popular might also be unwilling to recognize her as more successful than them. And her identity is dependent on recognition from these others. This negotiation of identity and positions is part of the *dialectics* of social identity found inside the setting of Anglo High.

Where being Good, Bad and Popular are statuses and identities managed and negotiated within the student population, being "at risk" is a status that is mostly externally ascribed, and infrequently used by kids. Common perceptions among kids might be that "at risk" kids usually have both an ascribed and self-ascribed identity as being Bad – as with the sophomore kids. In the case of for instance Martin, Esteban and Pedro this is not true. These are Good kids with regards to behavior, but they have academic problems, they have few, or no, sports-skills, and they do not get into trouble. Lacking many of these mainstream skills leaves you socially invisible in a school with over two thousand students, suggesting that within a high school, *visibility* is the embryonic stage for recognition, which is a necessity for success. Strategies for success, through visibility and recognition are to be discussed next.

Bourdieu and Foley: Fields and Expressive Practices

The principal at Anglo High voiced a concern for how some kids did not fit in with the rest of the kids at Anglo High:

> *Principal: We have all kinds of kids that don't fit in. Misfits. Everybody's trying so hard to find a niche, so sometimes you find someone, even if it's not kids that you necessarily have a lot in common with, but it's someone that's willing to accept you and include you.*

American high schools have an abundance of organizations and activities that can be said to make them into miniatures of large-scale American society. Their structure is usually made up of a complex in-school hierarchy of social positions. To do an analysis of how kids in school use different strategies in their quest for individual recognition and success, and how the strategies are dependent on kids in-school identity, I want to use Pierre Bourdieu's terms *field* and *capital* to show the relative position and success of different kids within the school.

Examples of important *social fields* for production of recognized social position, or *symbolic capital*, are for instance cheerleading and sports. According to Richard Jenkins, Bourdieu defines social fields as "structured systems of social positions" and capital as "those resources which are at stake in a field" (Jenkins 1992:84-85). A *social field* is dependent on a degree of autonomy, and that those who control the field possess some form of capital, that they can control and distribute according to the rules and norms agreed upon within the field. *Symbolic capital* can be divided into a variety of sub-categories of capital, for instance *cultural capital, political capital* and *educational capital* (Bjurström 1997:191). I will use the common term *symbolic capital,* but with the understanding that there are different sources to this sum of symbolic capital. In the case of Anglo High, the resources at stake are in-school academic and social success, mediated through recognition from kids and adults. The school can be divided into several different fields, which all have a different logic. Within each field there is a struggle for positions, or capital, as is the case *between* fields. Lastly, there is also a certain negotiable overlap or traffic between the fields. Even if the logic is different within each field, all fields are to a certain degree subordinated to the *dominant field*, or the field of power, when it comes to the production of *symbolic capital,* in the form of recognized social positions and prestige (Bourdieu 1977). The relative position and accumulation of capital achieved should be understood in relation to the American ideological valuation of *success* and *industry* as proof of self-realization.

Being Bad, Good and Popular can be viewed as a result of both a labeling process, and of different strategies undertaken by different kids, occupying partly competing social fields. The Populars occupy and dominate the school's main social field, a field high on conformity to the general society's definition of recognized symbolic and cultural capital. The Bad kids can be seen as being in a position where they, instead of being dominated by the Populars within the(ir) main field, have become the dominators of a separate field. Within a field,

different individual dispositions (or *habitus,* Bourdieu 1977) in interaction with the structure of the field constitute new forms of symbolic capital. My kids do not have the capital that could give them the option of being the dominators in the dominant field. Success, and capital, is experienced relatively, meaning that being the dominator in a subordinate field gives a surplus of capital, while being dominated in the dominant field gives a social deficit. To move to, or establish a new and different field is therefore the preferred strategy among most kids when they find that they are not able to dominate their current social field. Such alternative fields are usually what Erling Bjurström (1997) calls *semifields;* in that they are not fully recognized by those outside them. The "misfits" mentioned by the principal are those perceived by him to stand outside most fields all together. Some kids doubtlessly do fail to be accepted into most or all established social fields in Anglo High, like for instance Martin. In addition, the principal probably does not recognize the same kind of fields that kids do as legitimate, and might therefore classify kids who themselves experience a commitment to a certain group of friends or field of interest as being social "misfits." Even if occupants of different fields share a goal of achieving *social recognition*, their strategies and valuations differ.

Relying on the previous quote by Jenkins (1996), in that social identities should be seen as a product of agreement and disagreement, through a process of negotiation, it is worth noticing that the accumulation of social and symbolic capital, and the positioning within a field, is just as much relying on the ability of *self-presentation* (Goffman 1992) as on the self-experienced content of the identity. Foley (1990) argues that this ability to successful self-presentation is what separates the high status group, or Populars, in his high school from the low status group. He sees American high schools as arenas for the *enactment of American popular culture* through *popular cultural practices* (ibid:xvi) that naturally favors those habituated into American popular culture. Since identities are subject to continuous dialectical processes, and since these identities are often disagreed upon, personal experienced identity is reliant on, and formed through social recognition from *those you strive to be recognized by*. The recognition needs not be one of normative acceptance or approval. Lil'B, in his lyrics, is relying on disapproval by some, to gain approval as a successful *gangster* by others. So is the case with Javier. Being so Bad that his friends assume that he has been to BMC, without knowing for sure, can be a sign of successful self-presentation resulting in recognition, and is therefore not necessarily primarily oppositional. What can be seen as opposition or resistance by some might therefore not be so intended by the kid in question, but can rather be a signal

of a difference in valued or accessible reference group. In Martin's case, the problem arises when he is not successful in the field that he has chosen, or that he identifies with. Where other kids who fail academically have the option of achieving social success through being good at sports, or, in what can be seen as a parallel or subordinate field, through being Bad, Martin does not see this as an option because of lack of skills, money, and in not wanting to identify with his brother. Even if choosing to stay Good will lead to approval from school authorities, the lack of academic results will leave him without a self-ascribed feeling of recognition or success. He is being dominated in the dominant field, and with success being a relative experience – he feels he has very little, or none.

Bourdieu's theory of social fields and their dynamics shows how identities can be seen as expressed and negotiated in the setting of dominant and subordinate social fields inside a high school. Kids everyday commitment and attention can however not be reduced to strategic efforts to maximize profit of either social or symbolic capital, which is a commonly voiced criticism of Bourdieu's theory (Foley 1990, Bjurström 1997). An additional question that needs to be asked is therefore what *options* kids experience themselves as having, and what they experience and express as their motivation in orientating within these options. Erling Bjurström (1997) has argued that even if Bourdieu's field theory can be seen as somewhat lacking in its ability to explain both social and cultural *change*, and *resistance* through counter- or alternative cultural production, which would be the dominant view of the CCCS and among them Paul Willis (1993), the terms *field* and *capital* can still be quite fruitful in analyzing the choices and practices of different groups of youth. According to him, there is always the option of establishing a new field if success and recognition cannot be achieved within existing or dominating fields. My Bad Mexican kids can therefore be seen to have established a field of their own, where the capital sought is *toughness* and *badness.* Even if the option of establishing a field is present however, the relative positioning of the field within the hierarchy of the school is largely determined by the ascribed Bad and Mexican identity. My kids can be successful in presenting themselves as the toughest, nicest, cleverest, most successful Mexican kids – but they will always be Mexican.

To recapture - my kids' position in school, and within society, is without question being socially and culturally *reproduced,* but explanations for the motivations, mechanisms and the "go's" involved are disputed. The way I understand my kids, both Bad and Good, their main aspirations and goals are the same as those proclaimed by high status groups of kids, and

voiced by the American national Creed. I do not see my kids as refusing the ideals of White middle-class society, substituting their ideological ideals or values with any form of Mexican working class ideal, the way Willis (1993) might have seen it, even if the *results* of their choices could indicate this. But nor do I see my kids' cultural expressive practices as nothing but structurally determined failed attempts, explainable through capitalist America's *corrosive effect on human relationships* (Foley 1990:154), making White Populars out to be Goffmanesque impression management wizards, while Bad Mexicans are nothing but unsuccessful extras, the way Foley might explain them.

In having similar goals - that of pursuing happiness and success and complying to the American Way - some of the Bad kids choose to adopt a counter strategy to avoid being dominated in the mainstream field. The Good kids mostly choose conformity, indicating that there does indeed exist a *choice.* The options available are however not exhaustive. In having categorizational or definitional power to ascribe identities and their meaning, and of defining the symbolic capital to be at stake within fields, school Populars and adult authorities set the limits for strategic efforts, but the reinterpretations and adaptations made by my kids cannot be written off neither as mere class resistance and counter culture or as lack of cultural ability. I understand their cultural expressive practices to be an effort to dominate a parallel field within the given societal or structural circumstances, and not to be reducible to either self-damnation or a sign of deterministic subordination.

For the next section I propose a shift in focus from what here is presented as strategic efforts, towards what is experienced as everyday activities. This does not suggest a separation between what is part of a social play and what is genuine or *real*, but it will try to show which, how and why, everyday practices are influenced by, and hence influence, kids position within the proposed different social fields.

Everyday Commitment: Friends and Families

When investigating kids' self-experienced identity, the Anthropologist's questions might often provide answers that are not necessarily false or incorrect, hence they might be *reliable* (Hellevik 1991:159), but they might not be very relevant to what these kids experience as important, hence both questions and answers might be low on *validity* (ibid). Much research done on youth has come off as quite demonizing, in my view this is largely because only certain aspects of kids lives have been subject to investigation. *Youth culture* has as

mentioned been used synonymously with *counter-* or *sub*-culture, implying opposition and resistance. This might give two sources of misrepresentation. One of the sources of this misrepresentation is the muting of the large degree of *conformity* towards societal norms and values as experienced and expressed by many kids. The other is a failure to investigate the *reasons* given by kids themselves. To do this is not just a question of "Learning how to ask" (Briggs 1986), it is also a question of learning when and how to listen.

Most anthropological and sociological research, as well as social work, focusing on adolescents therefore appear to be overly concerned not only with aspects of conflict and risk, but also with the sensational aspect of kids' lives, which is not a part of their mundane, everyday activities. Paul Willis (1990) makes a point of underlining that our *everyday* tasks, like work and school, are as much, if not more, representative of our *cultural* lives as those activities or actions generally recognized as iconic or symbolic representations of belonging or commitment. When addressing questions regarding youth, especially when using the term *youth culture* (Brake 1985, Amit-Talai and Wulff 1995), the focus automatically turns towards risk-behavior involving for instance sexual activity, drugs, violence and gang-affiliation, even if most youths spend most of their time in school, at work, or in non-delinquent activities together with friends and families. Not refusing the usefulness of addressing trouble- and problem-behavior all together, it is still worth addressing for instance Robert Paine's (1969) surprise at how anthropologists, who themselves live their lives centered around and dependent on *friendship* much more than kinship, ignores the first and overemphasizes the latter when they assume the role of the anthropologist. The emphasis on "trouble" when studying youth might feed into the already prevalent view that presents *youth* as the radical "Other".

My fieldwork was conducted almost exclusively through everyday conversations, within the setting of part of their everyday environment, the school. All kids are, of course, different, and therefore the topics for everyday conversations addressed by Good kids like Martin, Anna and Esteban usually differed from those of the tougher sophomore kids. This might be in part because they had different identities and occupied different social fields within the school, or the difference observed in preferred conversational topics could be part of the reason why they had different identities. Most likely, as discussed above, it is both. The latter group will be addressed shortly. The preferred topic for Martin, Anna and Esteban, beside from talking about schoolwork, teachers and classes, was to talk about their families.

Kids and Families

Whenever these kids were talking about attending any neighborhood event, Anna usually always excused herself with having to go to church, do her homework, or baby-sit for her younger brother and sister. I got the impression that she did not socialize much outside school. Her family attended a Pentecostal church twice a week, Wednesdays and Sundays, and Anna was in the church dance-group. I asked her if she was the oldest child in her family, since she had a lot of chores and responsibilities. She told me that she did have an older brother but he could not baby-sit the younger brother and sister, because, she said: *'He's mean to them'*. Angela told me that Anna helped support her family with odd jobs after school, and that she had also asked Angela to help her in providing more money and food for her family, since they were very poor. Anna was 14 years old, and as shown, not only did she have adult responsibility, but also adult worries. I met her once, outside school, when she came to the "Barrio Olympics" event, organized by the outreach organization, but she only stayed for a little while before she had to go home and do her homework.

Esteban spent a lot of time together with his younger brother, his dad and his uncle. He would talk about things they said, and plans they had, be that going to watch professional wrestling, or going to Mexico for the summer. He addressed the first of these two topics on several occasions, in conversations with both the social workers and me. He was seeking advice as to whether he should take his brother, who he said was *'eight or nine'* years old to see a wrestling show, worrying that it might be too violent for him. Being, or at least trying to be, very politically correct, young, White, women, we both advised him to not only *not* bring his little brother, but to stay away from wrestling all together. In retrospect, I suspect him of having both predicted and enjoyed our strong antipathy towards wrestling as entertainment, and I also think he might have been pretending to be going more back and forth as to whether he should go or not, thereby using our attempts of distributing and modeling what in our (White middle-class) eyes was *Good for him.* His concern for his brother however struck me as quite genuine.

Good kids are seen as better by school authorities because they are less confrontational, less "trouble". The family might be, or appear to be, more important to these kids simply because they are generally a year or two younger than the Bad kids. A study from Norway shows that

the amount of time spent with your family decreases during the teen years (Øia 1994), because of an increase in time spent with peers.

Since my observations were done in peer-related situations only, I have very little information about family relations and constellations. What I have wanted to argue here is that my Good kids expressed issues concerning family-relations frequently, and, as I will show next, my Bad kids were almost exclusively attentive to their friends – when with me. I do not propose that this is necessarily representative of any difference in feelings of belonging or commitment to families, but it is representative of differences in the way they presented themselves to Angela, Faith and me.

“One of my homeboys”

All the boys here presented as the *Bad* sophomore kids were both self-ascribed and assigned to the same *ethnic group*, that of being Mexican, but by far all Mexicans at Anglo High were eligible to belong to their *friendship group*. Anglo High had quite a few middle-class Mexican students who were neither “at risk” nor Bad, and who usually did not want to be associated with my kids. These are the kids that Douglas Foley in his study refers to as *Mexicanos,* to separate them from his lower status group of boys, the *Vatos* (Foley 1990). Foley draws a parallel between the *Vato,* and Paul Willis’ (1993) *Lads* in “Learning to Labour”. And I think it is possible to draw a parallel between both these groups and my *Bad kids.*

In addition, the Good kids in the freshmen group were not eligible to the Bad kids’ friendship group. After the “Homecoming incident”, to be described in chapter 5, Pedro, one of the freshmen who sometimes visited the office together with Anna, Esteban and Martin during first lunch, informed us that: *“I know who threw the trashcan. It was one of my homeboys.”* Later, at the end of the second lunch, Felipe comes by the office: *“Were you here this morning? Did you see it? Those trashcans? That was me - and all those water balloons too.”* I am quite certain that Felipe would not have been pleased to hear that Pedro had referred to him as his *homeboy*[71]. And if Pedro knew that Felipe would come in and admit to being the culprit, he probably would not have said anything. Pedro’s audience during the first lunch was largely freshmen and Good kids, and even if Pedro was seen as, and I would guess:

[71] The term *homeboy* can be used both to refer to a person from ones neighborhood and to a friend or fellow gang member. Technically therefore, Felipe is Pedro’s *homeboy* as far as the first interpretation is concerned. The way it was stated however, with pride, I am sure that Pedro meant to use it as *friend.*

appreciated being seen as, one of the Good kids, *knowing* one of the Bad kids could give you an increase in, if nothing else, interest and attention from the other kids. Felipe is both a year older, and regarded as qualitatively *tougher*.

Most of my kids did not generally talk about their ethnic identity, or label, in terms of something they experience as shared among them, but more often as something that separated them from others. Again referring to Fredrik Barth (1969), ethnic or cultural groups can be seen as primarily constituted and upheld in and around its borders, in contact with other groups. The experienced difference is seen as what motivates and initiates an expressed similarity. This is similar to the way I experienced my kids as invoking their Mexican ethnic identity as an opposition to White or Black identity, or culture. What was more often expressed as being something shared is that of being friends and neighbors. Commitment and belonging to a friendship group is an important part of the two-way process of self-ascribing and categorization that makes up social identities (Jenkins 1996). This is addressed by, among others, Bell and Coleman (1991:1) through stating that "through the ambiguities and ambivalences involved in establishing and keeping friendships alive, we learn about how others see us and therefore, in some sense, how to view ourselves."

A friendship group has a different function in everyday school life than ethnic group membership has. Where ethnic identities within the high school setting entailed hierarchical positioning as well as perceptions of risk and success, the friendship group has an internal dynamic that is somewhat different from the world outside this group, it is perceived as more of an informal and voluntary group. The friendship group can, ideally, be seen as providing a sanctuary from external domination and labeling, or, more pragmatic, to at least constitute a different arena for identity and status management.

In conversations, my kids would usually not talk about their experienced friendship, or the feelings or emotions they felt for each other. An analysis of friendship can easily become a quest for revealing true sentiments and mutual affection. As James G. Carrier states:

> *Friendship is not just a relationship between people, it is a kind of relationship, one based on spontaneous and unconstrained sentiment and affection. After all, if the relationship is constrained we confront something very different from what we call 'friendship' (Carrier 1999:21).*

In this statement lies a normative understanding of what universally should be contained in and understood by friendship. To morally or theoretically evaluate someone's emotional alliance to another is a task that I do not wish to undertake, even if it is worth noting that "friendship is a topic with much moral weight" (Bell and Coleman 1999), indicating that the expression of a type of relationship which is conceived by most as *affectionate*, will have to relate to these conceptions. However, expressions of friendship relationships and loyalties will be compared to other kinds of commitment. One of the dangers involved in seeing friendship as more genuinely felt or universally existent, is that other social or group identities, like for instance those relating to ethnicity or culture, is presented partially or wholly as *constructed* while the ability to make and keep friends is presented as somewhat natural or *essential.*

In attempting to analyze interaction among friends, Robert Paine remarks that it is important to differentiate between whether one is talking about friendship as "a cultural artifact and a social arrangement, or as a set of universal needs" (Paine 1969:506). I will deal with friendship as a social arrangement, and more precisely, as a *social field,* within which personal and group identities are expressed and managed. Taking my cue from both Paul Willis (1990), in emphasizing that our culture is embedded in and made up of our *everyday activities*, and from Richard Jenkins (1996), in that both identity and meaning is dialectically constructed and maintained, hence managed through a *flow of practices and processes* (ibid:4), I want to investigate the *everyday practices* present in friendship interaction, and not the label or the identity of that of being a friend in itself. David Jacobson (1981) deals with friendship as label and symbol of committed personal relationship, and as something that can both be applied and taken away. If friendship in itself was my focus I would have to investigate what being a friend means, and therefore what it means to *not* be one. Among my kids, however, friendship was not usually addressed or questioned, and membership in the friendship group was usually not challenged. Friendship will here be taken to mean whatever personal or group commitment and affection the kids ascribe to it. The everyday practices of joking and laughing within the setting of the informal friendship group were experienced by me to be part of a self-presentation and a distribution of values and ideas specific to the setting of this field, and contributing to constituting a negotiation of both personal and group identity.

High School as arena for managing friendships and identities

Anglo high school is a large school by Austin standards, both in terms of the number of students and the size of the building. With the exception of a lunch break in the middle of the day, which divided students into two groups, the only time kids had outside class was a *passing period* of five minutes between classes, which left just enough time to walk from one classroom to another. Unlike most Norwegian schools, where kids belong to a school class of between 10-30 students who usually have a home room of their own where they spend most of the school day, the kids at Anglo high did not belong to any one class, but rather to different classes for each course they took, and the teacher was generally the one who had a home room. This means that between classes, during passing period, all the kids have to move from one room to the other and from one class to another. Passing period is five minutes of chaos, where all the doors to the classrooms open, and kids pour out into the hallways, heading towards their next assigned room while laughing and talking. At the same time, the hall monitors (to be discussed in the next chapter) make sure that kids do not loiter or litter, or generally misbehave.

The size of the school, and the fact that most kids do not have a small-sized class that they belong to, makes high school a place that can be intimidating for many. It is possible to get lost, or to become socially invisible in such a place, and establishing and maintaining a group membership or a social status becomes both more difficult – and at the same time more essential, in that there is no, or few, group belongings that come “free of charge”. My kids usually “hung” with kids that they knew from middle school, and from their neighborhood. Since the boundaries assigning kids to Anglo High are somewhat artificially drawn, to ensure desegregation, some kids did not have many of their middle school friends at Anglo high. In combination with this, some of these kids did not have the skills, opportunity, or social capital to participate or excel in extracurricular activities like sports or choir or the informal status groups like “the skittles crew”, like in Martins case, and it is no mystery why some of these kids might have felt alone, or like “misfits”. John Devine (1996) argues for the need to create smaller high schools, but not at the cost of the larger ones. He sees the attempts made to redress the current problems by creating smaller *special* high schools as contributing to the ghettoization of the larger ones, in that it leads to a recruitment of the best students from the larger schools to the smaller ones, and hence leads to further disabling of the regular large-scale schools.

Devine (ibid.) also mentions how the teachers in his study from inner-city high schools in New York jokingly refer to the cafeteria as “the dungeon”. This is the place where the “inmates” go to eat, and simultaneously to enact their social status and identity. This is also a place where adults do not usually go, so that here, identities are mainly subject to ascription and self-ascription by fellow students only. I tried to spend time with my kids there but this was apparently very uncomfortable to them. Being seen with me was connected to many kinds of social stigma, so when I discovered that I was making them feel uncomfortable; I tried to leave them alone there. The cafeteria is where different cultural practices are enacted and where symbolic capital is displayed. Populars, who dominate recognized and highly valued social fields, control the setting of the cafeteria. My Good kids usually just kept a low profile in the cafeteria, while my Bad kids were both occasionally using a self-expression strategy to show off toughness, while other times they were also keeping a low profile. Even when they did talk loudly and joke within the setting of the cafeteria, it usually resulted in recognition only by those acknowledging this kind of *toughness* capital, while it just made them visible to the Populars. After having spent some time with kids in the cafeteria I got a better understanding of what made them come to the SWO office every day. The cafeteria was the only alternative, except from hanging out in designated hallways that were not classified as off-limits by hall-monitors, since seniors were the only ones allowed to leave campus for the lunch period. John Devine’s (1996) use of the term “dungeon”, entailing associations to inmates and prisons, makes it natural to think of both Erving Goffman’s elaborations on *total institutions* in his book *Asylums* (1987), and of Michel Foucault’s (1977) *panopticon.* Both of these will be used to say something about perceptions of risk and danger in the next chapter.

Jokes, Laughter and ‘Trash Talking’: Entertainment and Community

As mentioned earlier, the Bad kids had a few favorite topics for conversations when in the SWO office; girls, gays, sex and violence. Their conversational style was rough and with plenty of jokes, and could probably have been regarded as offensive to many. Part of the ritual around this “trash talking” was probably an attempt to offend and challenge others present, “others” usually consisting of the social worker and the anthropologist. Indulging in behavior that they knew was morally sanctioned by school staff and social workers could be seen as a form of resistance or opposition, but mostly it was presented as pure entertainment – the main point was to have fun. Laughter and jokes heavily outnumbered the occasional conflicts, like the one mentioned in Chapter 1. This might also be the main reason why this anthropologist

has a hard time, emotionally, understanding the school administration's perception of "my kids" as being first and foremost Bad, and constituting "trouble". My experience was that jokes were primarily told for entertainment, and for the positive experience of being seen as a good orator, storyteller or clown. It was also within the setting of joking and laughing that I first experienced the obligatory-Anthropological experience of being tricked and fooled by your informants[72]. We were sitting in the office one day, when some girls walked by the open door. Marcus, who was sitting next to the door, shouted after them:

Marcus: (loudly) Boppers!!!
Faith: I'll have none of that in here
Me: Why? What do you mean? Doesn't "Bopper" mean a pretty girl?
Marcus: (screaming with laughter) Who told you that?
Me: You did, Marcus
(everybody laughs)
Marcus: (still laughing) oh, well. Yeah, that's what it means.
Me: (to Faith) What does it mean?
Faith: It means a girl who gives oral sex.

This episode probably brought Marcus three times the success he could have hoped for. For one, he succeeded in shouting something offensive to some (probably) innocent girls, secondly he was told off by the social worker, and thirdly, he got recognition for telling the anthropologist that something suggestive was really a nice thing to say. It resulted in heavy laughter by everyone present. Sexual suggestiveness was usually a certain way of getting approval through laughter, and Marcus was by far the only one to use it.

Miguel: 5 $, I paid for this S.O.B. (a poster of Jennifer Lopez)
Felipe: Damn. She's gonna rip that shirt with those nips that hard.
(laughter)
Felipe: Her nickname should be ice-boy willie.
-
Pablo: [reading from a brochure] Did you'all know that "hugging, kissing and oral sex are also exciting ways of making love" (laughter)

Sometimes, the joke telling does not result in laughter. In telling a story, besides from the story itself needing to be good, the kids are dependent on some or most of the others finding the story amusing. It is also a measure of social prestige within the friendship group, and of friendship alliances in general. How much others laugh at a joke or a story is dependent on both how much they enjoy the joke, and how much they want to show appreciation and

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[72]Like in Napoleon Chagnon's book *Yanomamö* (1997).

support of this person by laughing. Even if they are all friends, the power-balance within the friendship group changes from time to time, and the general mood does too.

> *Felipe: Are you a dog? Are you a dog? Are you a dog? Well, bite my bone then.*
> *(nobody laughs)*
> *Javier: I once sucked dick for crack.*
> *(pause, nobody pays any attention to him)*
> *Javier: I once sucked DICK for crack.*
> *Pablo: Quit it. It's getting old.*
> *Felipe: Get back in the closet, Javier*
> *(laughter)*

Felipe utilizes this negative response towards Javier to make a joke that is successful. Also, making a homosexual joke on Javier's behalf is extra funny because he frequently presents himself as the most homophobic of all the Bad kids. The different positions or personalities of the kids in this group also influences how their jokes are received. Marcus gets sanctioned a lot, since he is often called "hyper"[73] and is perceived as somewhat uncontrollable. Pablo is generally recognized as the smartest of the Bad kids, so his jokes even if they are not as frequent are generally appreciated. Javier not only tells a lot of stories and jokes, but he is also usually very appreciative of others' stories, so his jokes are also generally reciprocally appreciated – and additionally he is generally seen as being somewhat more Bad than the others, so appreciating his jokes is also a sign of respect for this.

James P. Spradley and Brenda J. Mann suggests that the *joking-relationships*[74] they observed between cocktail waitresses and bartenders in a college bar worked to maintain gender-differences and also to signal gender identities (Spradley and Mann 1975). They refer to *ritual reversals* as those jokes that work to confirm the opposite of what is suggested in the joke (ibid:134). In joking about homosexuality, Javier can therefore be seen to underline his heterosexuality. The same explanation can be used to explain why referring to Paul and Miguel as racially "mixed" is so funny. It does not only underline these two kids' ethnic origin – it can also be seen to manifest the entire groups ethnic origin, and its unchangeable nature.

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[73] If Marcus had attended a Norwegian public school he would, in my non-professional opinion, most likely have been diagnosed with AD/HD (Attention Deficit / Hyperactivity Disorder). The way things were at Anglo High, however, I never heard any use of this kind of medical diagnosis.

[74] The term *joking relationship* is R. Radcliffe-Brown's (Spradely and Mann 1975)

Why the kids want to spend time together, and why they want to spend that time telling jokes and having fun is no sociological mystery. Sometimes, "sociability is interaction for interaction's own sake, without a purpose other than enjoyment of the moment and without consequences beyond the encounter itself" (Simmel in Hannerz 1969:105). Joking can be interpreted in a multitude of ways. Be that as a way of releasing unnatural encrusted tension in man, as a Freudian momentary slip, and/or as a predominantly scatological and symbolic representation (Douglas 1968). Mary Douglas introduces her perspective by stating quite matter-of-factly, that "[f]irst, let me bracket aside the whole subject of laughter. It would be wrong to suppose that the acid test of a joke is whether it provokes laughter or not" (ibid:362). Maybe so, but in bracketing laughter aside one supposes that laughter is, or is not, the result of a joke, and disregards that sometimes, or most times, jokes are mainly means in the quest for laughter and fun. This might seem like an obvious point to make, but it is still an important one. *Why* they enjoy hanging out is not what I want to address, but rather why *these* kids hang out together, why they make, and laugh at, *these* kinds of jokes, and why the jokes are on the expense of *these* groups of people. Does joking and laughter serve *additional* purposes, outside the initial gratification of having fun?

The first of these preliminary questions has already been attempted answered. These two groups of "my kids", Bad kids and Good kids, spend time together in the SWO office, and after school, because they know each other from before, and because they share some in-school identities, some with agreed upon and with largely negative connotations, like that of being Mexican, poor and "at-risk", and those disputed, like that of being Good, Bad and Popular. In proposing that my kids are occupying the same, or two related social fields, this will mean that a sense of autonomy for that field and an agreement on rules and norms applied within the field, and what sources of capital should be sought.

Douglas (1968) argues that both the telling and perception of a joke is reliant on knowledge of the social circumstances addressed. As she says: "all jokes are expressive of the social situation in which they occur" (ibid:366). Also, the telling of jokes is somewhat risky, in that those who want to control a situation also should control the challenges or ridicule voiced within it. This power to name entails that a joke can be rejected as not funny or not appropriate, both within a situational setting and within a cultural or ideological one. Proposed by Douglas, jokes mirror the social forms in which they occur, while obscenities challenge them. With this in mind it is possible to imagine situations where my kids are

telling jokes among each other, and that these jokes are perceived as obscenities by the social workers, with the result that my kids both get to joke and mirror events among themselves, and at the same time get to challenge the moral authority of the school and the social worker. In these situations where the definition of the situational form as understood by the kids, differ from that form perceived and preferred by the social worker, the kids usually end up being sanctioned by the social worker. The same type of interpretation can be used to explain why some kids get recognition more than others, and why for instance Felipe's changing of target for his joke, resulted in a change from group sanction to approval. Jokes can be argued to be a matter of power and control of a situation, within the group of kids, or as a "rebellion against the established order" (Hannerz 1969:113), here represented by the anthropologist and the social worker. Being perceived as obscene when in the company of White Professional Women might emphasize general difference from these, thereby emphasizing a Mexican Streetwise Male identity between the joker and his appreciative audience, which with regards to toughness is its own reward.

Emphasizing manliness, or machismo, in jokes and other social interaction can be seen as both a rehearsal and self-presentation of gender-specific values. Being a man, or being macho was perceived by adults inside and outside school[75] to be especially important to Mexican boys. My kids never talked about a Mexican *machismo* however, and White and Black kids in Anglo High were also concerned with being men. As Douglas Foley argues, the American high school can be said to favor male values and male culture over female (Foley 1990). My kids most often addressed manliness by elaborating on women's perceived weakness and subordination, and by ridiculing gay men. Being gay is perceived as being less of, or no more, a man.

Hannerz (1969) identifies that of being tough, a good talker, sexually active and sharply dressed as the main strategies for successful self-presentation for his Black men, living in the ghetto of Washington D.C. I would assume, but have little material or few observations to either confirm or reject this assumption, that these are arenas that are viewed as prestigious by most boys at Anglo high. Meaning that I do not necessarily see Masculinity as a specific value to either my kids in particular, or to Bad Mexicans in general. Rather, I see it as a common interest, which is interpreted as somewhat pathological when undertaken by my kids.

[75] As well as in academic writings, i.e. Gutmann 1996.

It is, however, possible to interpret their emphasis on violence and sex as expressions of a *counter school culture*, which, according to Willis (1993), must be based on something other than school. It is also possible to see these jokes and insults as a strategy in acquiring gender-specific capital within a chosen subfield, because of lack of opportunity and acceptance within a main field.

Not wanting to draw any conclusions as to how, or for which purpose joke-telling and laughter is expressed, suffice to say that how they joke is part of the process of identity management, in that the group uses laughter and insults to signalize difference from some and to celebrate belonging together. At the same time, the jokes work to acquire status and recognition within the group. The fact that the jokes are obscene and *risqué* is what makes them fun. Aspects of *risk* will be discussed in the next chapter.

5. "Do you have a Pass?": Risk and Control

The whole universe is harnessed to men's attempt to force one another into good citizenship. Thus we find that certain moral values are upheld and certain social rules defined by beliefs in dangerous contagion, as when the glance and touch of an adulterer is held to bring illness to his neighbours or his children.

Purity and Danger, Mary Douglas (2002:3)

Introduction

Kids at Anglo High were not very different from kids I have known in Norway, and neither were the social workers or school staff significantly different from those adults working with youth that I have known. Spending time at Anglo High was still a very different experience than any I have had before. The ascription and self-ascription of identities and their relative position within a somewhat rigid high school hierarchy was somewhat different, but kids in Norway also categorize each other, and are being categorized by the school staff as well. What I experienced as being the most different from my previous experiences was the way school staff and students interacted – or rather, how they did not. Identities contain an aspect of perception, in that the self-experienced and ascribed part of anyone's identity is dependent on recognition, and as I have suggested, in that recognition is dependent on visibility. How adults *see* kids is the focus of this chapter. The way the institution's *gaze* is applied can be seen to be as Mary Douglas states in the quote above, an "attempt to force one another into good citizenship" (ibid).

The Nature of Risk

In dealing with minority youth, one is dealing with a group of individuals that in a double way differ from a concept of normality as predominantly ascribed by the majority of a society, in being both *minority* and *youth.* The term *normality* can have at least two major interpretations. If normality is defined as the standard, or norm, of a society, one can induce this to refer to the *majority* within a democratic society. Being a minority therefore places you outside the demographic normality and into a position of numerical "otherness". An alternative, or additional interpretation, is one of defining normality as what is *natural*. This view, of course, intersects with that of normality as majority, since the power to define naturalness is also largely managed by the majority of a society, but in addition such a view carries a moral meaning, which affects the consequences of being defined as *unnatural*. Normality might define naturalness, and unnatural might infer thoughts of irregularity, abnormality or deviance. To the extent that *youth* are seen as being between categories, or to use a different term - *liminal* (Turner 1969), they are also in a way abnormal, and unnatural. The American national Creed echoes the mores and values of the American Constitution and Declaration of

Independence, where constitutional rights are presented as natural rights *and* normative demands provided by the grace of God and/or the democracy. The unnatural can be interpreted as being equivalent with immorality, and therefore as posing a *risk,* especially in the eyes of those groups that can be said to define and manage the national *key symbols* in a way that exercises control over other groups, through the American "unity of ideals and diversity of culture" (Myrdal 1944:3) – be that the Whites over the Mexicans, the adults over the kids, or the majority over the minority. The presence of risk necessitates preventative and protective measures, as well as sanctions. Who assesses the sources of risks in an American high school, and on what grounds? How is prevention and protection used as means to minimize risk, and why is minimization seen as the preferred way to control everyday school life?

Sources of, Subjects to and Reasons for *Risk*

The period between dependent child and independent adult is often described as involving turbulence and insecurity in anthropological writing[76]. Moving from one recognized position to another is seen as a transitional period of insecurity and uncertainty both for the kid in question and for those around him or her. It is seen as a period of *liminality* (Turner 1969). Although previously in this text I have argued that this age group's perceived "otherness," used to ascribe and explain kids and their actions as naturally oppositional, is simplifying at best and might also be largely misleading, the fact that I find these opinions to be commonly voiced by adult authorities can be used to shed some light on perceptions of necessary measures needed to control kids. What is non-categorizable can be difficult to both understand and therefore to *control*. The insecurity resulting from this categorizational difficulty also involves an element of danger, or *risk.* Risk can be seen to constitute an element of impurity and pollution for the society in question, as is exemplified in Mary Douglas' reference to dirt as being "matter out of place" (Douglas 2002:36). It is not necessarily the nature of the matter, or group, that defines the risk, or amount of "dirt" associated with it, but rather its position in relation to acknowledged institutions and categories. Previous chapters have dealt with both kids' general ascribed "radical alterity", Bad kids' ascribed non-conformity with regards to behavior, and the ridicule and perceived impossibility involved in being jokingly ascribed as both homosexual and racially "mixed". All these categorizational difficulties can be seen to involve some kind of pollution-risk.

[76] See for instance Fredrik Barth's article "Role dilemmas and father-son dominance in Middle Eastern kinship systems" (Barth 1971).

Labeling theory has been proposed used earlier in this thesis as a means of explaining the marginalization associated with ascription of Bad and Mexican identities, and the limited social space available for my kids in Anglo High. One of the critiques of labeling theory is that “labeling theory can not explain primary deviance, or what is taken to be a deviant act” but only how this deviance is distributed and administrated (Glassner in Raybeck 1991:52). Invoking Henrietta Moore’s quote from the previous chapter however, “ascriptive characteristics (…) themselves form the basis for power relations” (Moore 1994:92). In assuming that identities are dialectically managed it is possible to argue that labeling of identities work both as a way of assigning negative or moral stigma to a certain group, *and* as a way of providing reasons and explanations for the stigmatization of this group. My kids are to some extent labeled with their Mexican identity, which can be argued to be a way of inscribing “Mexican-ness” with a certain risk or stigma. What Glassner might include in such a term as “primary deviance” or “deviant act” is not immediately self-explanatory, but without venturing too deeply into the domain of deviance and its many faces and facets, it can be argued that “primary deviance” and “deviant acts” are sources of risk. Being labeled with an identity is not in itself contaminating. For that to be the case, the identity needs to be a negative one. Also, one can imagine that there are privileged minority groups in a society, whose identity is not a stigmatized one. The connection between groups of youth and perceived risk is therefore a complex one, where compliance with moral standards does not guarantee acceptance, because risk can be (unfairly) labeled, but also where distance from the center does not automatically entail a position of polluted *liminality.* Ascription and perception of risk must be seen as not only one of relative position and ritual contamination, but also as a product of *power*. Above, the sources of risk have been discussed, but it is also essential to investigate who is seen as being subjected to this risk.

Youths are neither adults nor children. They demand increased freedom, and do not necessarily assume increased responsibility. They might look like children, and at the same time increasingly engage in adult activities, or vice versa. Their focus of interest and attention, and the amount of time invested, turns increasingly from that of the core family, parents and siblings, to that of friends and peers – and from organized activities to just “hanging out” (Øia 1994). Adults often report difficulties in understanding both their own and other youths. Choices of language, clothes, hairstyles, music, and after school activities are often seen as ways of expressing opposition against authority. Opposition or rebellion

constitutes a risk and danger towards establishments, and need to be controlled. As mentioned above, it is not necessarily the nature of the "matter" or the group that defines risk, but the position in relation to the normal/natural/median group, the distance from the negative *limen* to the *center*. Kids who are expressing opposition or rebellion the most, being heavily involved in what earlier theorists have dubbed sub-, counter-, or youth-cultures[77], are seen as being more at risk, more dangerous, and more in need of being controlled than the more conform kids, who can be seen to have internalized this control. This implies that not only is the adult society trying to protect itself against the youth phenomenon; good kids are also tentatively protected from other kids' badness, and also against the potential badness/or risk residing inside themselves. In a western society like the American one, which can be seen to have what M. P. Baumgartner (1991) sees as a distaste for confrontations, marginalized minorities constitute more of a risk than content majorities, rowdy boys constitute more of a risk than sweet girls, and unruly youths constitute more of a risk than sensible adults and easily confined children. "My kids" constitute a triple jeopardy towards society and themselves. To some degree they acknowledge and adopt this view, as shown in the previous chapter – in referring to their own "badness". Some of the risk assessments made therefore point towards youths as demographic group, as a source of risk in danger of contaminating themselves, their peers and their surroundings –an internal source of risk.

In addition to this internal source of risk, there is also risk that is not youth-generated. Anthony Giddens (1991) refers to the "risk society" of late modernity as one where global threats like nuclear power and AIDS (see also Douglas 1992) have become a part of everyday life. It might not be something that physically affects everyone, but one of the effects of globalization is that everyone has to relate to these threats, or risks. Media coverage of global risks, and available knowledge of theoretical risks, together with the feeling of adherence with (parts of) the rest of the world, leads to an increase in perception of risks. Risks are experienced as moving closer, and the demand for safety becomes more essential. Perceived "urban problems", like those of violence and drugs, which might not actually *be* bigger problems now than they used to be, *feel* more imminent. Even if these problems have a higher frequency in urban areas it is probably more correct to see them as "poverty problems". With a turn from stasis towards mobility, both geographically and socially, and a normative demand of individual freedom, the need for security increases (Giddens 1991). Both because

[77] Amit-Talai & Wulff 1995, Brake 1985, Hall, Clark, Jefferson & Roberts 1977, Willis 1993.

of increased interaction with potential sources of risk, be that diseases, violence or under-privileged people, and because possibility for upward individual movement also implies a risk for individual downward mobility as an effect of failure to succeed (Ziehe 1989).

In his book "Maximum Security", John Devine (1996) addresses the "culture of violence" that he not only sees as entering the American inner-city high schools from the streets of the inner-city slum, but also as being inscribed in the kids themselves, making them "agents of violence" (ibid:140). In this way external risk enters the students' bodies and becomes internalized. Kids become possessed or tainted by risk. Devine argues that it must be possible to claim that violence – a source of risk – exists inside schools, without being seen as either racist, good-old-days nostalgic, or to inhabit a "general adult squeamishness about adolescent culture (ibid:3)". According to Devine, to ignore the presence of risk, or to write it off as constructions or by-products of moral panicking, would serve no purpose. The main scope of this chapter is to explore different interpretations of sources and remedies for risk, and how the cure prescribed can be seen to confirm the diagnosis, without necessarily accounting for the real or imagined sources of it.

Causal explanations of risk can be seen to mirror political ideology, be that right-wing theorists "who think of (…) schools as totally chaotic and place blame on students, their families and uninspired principals" or radical theorists "who fixate exclusively on the "symbolic violence" perpetrated by the educational establishment" (both ibid:5) and glorify kids use of street culture in benign opposition towards teachers and principals. Oscar Lewis' focuses on how the "culture of poverty" (Lewis 1968, Bourgois 1995:16, Devine 1996) that saturates poor peoples lives, is reproduced by poor people's cultural preference, and therefore condemns them to a life in poverty. This view portrays poor people as producing their own misery through lack of discipline and moral standards, or because of ignorance, which represents a theoretical and ideological perspective that has been criticized for being both "right-winged" and evolutionistic in nature. Paul Willis (1993) sees kids' class- and cultural resistance towards school authorities as being indeed a reaction to such a "symbolic violence", as does Douglas Foley (1990), but where Foley also explains their failure with lack of cultural participatory parity, Willis sees their resistance as, unfortunately, being the main contributor to the reproduction of their current social subordination. These three theorists therefore position themselves in relation to each other, one could claim: right – left, from

Lewis through Willis to Foley. Their positions and theories will be readdressed in the last chapter. For now, I will deal with how risk is managed by school authorities.

Hall Monitors: Disciplining Through Surveillance

Anglo High has an administrative staff consisting of office staff, the principal, five councilors and five assistant principals. On the school's website, the function of the assistant principal is described the following way:

> "Assistant principals are the backbone of the school. They are responsible of facilitating a safe and secure environment conducive to learning. They assist students whose last names are in the alphabet assigned to them and are responsible for ensuring attendance compliance,(…) as well as, working with discipline matters. In addition to working to maintain a safe and secure school environment, they supervise building management activities (textbooks, lockers, student IDs) and plan transition activities (graduation, exam exemptions and the master scheduling process)".[78]

In addition to the assistant principals, a School Resource Officer from the AISD police department[79] would usually also be present on campus. Finally, in addition there were also two or three other "hall monitors" who would also monitor the students on their way to the cafeteria or the library during lunch and passing period. Whether this was their only job, or if they were part of the teaching staff as well, I was never able to find out. With "hall monitor" in this section I will refer to members of the staff who are actively monitoring student behavior in the hallways of the school.

Most often the person who was working the floor close to the library and the SWO office was either one of the White female assistant principals or a young Black hall monitor. They would be "armed" with walkie-talkies, and were strategically placed in a corner of the open floor, with a clear view to all three stairways, the library and the cafeteria. They were constantly shouting, smiling, laughing, yelling angrily and giving orders as kids were passing:

> *Male Hall monitor:*
> *-See that sign, son? (sign saying "no entry" on a door). Go back that door, son. Go back, turn around.*

[78] The website will not be listed, to ensure the anonymity of Anglo High.
[79] http://www.austin.isd.tenet.edu/k12/campuspolice/other.phtml.

-Are you ladies going to lunch? You need a pass. If you are going to the library, you need a pass.

Female Hall monitor:
-You need to leave your sodas outside (the library) please. Don't take your soda in there. I'll keep it for you. Do you have a pass? Let me see.
- Keep it on, honey (a girl is wearing a big college t-shirt over a fancy dress. She complains that it is too warm). You should have thought of that when you got dressed this morning. (turns to me) It's an evening dress, you know.
-Pull your sweater up, please (to show less cleavage).
- Those words out of that beautiful mouth!!!

All students going to the library needed a pass written by a teacher, even if they were going there to do school related work. The kids who came to the SWO office for their lunch break also in theory needed passes, but the kids who came regularly would usually just keep one pass and show it upon request. Kids were not allowed to bring food and drinks to the library, but it was accepted in the SWO office. In going from the classrooms to the cafeteria, kids were only allowed to use one particular set of stairs. On my first meeting with the SWO – the "back-to-school meeting", the introducing speaker was giving a pep-talk on what she called *the three main goals for SWO*, identifying them as *1. student achievement, 2. student achievement, 3. student achievement*, which she explained were to be attempted reached through ensuring *attendance and behavior*. Hall monitors are involved in both these tasks. One of the things monitored was, as shown above, the physical movement and presence of students inside the school building. Through making sure that kids do not loiter in the hallways during class, and that they have a legit reason (meaning a pass) to be where they are, attendance is supposedly promoted. The main task of hall monitors is however doubtlessly that of behavior surveillance. Through constant reminders, instructions and corrections, and through their bare presence, the hall monitors provide the high school with an attempted Foucauldian "disciplinary gaze" (Foucault 1977 and Rabinow 1984 (ed)).

The AISD has a thorough description of what constitutes general misconduct, and what the consequences of such will be, in its Student Conduct Code[80]. Here it says that students are expected to be "well-groomed and dress appropriately", but it does not specify what "appropriate" means. The practice was that style or color that could show gang-affiliation was not allowed, but the "skittles crew" as mentioned by Elena was accepted. One boy had to deliver his red shoelaces to Angela one morning because these were seen as gang colors.

[80] http://www.austin.isd.tenet.edu/k12/parentsinfo/conduct.phtml.

Spaghetti-string tops and tube tops were considered indecent, and therefore not allowed, as in the example with the girl who had to wear a college sweater over her (by the hall monitor's standards) skimpy dress. Language was tentatively monitored, both to fit standards of decency and to not be derogatory towards other students and/or teachers. This was an almost impossible task, however, since the crowd of students move through the hallways while talking and laughing. Reprimands for bad language was usually given more in one-on-one situation and in smaller groups. Angela would especially sanction derogatory remarks made towards women and gays, and they were many. She would insist that topics were really a matter of respect, and what kind of an atmosphere the SWO office should have. The hall monitors were usually friendly towards the students, but (at least I thought so) also somewhat condescending, for instance in using words like "honey", "ladies" and "son". This use of language and choice of words in monitoring highlights the differences between kids and adults, between students and teachers, and may be used to show the difference between authority and those subjected to this authority.

Mentors and Monitors: Total Institutions and Panopticism

The surveillance conducted in the hallways of Anglo High is tentatively "total". A hall monitor or assistant principal is strategically placed by the library, the cafeteria and by every stairway during every lunch break and passing period. Like in Foucault's description of Bentham's *panopticon* (Foucault 1977), the surveillance is experienced as uninterrupted – consisting of a constant and wide ranging "network of gazes". The control and surveillance is "omnidisciplinary" (ibid) – it monitors both dress code, use of language, loitering and littering (spilling of food for instance), attendance and tardiness, as well as general behavior. "Omnidisciplinarity" is qualities of what Foucault describes as the "complete and austere institutions" (Foucault 1977, Rabinow 1984), whose main objective is to attend to every aspect of the individual, from bodily training and movement, to its moral habitus. The aspiration is not only to control through monitoring and surveillance, but also to discipline, and *discipline* is defined as a set of instruments or a technology of *power* (Rabinow 1984:206). Where the prison, which is one of Foucault's examples, shapes and molds model prisoners, the school tries to shape kids into model students, and through this – into model adults and model Americans. As has been suggested previously in this thesis, Anglo High can be seen as primarily distributing White middle-class ideals to its student population. Erving Goffman [1961] (1987) uses the term "total institutions" to describe "institutions established to care for or cater to a group of individuals who are either unable to care for themselves

and/or a threat to society" (ibid:16). In other words: institutions catering to individuals in need of both surveillance and disciplining - monitoring and mentoring.

> The total institution is a social hybrid, part (residential) community, part formal organization; therein lies its special sociological interest. There are other reasons for being interested in these establishments, too. In our society, they are the forcing houses for changing persons; each is a natural experiment on what can be done to the self. (ibid:22, my parenthesis)

Foucault describes how the panoptical penitentiary sees the resident as "delinquent" rather than "offender" (Rabinow 1984). It is his life (or nature) that is the focus of attention, and not the act that put him (or her) there. The same goes for students at Anglo High. The surveillance affects all students, not only those "at risk". It is their nature as students or youths who put them in the spotlight and in need of institutional disciplining.

One of the rituals I observed, and very soon got conditioned into, at the SWO office, was how some of the boys, especially Miguel, Felipe and Marcus, were very often greeted with the question: "Did you get in trouble?" To get in trouble would mean anything from getting into a fight, arguing with a teacher or, very often, experiencing a confrontation with one of the hall monitors. If they had indeed "gotten in trouble" their reaction was usually one where they explained why what had happened was not their fault, and that because of this they should not get in trouble for it. My kids accepted what constituted "misconduct", as defined by the school or the police. The rules were therefore to a certain degree agreed upon and the reactions were accepted. What is questioned is whether the kid in question should have to answer to what happened. The only time I ever saw Angela loose her temper, was over what she called *"such a victim mentality. They think we don't like them"*.

The hall monitors are tentatively providers of the disciplinary "gaze", in order to control the presence of risk, and discipline the student body - to keep them "out of trouble". I shall return to how successful this strategy is, and what some of its effects might be, but first I want to discuss what happens when control is lost?

The Homecoming: Loosing Control

One Friday, the second last week in September, Anglo High was having its *Homecoming*. Since I was not a part of the school administration, or the regular classroom education, I did

not hear about it until the day before the game, when some of my kids started to talk about how much fun the next day was going to be. Hearing the word *Homecoming* evoked memories from numerous "cheer-leader movies" in the naïve anthropologist, and I tried to quiz my kids in what the term meant, and what the event was going to include. None of them could give me a really good explanation to why it was called *Homecoming*, so Faith stepped in and explained that the school's football team was coming "home" to play football, after having played away for a period[81]. The actual homecoming was therefore the football game, which was played on Friday night. My kids, however, were more concerned with the homecoming as a social event including both the school day and the evening, meaning an opportunity to have a school day out of the ordinary – and according to themselves; get drunk and pick fights. Before I left the office the Thursday before the homecoming I was told that there was going to be "pep-rally", to boost school spirit, at 9 am the next morning, and that I should show up early to get a good seat.

I arrive at the school a few hours earlier than usual Friday morning. When I arrive, the marching band is practicing outside the school. The conductor is standing high up on a platform for everybody to see, and the different sections and instrument-groups in the band are not only playing while marching, like I am used to from Norway, but are performing highly choreographed movements out on the grass. The school building is covered in streams of toilet paper, and almost all the students who are arriving are dressed up in funny outfits. Instead of going relatively straight through the hallways, to the SWO office, I head towards the gymnasium. There is already a large crowd of kids outside the door, waiting to be let in. I find Javier and Pablo, and stand next to them, chatting while we're waiting to be let in. Javier and Pablo tell me that they are not going to let all the kids in, because there has to be room for parents and teachers. This strikes me as very peculiar, since this is a "pep rally", intended to boost the school spirit before the football game the same night. I say that I hope that at least we are let in, since I showed up early for this, and Pablo tells me to just go up to the door and tell them that I work there, and that they will let me in.

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[81] Even if this was the game when the varsity football team was seen as "coming home", they had actually played on their home field two weeks earlier. Of the next five games, however, four of them were to be played on their home field. The "homecoming" is a once a year event and also involves non-athletic events like for instance the election of homecoming queen and king.

Me: But I don't work here
Pablo: Yeah. I know, but they don't know that. Just walk up there. I'm telling you, they'll let you right in, Miss.

So, I just walk up to the door and say nothing. And a woman watching the door smiles and lets me in, no questions asked. Inside the gymnasium, there are only a couple of parents and myself[82]. A few minutes later, the kids are eventually all let in, and the gymnasium is packed full. The rally includes performances by representatives from the marching band, the cheerleaders and the dance-squad. The junior- and varsity football players are presented to the audience, and other teams who have performed well last season are honored and cheered on. In addition, the nominees for homecoming king and queen are presented, accompanied by great cheers. The rally is about to end, when suddenly a huge fire emerges in the middle of the fully packed crowd of people, on the opposite side from where I am sitting. Then things happen very fast. Kids scramble to get away from the flames that, fortunately, die out almost as fast as they appear. Campus police grab a (white) boy, and drag him out of the gymnasium. I look to the left of me and notice that all "my kids" are accounted for, and seated far away from the incidence, so there should be no danger that they would get in trouble for this. A lady next to me holds her newborn close to her chest and we all head for the door.

The gymnasium is over-filled with people. Nobody is over-eager to stay behind, including myself, even if the fire is put out immediately. As everybody is trying to push through the door at the same time, tempers are running hot, and a teacher yells out to be careful, so you don't step on anyone.

Anglo kid: (mockingly) Yeah, make sure you don't step on any Mexicans. 'Cause they have bare feet.
Mexican teacher: (very angry) Do you see these shoes? Do you see my feet? I am Mexican, and I am telling you that I have plenty of shoes.

This was the first, and only time I heard a race-related argument between teachers and students. Not only does this show that there were probably a lot of negative sentiments against Mexicans that was never communicated to me directly, since ways of communicating were always very polite and politically correct, but it also shows that the incident inside the

[82] They asked me *"do you have a girl in the dance-squad too?"* I told them, being very offended, that I was 25 years old, and did *not* have a 13-year old daughter. I did not think that they looked nearly embarrassed enough, but they apologized. Later I realized that many teenagers at Anglo high had been born when their mothers were teenagers, so that a close to 30-year-old woman might very well have a 13-year-old girl.

gymnasium had shaken and exited many of the spectators, so much that they were acting in unacceptable ways, without thinking, or caring, about the consequences. As everybody is leaving, things are literally getting out of hand. Decorations and posters are being torn down; trashcans filled with water are being thrown over the balcony and several fights break out. Some students are running around with (at least to me) intimidating ecstatic faces, while others are keeping close to the wall, obviously feeling uncomfortable. School police, Hall monitors, teachers, the principal and assistant principals are commanding everybody back to their classroom, and very slowly the hallways empty, and only a few students stay behind to tidy up the mess. Many of the students are dressed up in fancy outfits, with different themes for each grade[83], and the picture of upset students in 60'ies outfits and huge wigs, picking up torn down banners with slogans promoting school spirit and pride, pinpoints the ridiculous hopelessness of the situation, as experienced by the fieldworker, the teachers, and probably also by most of the students.

On their way back to their classrooms, and throughout the rest of the day, most of the regular kids stopped by the SWO to talk about the incident that morning. Most of my kids did not seem upset at all, but quite contrary they seemed very excited.

> *Pedro: I know who threw the trashcan. It was one of my homeboys[84].*
> *Faith: The Principal gave an announcement.*
> *Pedro: He sounded as though he was crying.*
> *Faith: No – I think he sounded mad. But he used feeling-words though. Like "I feel very sad".*
> *(Pablo enters)*
> *Pablo: Hey Miss.*
> *Me: Were you here this morning?*
> *Pablo: Yeah.*
> *(Paul comes in)*
> *Paul: Did you have fun, Miss?*
> *Me: I had fun, up to a point.*
> *(people leaving, entering, talking, laughing)*
> *Me: But you didn't get into the fight, did you?*
> *Paul: Yeah…*
> *Me: You did?*
> *Paul: I didn't even want to. Two fights broke out.*
> *Pablo: Three.*
> *Paul: Three? One on the 1st and one on the 3rd floor. And I was just walking, and suddenly this guy just WHAM (shows a hit to his jaw).*
> *Faith: You guys need to go to class. I'll see you for lunch.*

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[83] The dress-up theme for the Homecoming was: Freshman: 50'ies Sock hop, Sophomore: Mardi Gras, Junior: Fiesta, Senior: Disco.

[84] As mentioned in Chapter 4.

(Felipe comes in)
Felipe: Hey miss.
Me: Hey Felipe. You need to be in class too.
Felipe: Were you here? Did you see those trashcans? That was me. And all those water balloons.
Me: That was very dangerous. You could have hurt someone.
Felipe: I know, and I almost did too.
Faith: You shouldn't tell me this Felipe, because if someone asks me if I know who did that, I'm going to have to tell them it was you.
Felipe: You can't do that.
Faith: I can, if I think you're going to hurt yourself or someone else.
(Felipe leaves - very angry)
Me: Would you tell?
Faith: No, probably not.

The football game was held the following evening, without any new disturbances. My kids were there, but as they had told me they would, they spent most of the time behind and under the stands talking to other kids. I enjoyed the football game, and the announcing of homecoming queen and king, and left them alone. Like most other times that I met them "in public", meaning outside the SWO office or the outreach-organization, they were polite but somewhat rejecting. For days to come Faith, the kids and me continued talking about the homecoming, and what went wrong.

Anti-Panopticism: Visible Authority, Imperfect Gaze, and Indocile Bodies

The idea behind Bentham's panopticon was that surveillance should be experienced as constant, and also that the supervisor should not be visible to the inmate. In this way, the inmate can never be certain as to whether he or she is being watched or not. The control therefore becomes internalized, since the chance of being watched is constant, and the inmate becomes his or her own guard, monitoring their own behavior (Foucault 1977, Rabinow 1984). John Devine refers to the current system of surveillance in violent inner-city high schools in New York as in effect being antipanopticism[85] (Devine 1996), because the disciplinary "gaze" is averted. The teachers have submitted the task of surveillance to the guards, and their monitoring is largely relying on technological measures, like metal detectors and identity cards. In Anglo High, the "street culture of violence" was not as prominent, or at least not as recognized as in Devine's description. There were no metal detectors and no guards monitoring the entrance, signing visitors in. The first time I was there I registered as a visitor with the administration, but after that I came and left as I wished, no questions asked.

[85] I will use the term "anti-panopticism" for my use of the term, to separate it from Devine's "antipanopticism".

Even if hall monitors did do much of the surveillance and disciplining that did not exclude the teachers from this task completely.

Devine's view of the antipanopticon, with the averted gaze is therefore not a good model for describing what goes on, and what occasionally goes wrong, at Anglo High. I still think the term "antipanopticon" might be useful however. Instead of providing an invisible monitor that sees everything[86], Anglo High has very visible (and audible) monitors that see *almost* everything. In such a system, control is not internalized. Instead, the means and opportunities for control is moved outside the student's bodies – they become externalized. The students' bodies do not become *docile* (Rabinow 1984), but chained or muffled, always conscious of their monitors. But like in Goffman's (1987) "total institutions", the patient (or student) always finds a way to escape this gaze. One interpretation of the "homecoming incident" is that when such a large number of students were gathered in the gymnasium, successful surveillance of all of them was difficult, or impossible. Somebody probably understood this, and took advantage of the situation. When all control is externalized, and taken away from the student, authorities have simultaneously produced a situation where lack of control will most likely lead to some sort of unwanted behavior. This is not Devine's antipanopticon, but it can be interpreted as an alternative anti-panopticon, or a pseudo-panopticon. Foucault saw the panopticon as a construction of modernity, and Devine sees his antipanopticon as a deconstructionist construction (!). In a society where modernity and individualism have lead to an increase in self-reflexivity and emphasis on individual responsibility, the strategies adapted for controlling and minimizing risk inside Anglo High school can be interpreted to have the opposite effect. If somebody sees you (almost) all the time, and control is externalized, then, when nobody sees you, everything is allowed. What *kids*[87] might do when outside the realm of authority can be used as an argument to increase surveillance even more. Also, it might excuse teachers' and parents' lack of trust in their students and kids. The question that can be raised is whether this increase in monitoring is further disabling kids ability to assume control of their own lives, as well as their own actions. The dilemma is to prepare a large student population for adult life, without exposing them to what is perceived as too much adult *risk.* Also, as stated by Devine, antiviolence normalizes violence (1996).

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[86] Today, the term "Big Brother" probably would help more people understand Bentham's "Panopticon".

[87] *Kids* here as in "kids in general". Obviously largely simplifying, but representative of a view that sees most "kids" or "youth" as potential delinquents.

Focus on safety underlines the potential risks. And as a result, the myth of unruly and trouble(d) kids is being reproduced.

The Behavior Management Center: Disciplining Through Punishment

During my first meeting with the Social Work Organization I got in contact with the social worker at the Behavior Management Center (BMC), who invited me to visit. The BMC is a special school within the AISD, where students who are expelled from their regular schools attend for periods up to 120 days[88], as an out-of –school detention. If the student has committed serious or violent offenses they can be sent there for longer periods of time, but this is not seen as a good solution (by those concerned with the students academic progression) since BMC does not provide a complete education. The BMC offers both regular classes in English, Math, Social Science and Natural Science, as well as special classes for behavioral problems, anger management and team building. Students who are sent there are released either on date, or after completion of a program. The social worker says that the general attitude is that kids at BMC have behavioral problems, but that in her opinion some of them have serious emotional problems too.

Where the AISD has not specified the dress code in its Student Conduct Code, the BMC has a very precise definition of acceptable and tolerable dress code[89]. The main rule is plain white t-shirts, blue jeans, and black, brown or white shoes. No hats, purses, backpacks or hairbrushes. In addition, the kids are evaluated on a point sheet every day that marks their performance in different categories, ranging from "Anger Control" to "Quality" and "Showing concern". The kids who are there to be released on completion need a certain score to be released. The dress code and the point sheet show a similar emphasis on bodily discipline as described in the previous section of this chapter.

> Anger Control means:
> No fighting, yelling, threatening, arguing, name-calling, making fists, making inappropriate gestures, slamming doors, chairs, tables, books or desks.
> Following Directions means:

[88] The social worker at BMC told me the maximum stay was 6 weeks, but others, like Faith, disagreed. The AISD Student Conduct Code says up to 120 days at a time (http://www.austin.isd.tenet.edu/k12/parentsinfo/conduct.phtml). This Conduct Code was revised in 2001, so it might have been 6 weeks during my fieldwork in 1999. No matter what the rule was, it was certainly disagreement and/or confusion as to what it was.

[89] See Appendix III for copy of Student Dress Code 1998-1999.

> Doing exactly what all BMC staff ask you to do, immediately and without arguing or talking back or refusing.
> Cooperation means:
> Controlling anger, controlling language, acting appropriately at all times, not disrupting, not arguing, being prepared, following directions, staying on task, completing all assignments, showing attention, showing interest, and correcting yourself and others appropriately when you have the opportunity; no gum, candy, drinks or lunches from outside.[90]

The students are driven to school in a special bus, which has a video camera for surveillance on board. Some of the kids have to get up very early to catch this bus, since it covers the entire AISD, and making this round is time consuming. When they arrive, they gather in the cafeteria before school starts. They have to sit with one open place between each student, their hands displayed on the desk in front of them, eyes and head turned forward, and no talking – until the teacher comes to pick them up, and take them to the classroom. When they get up and leave, they walk with their hands on their back, eyes forward and still no talking to their classrooms. When I was visiting the cafeteria just as school started, three adults came to pick up one boy. He was the only one in 6th grade for that time being. The other classes have around 5 or 6 students. In addition to teachers and administrators I also got to meet the school's uniformed police officer[91]. All the students are searched for weapons every day.

The social worker complains about how difficult it is to get anything done at this "school"[92]. For one, the kids are only here for a short while, and then go back to their original schools, and also, the kids are so different that it is difficult to assess their needs. The school has a much larger number of boys than girls, but with a fairly equal division of Blacks, Whites and Mexicans.

> *Social Worker: We have, in the same classroom one guy taking 9th grade for the third time, so he's just not getting it, right? And then we have one guy who counterfeited money on the school computer – and spent 4000$ before he was caught. Another girl reads like a 3rd grader, she is really an 8th grader, but she is in 6th now, because they held her back. (...) And all I ever get to do is "anger management".*

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[90] Appendix III.
[91] The police officer was probably one of the largest men I have ever met. And still the social worker told me that just a few days ago, a girl who is known to be violent had kicked him to the floor, so that he had to grab her leg, and 'flip' her over.
[92] John Devine (1996) draws a distinction between schools and "schools" "not to indicate a totally chaotic situation" (ibid: 44), but rather to distinguish the concept, or discourse, of "normal schooling" from that where violence is not only present, but has also become normalized. The BMC must be said to be a "school".

In connection to the BMC, in the same building complex, there is also a special program for kids on their way back to their school or their community after having in some way been inside the judicial system. These were serving anything from severe to minor sentences.

(in the SWO office)
Faith: one of my kids from a different school was just sent to BMC for the completion of the school year.
Me: What did he do?
Faith: He threatened a teacher.
Marcus: (enters the office) That's cool. I've done that.
Me: Have you ever been to BMC, Marcus
Marcus: Yeah. Once.
Me: How did you like it?
Marcus: It was all right. It was better than here. I was with the state justice program though.
Me: So, what happened. How did you end up in the program?
Marcus: I was on parole for 7 months, and so they brought me there (he doesn't want to talk about why).
Me: Did you have to wear the white t-shirt and stuff?
Marcus: No, we got the program's T-shirts, with the Texas sign on them, in green (points to his shirt). They only gave me two of those though. The only thing I didn't like about it was that they didn't give me credit for the things I did there.

The BMC is supposed to be used as punishment, and some schools usually just send their students there for the first two days, to be registered, and then allow them to come back hoping that they have had a scare. For a student to be sent to the BMC there has to be a hearing (my kids referred to it as a 'trial'), where the principal, the student, the parents and maybe one or several teachers are present. If the student is charged with assault he or she has to be sent to BMC. Many students, like Marcus, actually like the BMC better than their regular schools, in spite of the strict rules and regulations.

SW: (talking about the cafeteria at BMC) The kids don't get a choice (of lunch) here, and they don't get dessert or a soft drink. They do this so that they shall not want to come back. A lot of kids like it better here because of the small classes – but they are not getting a full education here.
(...)
SW: Part of the problem is that schools can choose if they want to give them credit for the work they do here. A lot of kids do really well here, and when they come back they have to do classes over.

Even the BMC only reaches the students who actually show up for school. If they do not show, a wanted message is sent to the police, but there is not a lot they can do. Control is only possible to administer to those kids who are physically present. A few days before my visit to

the BMC, two students, a boy and a girl, had showed up to be enrolled. The boy was not wearing the T-shirt/Jeans "uniform" and did not have his parents with him, so they had to send him home. The girl was in "uniform" and accompanied by her parents, and was registered. She stayed until the end middle of the day, before she took off. A member of the school staff expressed it like this: *"These are gang kids. They're not gonna come back"*.

"The Place for Conflict": Minimizing Risk Through Therapy

Even if hall monitoring and surveillance is the most frequently used method of keeping students out of "trouble", and even if in-school detention, or expulsion to the BMC or even the state program occasionally are used as punishment and as disciplining measure, the need for different ways of both preventing and resolving conflicts and "trouble" incidents is recognized by most of both staff and students at Anglo High. As mentioned, Angela expressed the view on one of my first visits that "every school should have a social worker. Because kids have problems, right. And this is a good place to deal with them". Even if Angela did not see the staff as either very helpful or supportive of her work, I overheard them expressing their approval both to her, and to me, several times. One of the assistant principals once told me, while lowering her voice to a confiding whisper, "I know that you have your little group up here, so I usually let them bring their lunch". Bringing food up on this floor was not really allowed, but obviously exceptions were being made for our "little group".

One day, during second lunch, Garcia and Lauren enter the office. I had never met any of them before, but Garcia still points at Faith and me, and declares to Lauren:

> *Garcia: These are my friends. (...) I told you, it's cool to come here. This is the place for conflicts, and we sure have a conflict!!*

It turns out that a girl has been spreading rumors about Garcia and Lauren, and now Garcia is both worried that Lauren will not want to see him anymore, and that his sister is going to fight with the girl who was spreading the rumors. Faith talks to Lauren and Garcia, and they all agree that the important thing is that they want to continue seeing each other. The problem is not solved, however, because Garcia's sister now is involved.

> *Garcia: And my sister is BIG. (...) You see, if a girl messes with me, my sister automatically steps in. The same way that if a boy messes with my sister I automatically get involved.*

Faith gives Garcia a pass to give to his sister, and have her come talk to us, instead of getting in a fight. Garcia does not think she will want to, but says he will give it to her. At least the conflict between Garcia and Lauren is solved. Faith says that "sometimes people just need to let off steam, and they can do that here."

The "let's talk about it", or counseling approach to dealing with kids "at risk" has several different connotations. It is an approach much likely to be preferred to that of surveillance, monitoring and punishment by many social workers and social scientists concerned with hands-on youth work. It provides an opportunity to deal and work with issues and problems as experienced by the kids themselves, instead of primarily perceived or ascribed by "others", or more correctly "adults". Within larger high schools in the USA, where more than 2000 students move from classroom to classroom every day, without being recognized or noticed by anyone, and especially not by the staff, the establishing of an individual relationship between students and adults becomes increasingly difficult. Devine (1996) argues both for a return to where teachers were also disciplining students, instead of avoiding their "gaze" from conflicts and calling on the guards, and also for smaller schools.

Establishing a personal relationship between students and mentors can however not be used to solve all problems at hand. Such a suggestion can result in an overemphasis on *therapy* as a way of minimizing risk. If this is being used as the only or the most important approach, the possible signal might be that the *risk* at hand is located *within* the trouble(d) student, and that the elimination of risk can be reached by showing the student the error of his/her ways, or by convincing him/her of their individual responsibility to pursue their own happiness and correct the wrongs. Philippe Bourgois (1995) points to the problem of ascribing therapeutic remedies to individuals, who he argues are often subjected to structural injustices. Not only is it not likely to be a solution to much else than the emotional problems caused by the structural ones, not that the importance of this should be overlooked. But the danger is also that the image of *youth* (or *minority*, or *lower-middle-class*, or *young man* – or in the case of "my kids": all of the above) as menace to society might confirm youth's perception of themselves as Bad, and hence force them to accept the role as societal culprit. Where a static and fatalistic view of social injustice and immobility can lead to an undesired *victim mentality,* the *culprit mentality* can be the result of being left behind in a society that preaches universal upward mobility. As shown in the two previous chapters, society in general, as well as school administration in particular, can be seen to *label* kids with identities. The American ideology

proposing *equality* and *liberty for all,* can be seen to constitute a hegemony, within which values and foundations are rarely questioned, but rather seen as pan-human ideals, there is little or no room for alternative interpretations or definitions to be made by the kids of their own disadvantaged situation. Their "badness" therefore can be interpreted as a way of opposing their position within the system without questioning the system.

"We also realize that the traditional high school is not for every kid"

When I was meeting the principal at Anglo High for my scheduled interview I was a bit anxious about meeting with him, since both Angela, and later Faith, had been somewhat critical towards him. We had a very nice talk however. The social workers resentment might have been a result of professional differences, where social workers and administrators have different priorities. I started by asking about the way control and surveillance was conducted alongside with the educational work inside the school.

> *Me: (...) Do you see your task in running a high school as more one of ensuring social control than the passing on of knowledge?*
> *Principal: Sometimes it's really hard to balance my time between those two, but I try to keep my focus on academics, making sure that my teachers are focused. At the same time I spend an enormous amount of time dealing with social issues; and the major issue on this school is alcohol and drugs. That's what we spend a lot of time dealing with. (...) So I find that in a lot of times when I should have been in the classrooms I find myself going to hearings. But I try to stay focused by going to department meetings and so on. But this is an 80 hours week... I usually get here at 6.30am, and last night I got home around 10pm.*
> *Me: Do you think the teachers feel they spend too much time monitoring too?*
> *Principal: Probably, but not as much.*
> *(...)*
> *Me: Do you think that [the Columbine incident[93]] has affected the monitoring and control on high school kids?*
> *Principal: Well, maybe in the way that you never let your guard down. You're always looking out for signals. Why is this kid not coming to school? Is there anything we can do, and so on. Making sure they go to class.*
> *Me: Do you have any thoughts on consequences on a larger societal scale from the way young people are being treated in the US – when it comes to expectations and monitoring(...)?*
> *Principal: (...) I've never really thought about that. I guess it would [be consequences], because when they leave there is no one that's going to tell them to show up or do their homework. (...) And still parents react and defend their kids, saying that we're too harsh. And if they are not being disciplined at home, how am I supposed to get through?*

[93] In 1999, before I left for Austin, there was a tragic shooting at Columbine high school in Littleton, Colorado.

> *<u>Me:</u> I was here for the homecoming and the pep rally that got out of hand, and I sort of asked myself if they are being monitored so much that when they can hide in great numbers they don't recognize a bad idea when they get one, like: "let's set the school on fire!"*
> *<u>Principal:</u> I know! And that was so well planned too. And still people come and say that "he's really a good kid, and he shouldn't be punished."*

To some degree I felt that we were talking past each other. I wanted to address and ask about how the surveillance was making kids feel and act, and the principal answered with how the things that had happened justified strong disciplinary actions. This can be taken to support the argument made before, that what happens in schools like Anglo High is that control and surveillance is used to underline the perceived behavioral risks. Risks that are seen as greater for my kids than others, in that they are Mexican, "at risk", poor and – at least some of them – Bad. In managing a student body, rules apply to all kids, but the "gaze" is more firmly fixed on some.

> *<u>Me:</u> What do you think is the greatest challenge for the future?*
> *<u>Principal:</u> I think the really great challenge is to do something with the dropout rate. I think that any strategy that's going to be successful has to start at a very early age. But I guess that if I had the answer I would tap it in bottles and make a million dollars.*
> *<u>Me:</u> White kids drop out as well though?*
> *<u>Principal:</u> Yes, but that is really minor, compared to the Hispanic dropout rate. I think some of the problems are that the schools are getting too big, and they're sor of expecting us to do miracles. When you have a school with over 2000 students, there is no way you're going to be able to meet the need of every kid. I know the Charter School is doing some good things, and are being successful, but they have 85 students. (...) When they have the time and the resources it is easier to think different. We have over 2000 students and 5 counselors, that's how many kids per counselor??*

The large number of students enrolled at Anglo High was something that struck me the first time I was there. And along with that, the fact that teachers did not know their students. One time, when I was talking to the Assistant principal outside the SWO office, a somewhat older looking boy walked by. The Assistant principal smiled at him, and he smiled back and walked on. When he was gone, she confided in me:

> *Assistant Principal: I don't know if he's a teacher or a student, but I don't want to embarrass him by asking. If he is a student he obviously knows that he's getting away with it (crossing that floor without a pass).*

Not only does one of the assistant principals not know all the students, she does not know all the teachers either. The first time I visited Charter school, one of the kids who had just been introduced to me, and had told me how she preferred this school, soon after walked down the street while hugging a woman – smiling and laughing. Mike, who was showing me around said: *"You see? This is the kind of place this is. That woman is one of the counselors."* The smaller school is however not necessarily everybody's educational and behavioral "salvation", or guarantee to stay out of trouble. Charter school had a high drop out rate compared to Anglo High, and only a small percentage of their students went on to college, but as the Charter school principal emphasized, this school is working with a different part of the population, and with different goals.

> *Charter School Principal: We are purposely different than most high schools. Our target population is dropout youth, or kids moving towards dropout. (...) Our intention is to work with those youths who have the most problems. While regular public school have a broad scope, we have a narrower scope. We deal with kids whose previous study environment wasn't effective, and whose high school setting wasn't successful.*

The way that different high schools are administered should be seen to mirror the type of problems the schools experience as important to address. I have wanted to suggest in the chapter just presented that some of the means of control exercised by schools partake not only in creating or maintaining the perceived behavioral risks generally associated with youth in the USA, but also in reinforcing the negative content of some identities that my kids in particular are labeled with. The effort by the school to control the student's *bodies* becomes an experienced necessity that can be interpreted as a result of the institution's *facelessness.*

The next chapter will try to sum up some of the reasons given and strategies applied with regards to how and why kids try to take control of their life and their school situation, and how they evaluate improvement and success, especially focusing on the differences between different schools and the differences between students in these schools. Suffice to say here that the structure of the traditional high school in itself is also a factor in the perceived need for surveillance and control, and the preferred methods applied. In a smaller school, the institution becomes more transparent and less faceless, and the distance between the students and the staff becomes smaller, thereby maybe allowing both students and staff to be seen as individuals instead of as categories. At the same time, it is worth remembering that an approach like that of Charter school's means grouping all dropout and "at risk" kids together

in one place, with the imaginable following risk of these kids being ascribed with the same kind of social stigma by both those inside and outside the school as my kids in Anglo High are.

6. Coping & Hoping: Pursuing Happiness

The line it is drawn
The curse it is cast
The slow one now
Will later be fast
As the present now
Will later be past
The order is
Rapidly fadin'.
And the first one now
Will later be last
For the times they are a-changin'.
The times they are a-changin', Bob Dylan[94]

Introduction

Chapters 3, 4 and 5 have addressed different strategies for positioning and management of kids' identities and behavior within an American high school. The primary approach to this has been an analysis of how kids experience and classify themselves and others, and how adults perceive and classify kids. These mutually dependent processes have been argued to be continuous and dialectical. Processes of identity management found within a system of what has initially been presented as one of relative stasis, or within an institution that can be regarded as at least semi-total, can therefore benefit from being viewed as circular or oscillating, and also to some degree as accumulative. These processes are subjected to influences from different levels of the American large-scale society, and to different interpretations of the American national Creed, which makes them difficult to explain and understand through a simple cause-effect analysis. Obviously, no educational or other social institution exists independently of its social surroundings. As a result of this, Mexican kids and Bad kids are often labeled and treated in a certain way by school staff and peers not only, or necessarily primarily, because of how these kids engage in strategies of self-presentation when in school, but also with reference to interpretations and application of this Creed.

I have tried to show how some of the kids have predominantly other points of reference, possibly entailing other values and ideals, than those primarily encouraged and managed inside the school, be that those of their family or of their friendship group. In this chapter I will address how some kids choose alternative, or additional strategies in pursuing individual success. These strategies sometimes exceed or contradict the limits and rules usually identifying kids categorized as Good, Bad or Popular. The Good-, Bad- and Popular-identities

[94] Dylan's lyrics. http://orad.dent.kyushu-u.ac.jp/dylan/timchang.html [Accessed Nov 20th 2002].

have been presented as those constituting the main framework of the social hierarchy of Anglo High.

In this chapter I will show how Felipe tries to establish a position for himself as a school *leader* through joining the student council, while still maintaining his status as *Bad* through his position within the friendship group of sophomore Bad kids. Felipe wants to achieve more, or additional recognition than that which he receives from being viewed as Bad, and maybe also recognition from other groups of kids than those within his friendship group. I will use Felipe's actions taken and choices made to discuss the meaning of the American demand for the "pursuit of happiness" as voiced by the declaration of Independence. Felipe largely fails in his attempts to achieve additional or alternative recognition. In light of the emphasis on individuals' rights, now increasingly prevalent not only in America, but also in most other parts of the post-industrialized world, it can be argued that this *right* is also in many ways a moral *demand*. The same way that equal opportunities can be used to explain unequal outcomes, the freedom to pursue happiness can be used as a way to condemn those unsuccessful in acquiring such happiness.

Additionally, I will show how both Martin and Ricky seek to transfer to other less-prestigious and minority-majority schools within the AISD, and how this can be interpreted as an attempt to position themselves within a different system, where they can receive a relative higher status position. It is important to remember that all the kids addressed in this thesis are kids that are in fact *in school.* Staying in school, and changing between schools is also a way of positioning yourself both within schools and within large-scale society.

At the end of this chapter I will re-address the question touched upon in previous chapters, of how social and cultural injustice is being reproduced. None of the works I have found, addressing the situation of ethnic or racial minorities or other economically marginal groups within the American educational system, have happy endings, or present optimistic predictions for the future. Inequalities *are* being reproduced, and it seems likely that Bob Dylan's prediction from the quote at the beginning of this chapter, that the "slow one now will later be fast" is, if at all imaginable, then at least not imminent. The question I want to propose is therefore not if, but how and why these inequalities are being reproduced?

Wanting more: Felipe

Angela: Felipe is really bright too, and he is trying to be a leader, but he is probably the one who has been asked to leave [the office] the most times.

Both Angela and Faith recognized Felipe's potential to become a leader or a role model, but they also felt that he was having some behavioral difficulties. Felipe joined the student council early on in the school year. In the beginning he was very enthusiastic about it and tried to activate his newly achieved position, or status, when with his friends.

Felipe: You'all gotta stick up for what you want, you know
Javier: nobody asked me to be in no student council, man
Felipe: man, it was on the intercom and everything
-
Felipe: How if we just raise our hand if we want to say something?
(Marcus is acting out, laughing and talking)
Felipe: Marcus…Marcus…MARCUS
Marcus (laughing) What? What was the question, Felipe?
(Everybody starts laughing, and Felipe gives up trying to control the situation)

Later on, Felipe's interest in the council declined. One incident that illustrates the difficulties he experienced in trying to combine his status as a recognized school leader with that of being Bad was the Homecoming. Felipe had participated in planning the event with the members of the council, and then he participated in sabotaging it together with the rest of the Bad kids in the riot that followed. In fact, Felipe was one of the most active during the incident.

In addition, he also actively participated in the half-serious joking discussions often undertaken by the Bad sophomore kids inside the SWO office, where attitudes both sexist and racist in nature, attitudes not condoned by school officials, were frequently expressed. These attitudes constitute what Paul Willis (1993) calls "limitations" found in working-class culture, that prevent this class from successfully "penetrating" dominant ideologies.

Felipe: I sure don't want no woman President
Me: Why is that?
Felipe: You guys are all too feminine and weak.
Me: [somewhat annoyed] You can't be serious.
Felipe: Sure, all those protesters, you know, with the "What about the children?" They are all women!

Alongside seeking a position of relative power and influence over others, Felipe also wants to participate in the fun, and *counter-school culture* (Foley 1990, Willis 1993) that defines the Bad kids. Angela partly explained this counter-school culture as resulting from influences from the outreach organization, which consisted of young Mexican men who were very popular with the boys. Unlike Angela and Faith, these outreach-workers were acting more like friends, participating in the kids' joking and laughing, and sometimes also in their 'trash talking'. Felipe's attempts at being recognized as a leader, while holding on to his Mexican friendship group and their everyday practices, can be understood as a "Chicano" strategy for success - especially if Angela is right in ascribing some of his efforts to influences from the outreach organization. Felipe wants to be recognized as a Mexican leader. This is fully accomplishable, but it can be argued that *Bad* Mexicans do not easily become leaders in a predominantly White high school, and that joining a predominantly White student council does not automatically make you a Chicano leader. Mexicans who succeed in playing the status recognition game in Anglo High are mostly those who have the *capital* to utilize their ethnicity status in combination with other identities, and who are not burdened with the same amount of *role-discriminatory attributes* as my kids are.

The sophomore friendship group of Bad kids has no leaders. Therefore, if Felipe joined the student council, part of the mainstream culture of Anglo High, to dominate or lead these Bad kids, his lack of success could have been predicted. If he joined to improve his position within the schools recognized main social fields he would have had to be willing to give up his Badness status. In doing so, he would have risked going from being one of the successful members of one social field to being at the bottom of another, in addition to being alienated from his neighborhood friends. Felipe's loss of interest in the student council can be interpreted as a sign of resignation, like the one Philippe Bourgois (1995) describes his East Harlem crack-dealers as experiencing when they are rejected by the legal economy on the basis of their ethnic- or racial identity. Applying this view, it can be argued that Felipe does not necessarily choose his valuation of the Bad kids' non-conform behavior, but rather is forced to participate in this "illegal" social economy, because of his rejection from that of the main social field.

If, on the other hand, Felipe was trying to establish an *individual* status among the Bad kids in particular, and within the school in general, his attempt can be seen as somewhat more successful in that he entered a new social field – the student council. He was the only one of

the Bad kids who did this, and even if they did not let him "lead" them, they at least noticed his attempt to succeed within one of the school's recognized social fields (Bourdieu 1977, 1984) or within the legal social economy (Bourgois 1995).

The need for an individual identity can be assumed to be important to most kids anywhere, and maybe especially in the USA, with its emphasis on the individual's liberty to pursue happiness, and therefore also the individual's responsibility for his or hers own success. As Felipe says: '*You'all gotta stick up for what you want, you know'*. Even if my kids occupy the lower section of the status-hierarchy, or the social subfields of Anglo High, they still value popular American cultural activities. And even if they often blame others, and then usually Whites and/or adults, for the "trouble" they get in, they also largely agree that in the end, their own happiness is their own responsibility. Felipe's strategy for achieving success or happiness was to individually aspire to a different social field, more legitimate and positioned higher in the social hierarchy. His lack of success can be ascribed both to an unwillingness from more Popular or Good kids to accept him into their field, and to his own unwillingness to give up the Bad identity and remove himself from the friendship group. Additionally it can probably be ascribed to both his and other's inability to perceive him as anything but Bad and Mexican.

Creating and Choosing Yourself

Many of the people I met during my period of fieldwork in Austin would at one point, and sooner rather than later, tell me about something that they recently had stopped or started doing, or of something they were going to start or stop doing in the near future. This could be anything from quitting drinking, smoking or eating meat, changing jobs, or moving to another place. Projects initiated were usually things like getting a membership with a gym, going back to school or devoting themselves increasingly to music, arts or to a new religion. The way these life-projects were communicated to me I got the impression that they partly defined who the person saw him- or herself to be, and it usually also involved a personal history of an event or situation that had brought on this change, and had improved this individual's life, be that a life-threatening disease, a trip, a "trip[95]", or an abusive relationship. This attention paid to *change* can be seen as a result of the American ideological emphasis on the individual's right and duty to pursue happiness. Both doing something, and reflecting on the reasons

[95] The term "trip" is commonly used to refer to a drug-related experience.

means taking charge of your own future and success. Also, these new or discarded life-styles would frequently be evaluated or justified morally, in that things would be explained as being either “good for you” or “bad for you”[96].

In addition to being an indication of a particular American Creed, this self-reflexivity can also be understood as part of the influences of Modernity, as a global *zeitgeist.* Both Thomas Ziehe (1989) and Anthony Giddens (1991) argue that the increased emphasis on both opportunities and risks of change and instability on a global basis can lead to an increase in attention paid to how each individual maintains and creates him- or herself, and how this proves personal success in relation to others. Giddens also argues that with an increase in experienced risks and doubts, the need for trust and commitment increases. Whether the global influences of Modernity are partly instigated or maintained by the export and incorporation of American ideals and values to the outside world, or whether the American society originally was founded on the very ideals of Modernity will be a question left unanswered, since my scope is the American society and not it’s influential powers abroad. Returning to the Declaration of Independence as national key symbol, I want to suggest that the right to *equality* and *pursuit of happiness* is combined in such a way that it provides the individual with a societal expectation to use this pursuit to challenge the mentioned equality. Somewhat rhetorically it can be said that the American society provides little safety and stability with the exception of this right to initial equality – which is an ideal that every individual is supposed to aspire and strive away from, to make yourself *more* successful than your equals.

Where nothing is given, everything can be altered. Who you are becomes a continuous creational process, as already argued here in this thesis; in that identities should be viewed as what Richard Jenkins calls “a continuous flow of practices and processes” (Jenkins 1996:4). Through this, standing still constitutes failure, and change and movement constitutes success. Charter School had a class that was called “the Journey” – the name in itself signalizing movement and change. The goal of this class was to prepare the students for the change from childhood to adulthood, and involved lessons like “Asking who are you?” “Entering the labyrinth”, “Finding your path”, and “Mapping the past”. The class had a ceremony at the end of the semester, where kids sat in a circle, wearing masks and holding lit candles – very much

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[96] Most frequently these terms would be used with reference to food and/or alcohol. A friend of mine half-whispering confessed that she really enjoyed eating bacon. When I responded with a “well, why don’t you then?” she exclaimed that “oh, but it’s just sooo bad for you!”

a *rite of passage.* One time in this class all of the kids handed in questions they regarded as essential, and together with the teacher they tried to answer some of them. One of the questions submitted was: *Will I complete all of my dreams?* Even if the general attitude was that nobody reaches all their dreams there was also a strong encouragement towards never ceasing to believe that you could do or become anything you set your mind to.

Understanding individuals' strategies and motivations demands an attention paid to both the *structural* injustices or imbalances that precedes or influences action, as well as to the *actors'* choices and utilization of strategies (i. e. Longva 1997). Addressing both *structure* and *actor,* makes it possible to understand both the commonalities and the particularities in the process of adopting individual strategies for coping and succeeding within a society, through investigating how the structure and actor interacts.

As mentioned, Philippe Bourgois (1989,1995) sees the American ideological system as offering individual therapeutic solutions to what he sees as structural problems. This view can explain the way that risk and negative identities are managed in the USA today as a way of understanding individual kids through a largely ascribed "risk" or Bad identity, thereby making them both personally responsible, and victims of their own failure. According to Bourgois, his crack dealers are actually "following the minute details of the classical Yankee model of upward mobility. They are aggressively pursuing careers as private entrepreneurs; they take risks, they work hard, and pray for good luck" (ibid:323), but even so they are seen as personally responsible for their own misfortune. My kids can be described much the same way. They are trying to be successful within an American high school setting, but are largely assigned to counter-school cultural practices because of their ascribed Mexican identity and the connotations of risk and poverty this entails. Being Bad successfully means doing something, it means taking charge, moving and choosing. And it can therefore be interpreted as preferable to that of failing at being Good or Popular. This might have been Felipe's motivation in toning down his commitment to the student council, and commit solely again to being Bad.

Should the effort towards change and improvement be understood primarily with reference to the American Creed*,* with its demand for self-fulfillment and the pursuit of happiness, or as a sign of the times, indicating that a search for a new and improved self is necessitated by our modern lives? Should it, when found among my kids, be interpreted as a sign of a youthful

need, or desire, to overthrow the establishment? Or can it be explained as an inner drive, found in All Men, towards individual success, or as desperate strategies for coping? Whether the American society is more attentive to strategies for progress and improvement than others, or if these goals are just more willingly voiced is not a question I will dare answer here. Suffice to say that presenting social and individual success as being universally reachable for anyone, and encouraging or demanding everyone to reach for this, makes the consequence and feeling of failure that Felipe, and next Martin, experiences more personal than structural. And it is evident in the regret Javier voiced one day in the SWO office: *I want to be a Marine… I wish I could be 10 again. Then, you can get away with everything, and I could make the right choices.*

Wanting out: Martin and Ricky

Martin came in to the office one day and told Faith and me that he had not been to class. He had been to see the Principal about what he referred to as the "pencil incident" last Friday. He did not really want to talk about it, but briefly told us that he was just waving a pencil around between his fingers, lost the grip on it, upon which it flew across the classroom, and the teacher thought he was throwing it at someone. This particular time Martin was more visibly upset than I saw him at any other time.

> *[he's quiet for a long time]*
> *Martin: (looking down, maybe crying) I don't like this school*
> *Faith: Why don't you like it?*
> *Martin: It's just boring, that's all.*
> *[starts sniffling]*
> *Martin: My nose is running. I had a cold all last week.*
> *[Faith tries to call his mom. Martin has already been to see the nurse, but she would not give him the rest of the day off]*
> *Martin: I've only got honor-classes*
> *Faith: That's a heavy load, Martin*
> *What's the name of your teacher?*
> *Martin: Mr […]*
> *Faith: Oh. I had him in high school. (Faith turns to me) I went to high school here. He's tough. (back to Martin) I can see why you don't like him.*

Martin said that he wanted a transfer to another high school, Mexican High. Martin is Black, and later in the semester he changed his mind and wanted to transfer to Black High instead. Both Angela and Faith asked him several times if the reason he wanted to transfer out of Anglo High was because there were few Black students there, but he always refused this to be the reason. All Martin said was that he wanted a fresh start. He thought that even if he had

just started going to Anglo High, it was already too late for him to start over. His mother had said that it was OK for him to move, but Faith told him that because it was quite late in the semester he could not get a transfer until next year anyway. Martin said that he did not care if he passed his classes here, since he was getting a transfer anyway. One of his teachers had agreed to get him out of one of his classes because he was about to fail. He was going to go to class next period, only because Faith and I asked him to, but he did not care anymore.

Martin experienced several difficulties, both at home and in school, but still, the hopelessness experienced by him here can be seen as partly a result of his inability to find a position within Anglo High. He has concentrated all his effort on being a Good schoolboy, and when this fails he has no back-up plan or alternative strategy. As mentioned in chapter 4, having to achieve all positions within such a large school as Anglo High, where no or few positions or identities come "free of charge", might result in an individual being left with nothing. Being Bad is probably favorable to being nothing for most kids, but not for Martin, who has a Bad brother he dissociates himself from. Martin therefore seeks a transfer to a less-prestigious school, where he might succeed in being recognized as a schoolboy.

A while before Martin first came in and wanted a transfer, Ricky, a Mexican boy, also came in and wanted to transfer to Mexican High. He told us that the reason was that at Mexican High they only take 4 classes a year, instead of 8, and you get to go out for lunch. He was having trouble at Anglo High because he was often late for class. He claimed that he had to walk too far, and that this was why he was always late. Angela called his mother for him, talked to her and agreed to set up a meeting with both Ricky and his mother, but it probably did not turn out the way Ricky had hoped, since Angela and his mother agreed that moving him to another school was not likely to help.

> *Angela (on the phone): Ricky can get in trouble anywhere. He's going to have the same kind of trouble there.*

Where Martin and Ricky see a strategy towards changing schools as a way to improve their in-school situation, typically adults usually do not. Adults might see it partly as running away from the problem, indicating that the problem is going to follow kids wherever they go. Running away from your problem is partly seen as a "flight" strategy, and not the "fight" one that social workers and parents would have preferred, and which mirrors the American

ideological demand for individual industriousness and success. For some kids, however, transfers can be experienced as a way to take charge of their in-school life. Where social workers and parents assess the situation of the kids within the frames of a larger system, the school district, Martin and Ricky make their assessments from an individual position within a single school. Bjurström (1997) emphasizes this when he argues that inter-generational conflicts are not necessarily initially a matter of conflict between kids and adults, but rather that this conflict is a by-product of kids and adults choosing and valuing different strategies, having different goals, occupying different social fields and accumulating different social capital. Valuations held by kids and adults differ when it comes to choosing inter- and intra-school strategies for change and success.

Culture as Asset or Restraint?

A frequently voiced opinion among many of the adults I encountered in Austin was that Mexicans as a rule were more family-oriented than Whites. One of my friends from the Humanist group told me that even if she understood that her kids were privileged in most ways, compared to my kids, she thought that my kids had the benefit of having a closer relationship to larger parts of their family. Ziggy, the hostel-residing hippie quoted in the beginning of chapter 2, claimed that the problem of today's America was the fact that people had no *moral,* but that Mexicans had more moral than others. And one of the teachers at Charter school told me that he felt that Mexicans worked better in groups and in project-based education, because they were more family- and community-oriented than White or Anglo kids. The emphasis on family among Mexicans was almost seen as excessive sometimes, exemplified by Angela one time telling me with a slight sigh that "*they talk about "their brother", but they have a different way of thinking about these things, so I never know if it's their <u>real</u> brother".*

Positive perceptions of the Mexican family-orientation therefore stands in contrast to other, and just as commonly voiced, worries over frequent teenage-motherhood and single-parent family constellations among Mexicans. Angela once told me that the principal had said, *"we have over 2000 students here, and twice as many parents."* Angela felt that in making such a statement the Principal had failed to recognize that many kids, and more minority kids than others, came from single-parent households. When talking to me about teenage pregnancy, the same principal voiced his concern that the (overly) strong family orientation was part of what was causing Mexican teenagers to get pregnant.

Principal: They know about birth control, and they know where to get it. What I see is that it is very common that if one girl gets pregnant, not long after the second daughter gets pregnant. Because there is so much attention towards the girl that is pregnant. Everything revolves around her, even if she is not married or anything, so the second daughter feels left out, and gets pregnant too.

Mexican families are therefore commonly viewed by both school staff and social workers as both providing my kids with a cultural asset and a cultural restraint. Mexican and White families are perceived to contain an important cultural difference. Oscar Lewis argues that Latino families often adopt strategies and hold valuations that end up constituting a "culture of poverty" (Lewis 1968). Some of the same arguments were presented by the Principal.

Principal: A lot of parents just don't have the time. I think it's a matter of having availability to books, and a lot of these parents are just so busy working to survive. They have several jobs, and they just don't have the opportunity. (...) And it's also a matter of modeling. As I said [my Mexican family] was not rich, but there was two things that my father would always make sure that we had. One was a subscription to a newspaper, and the other would be a magazine. We would see him reading a magazine, and we couldn't wait to get our hands on the magazine.

Me: Another thing that is new to me is the "Machismo"-thing that is so strong! They are so hung up on being Men, and they talk so derogatory about gay people. Do you know why this is so important to them?

Principal: I guess it is partly modeled from home. You know the Hispanic man has a very high esteem in the home, and particularly with the mothers. I remember when I was a principal at a middle school, and I talked to one of the mothers, and she told me that "my son got home at 3 o'clock this morning and I got up and made him something to eat." I'm like: you did WHAT? And she said: "Well, he was so hungry, poor kid." (...) So they really get to do what they want, and by the time they are 14 they are out of control. I don't know if it's bad parenting skills or what it is.

Where the Chicano outreach-workers emphasize the benefits the Mexican culture entails, and sees it as providing my kids with both authenticity and autochthony, the Principal and the SWO workers see the Mexican identity as primarily being a liability for my kids. The liability is not necessarily primarily, or solely perceived by these in-school workers as being a result of a Mexican "cultural poverty", but can also be ascribed to both individual and institutional discrimination and racism towards Mexicans and Blacks. Picturing violent inner-city kids as innocent victims to unfortunate and unfair circumstances is, according to John Devine (1996), to ignore individual agency as an explanatory factor, and also to produce a false image of all

inner-city/at risk kids as being equally dangerous, or at risk. Both to see all kids as bad, and to see them all as good is overly simplifying. My kids include both some Good kids and some Bad kids, positions that were at least partly achieved through individual choices and strategies. There is however no opting out from being Mexican, and therefore any action taken, choice made or strategy undertaken by my kids are going to be understood and interpreted with reference to them being Mexican.

Two Different School Experiences: Relative Success and Happiness

Even if I have argued that my kids were more concerned with accumulating social capital within a field or within a school than they were with their school's position inside the AISD, the kids at Anglo High were still aware that this school was considered one of the better schools within the AISD, and especially when compared to Mexican High and Black High. When evaluating their own school, they are often critical, but when I asked them about another school in the AISD, Black High, generally recognized as being a 'worse' school, their attitude changed.

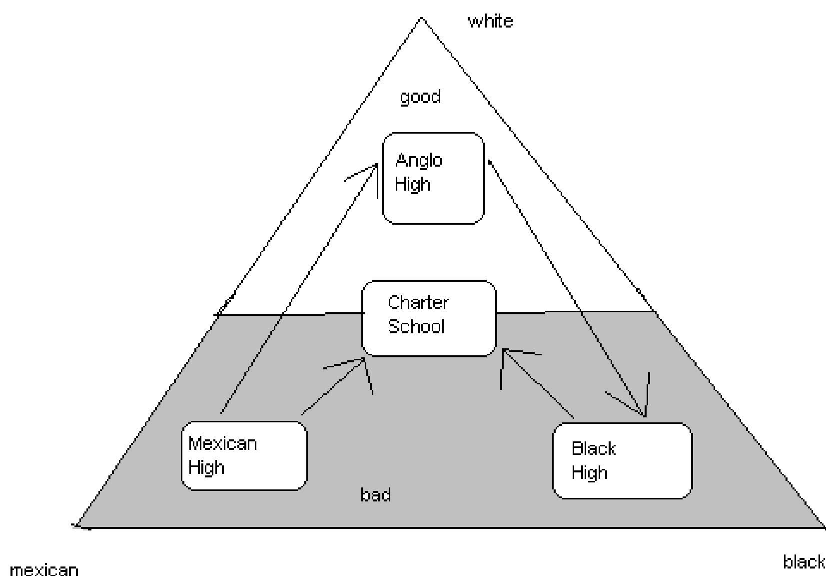
> *Javier: You should go to [that school], Miss. That's a really bad school. The only thing you hear there is 'You're my baby daddy' (Meaning: You're the daddy of my Baby). All the girls there have babies. This is a much better school.*

Even if they do not like Anglo High, they adopt the dominant position, or view, that it is one of the best schools in the district. They are caught in the lower section, or a stigma position, in this school. Some of the kids, like Ricky and Martin, requested a transfer *to* some of the 'worse' schools to be able to advance on a ladder of relative success. At the same time, they recognized their position within the larger system, or structure, and saw the benefits of staying in Anglo High.

The kids I talked to who attended Charter School were also attentive to their school's position compared to other regular high schools. Charter School had a higher dropout rate and fewer classes that gave college credit than Anglo High. Kids in Charter School had a lower attendance percentage and a lower score on state distributed standardized tests, like the TAAS, than kids at Anglo High. One of the reasons for this was given to be that their student body was far from representative of the city, or even any given school area. The students at Charter School are kids from all over the city, given a second chance by schools, courts, their family or themselves. Somewhat simplified, these are all "at risk" kids.

On the other hand, the students at Charter school have a chance of creating and managing a personal identity in the eyes of others that supersedes what my kids at Anglo High have. “At risk” Mexicans at Anglo high are likely to be viewed as Mexicans and/or as ”trouble” in most situations. Categories separating Good kids and Bad kids, Populars and non-Populars, White kids and Mexicans and Rich kids and Poor kids are not very permeable, and most Mexicans inhabit the latter of all these binary oppositions. At Charter School, on the other hand, most kids are as mentioned “at risk” in one-way or the other, and hence different methods for differentiation are needed. These kids might not be part of an existing neighborhood friendship group in Charter School, and therefore have to form new alliances. In Charter School many of them have an opportunity to develop ways of expressing personal identities, while they previously, in regular high schools, might have been predominantly seen by both most teachers and most kids as being somewhat faceless members of a group or a category.

As mentioned earlier, both success and happiness is experienced relatively. In the figure presented below I have tried to suggest how requested and completed transferals between some schools in the AISD can all be seen as producing a surplus of happiness or success. Whether the move is made from what is generally recognized as a bad school to a better one, or from a good school to a bad one, the effect can be interpreted as positive.



The triangle indicates that schools with a minority- and poverty-majority are generally recognized as worse schools than those with a majority-majority.

The effect of a school change can be seen from two different perspectives, or from two different positions within the system. If the move is made from Anglo high to Mexican or Black high, as was requested by Ricky and Martin, the positive effect can come from moving from a position low in social status and recognition, or success, in one school to (expectedly, at least) one of higher status in the other. The difference is a move up for the student, even if the school is a step down. In moving from Mexican or Black high to Anglo high the move gives increase in individual prestige with family and friends outside Anglo high, in that the student is now attending a more prestigious school. The reference group is different, but the effect is still experienced as positive. Moving from any of the three regular schools, Anglo High, Mexican High or Black High to Charter School was also always communicated to have had a positive effect on the life of almost all the kids I talked to at Charter School. The positive effect here comes from choosing something that is different or special, and from moving to a smaller place where there are no hall-monitors, no passing period and where teachers and students interact more easily and frequently. This is exemplified by how all the kids I talked to at Charter school claimed that “this place is way better”, while most of my kids at Anglo High, and particularly the Bad kids, generally refer to their school as being “fucked up”.

Another possible reason why moves are almost exclusively experienced as having a positive effect on an individual’s in-school status is the act of *moving* in itself. The initiative proved in making a *change* is a sign of success, and gives a positive experience for the individual. In my experience, any change could be advertised as having had a positive effect on someone’s life - even those changes that, from a larger societal perspective, must have included some hardship as well. For instance, Reena – a Mexican girl attending Charter School, would tell one of her girlfriends who was complaining about her life being very complicated right now:

> *Reena: I am telling you, you just need to get pregnant, girl*
> *Girl: I know, you keep telling me*
> *Me: (somewhat shocked) What do you mean? Do you really think that would help her?*
> *Reena: All I know is that I was in a bad place, you know, with my life and all. And then I had my little girl, and now I am in a good place.*

Not only can something that is generally viewed as unfortunate, like becoming a teenage-mother, turn out also to make a positive influence in someone’s life, but also, the positive

outcome can often be ascribed to the particular change. Change in itself usually provides the individual with an initial benefit, or surplus.

Dialectics: Change and Reproduction

My kids share a "commonality of purpose and strategy, because of encountering similar structural circumstances" (Longva 1997:154), but from this commonality they choose different ways of coping. This is sought either through inscribing an existing position with new meaning or through seeking to change this position. Why is it then that the structural injustice remains?

Do kids' individual or cultural strategies partake in reproducing the current order, as suggested by for instance Paul Willis (1993) in his description of the *Lads'* only partial penetration of dominant ideologies because of limitations embraced as shop-floor culture? Can reproduced subordination be ascribed to what Oscar Lewis refers to as a "culture of poverty" (Lewis 1968) where, among other things, the preferred family structure found among Latino immigrants prevent them from excelling? Or does structural injustice ruthlessly reproduce itself, regardless of individual efforts for change or resistance, as suggested by Douglas Foley (1990), in that the American capitalist society favors mainstream popular culture to such an extent that it leaves his *Vatos* and my *Bad kids* with few or no opportunities? And whose effect is addressed by Philippe Bourgois (1995), in claiming that the sub- or counter-economy adopted by his crack-dealing informants is a result of them not being admitted into the legal economy. If social justice is best achieved through ensuring what Nancy Fraser calls *parity of participation* (2002), what are the results of the categorization and labeling of ethnic and risk identities, that my kids arguably can be seen as being subjected to?

Central to the arguments presented in this thesis has been an emphasis on the *dialectical* nature of the social processes addressed. Taking my vantage point from Richard Jenkins (1994, 1996) and his view of identities as constituted through a "flow of practices and processes" (Jenkins 1996:4) and always as a "product of agreement and disagreement" (ibid:5), I have wanted to suggest that there are several dialectical processes that can be identified within Anglo High.

First, both fellow students and school staff partake in constituting kids' in-school identities through a dialectical process of internal self-ascription and external categorization. Through this process, kids' identities are not only being managed and assigned a position within the high school, but they are also being ascribed with a moral valuation, and subjected to a risk-assessment, with reference to a national ideological agenda.

Secondly, the measures of control undertaken by school staff to ensure a minimization of these assessed risks and moral dangers can also be understood as constituting a dialectical process: The way kids are monitored and controlled works to normalize violence or disruptive behavior, and therefore provides the recipe for expressing opposition.

Thirdly, strategies adopted by kids to position themselves in relation to other kids in the school are dialectical in the sense that those kids who are not allowed to participate in the mainstream social field choose to establish alternative fields, with alternative capital, and that this *subfield* occupancy makes them additionally ineligible from participation in the mainstream-culture.

Fourth, and last, national problems of social inequality between the majority and the minority, Whites and Mexicans, rich and poor, and the social *reproduction* of these inequalities can also preferably be viewed as the result of a dialectical process. It can be argued that ethnic identity is predominantly ascribed or labeled, that it is used as a euphemism for economic class, *and* that it is ascribed with a negative social or moral value. It is somewhat pointless to discuss whether Mexicans as a group have a lower economic status than Whites because Mexicans are subjected to structural and racial injustices, or whether Mexicans as a group are discriminated against because they have a lower economic status. These two explanatory factors work dialectically to reinforce each other. To see them as separate constitutes what Nancy Fraser calls a *false antithesis* and to redress (and address) the situation one needs a *dual approach* (Fraser 2001).

These sets of dialectical processes constitute a different and additional *Learning* process than that covered by the school's curriculum. Social identities exist through negotiation, and they should be regarded as "complex wholes". I have wanted to suggest that meaning ascribed to one aspect of an individual's identity will bleed into other aspects of it, and that in a situation with disproportionate distribution of the "power to name"(Moore 1994:92) identities can

accumulate negative meaning. This accumulation of negative meaning can be seen to reinforce social inequality, and to give its reproduction what Willis refers to as "go" (Willis in Foley 1990).

Paul Willis (1993) argues that the reproduction of class membership is not purely a result of a self-damnation initiated by the taking on of sub-ordinate positions in the social hierarchy of an educational institution, subscribing to the dominant ideology. Rather, he argues, the counter-school culture provides the Lads with meaning, and is seen as both a culture on its own, different from the dominant school cultures, as well as a form of *resistance,* however futile. He argues that these cultural processes do indeed constitute a penetration of dominant ideologies, even if this penetration is only partial.

Foley (1990) uses parts of Willis' theory in exploring what he describes as "internal links" between personal and group experience, "(…) how at least a fragment of a capitalist social and cultural formation really worked without turning its "agents" into fools, dummies, and robots" (Foley 1990:viii). Where Willis seeks to solve this through a down–up resistance perspective, Foley emphasizes the use of *expressive practices* – "cultural practices that display different class identities" (ibid:170) , and he focuses on how these practices are used and performed top-down in such a way that reproduces existing class cultures.

My kids did express a group, or ethnic, consciousness, even if it was not easily translatable to that of belonging to a certain class. Their behavior was, indeed, in many ways a *counter-school culture* (Willis1993:22), in that they constantly challenged school policies and school officials, and expressed a subscription to values that were not necessarily those condoned and encouraged by the school, for instance that of making a lot of money - fast, being popular with girls, and being tough and macho. All in all, being very similar to both Willis' *Lads* and Foley's *Vatos*.

On the other hand, they were operating in a confined space, or an ascribed status – that of being Bad and Mexican, both of which entails a social stigma. They participated less in some arenas, and more in others. None of my kids participated in much regular school activities, like sports, choir or the marching band. Some of these activities required both a lot of money and time spent by kids and parents, and some of them were regarded as dull. My kids were, however, some of the most eager participants in the riots after the pep-rally before the

homecoming, and they also showed up to watch the football match that same night, even if they spent most of the time under the stands, talking and acting out.

My kids are opposing and resisting the current order. In the same process they are also adopting the stigma identities or labels that are defined and distributed by school officials, even if they reinterpret them and partly give them both new meaning and a new valuation. These new valuations and meanings are to a very little extent recognized by school officials, thereby constituting only one part of the necessary dialectics of identity negotiation. They can be seen to be adopting a *counterhegemonic* process, where the "subordinate classes" oppose the dominant ones in a way that confirms the hegemony, or where "counterhegemonic discourse pervasively incorporates the structures, categories, and premises of hegemonic discourse" (Keesing 1989:23). Through this, my kids are confirming their position as troublemakers, and by this also confirming the schools need to increase control.

My kids lack of success can therefore be assigned to their non-conform behavior and to their adoption of a counter-school culture, concurrent with what Willis argues, but at the same time I think it is essential to also argue that the standards valuating success is provided by both their in-school authorities and by valuations proposed by the American Creed. This means that their experienced lack of success and happiness is, in my view, largely a result of both the school's and the American society's failure to understand both my kids' perceptions of what they regard as important and a failure to allow them to participate as equals to their White peers within the school.

Finally, there is a need to underline that the ascribed and experienced subordinate positions that have been suggested as an explanation for a perceived opposition and a cultural reproduction does not equate with ethnic- or racial-identity. Anna, Martin and Esteban, as well as Elena, all use *conformist* strategies to find a position, or an identity within the high school scene, and some of the Bad kids also used similar strategies, as shown when Felipe joined the student council. Like in Foley's (1990) study, there were not only *Vatos* or *Bad kids,* among the Mexican minority at Anglo High, but also several middle-class, 'no risk' Mexicans, who are not ascribing to the counter school culture, produced by, and ascribed to, the Bad kids. Middle-class Mexicans are, according to Foley, using additional ways of communicating status which is successful in a high school setting, while at the same time holding on to their ethnic and cultural "expressive practices" (ibid).

In Anglo High, school administrators and social workers encouraged these kinds of behaviors and strategies. Kids were encouraged to act as team-players, and utilize the options present within the main social fields of the high school, independent of their ethnic identity. This exemplifies what I experienced as a recurring paradox throughout my fieldwork and the writing of this thesis: Kids are told that they are *equal* while being ascribed with fundamental *difference*, they are encouraged to be *Good* while being ascribed with initial and cultural *Badness* - and they are encouraged to be team-players in the setting of the high school, while not being allowed to play by the same rules as others. My high school's principal willingly admitted, "high school is not for every kid".

Appendix I – Self-Help Books

This Appendix lists the self-help books presented by Martha B. Straus (1994) in the Appendix of her book *Violence in the life of Adolescents.*

<u>Books for Parents</u>

Anderson, J. (1990). *Teen is a four-letter word: A survival kit for parents.* Crozet, VA: Betterway.

Apter, T. (1990) *Altered loves: Mothers and daughters during adolescence.* New York: St. Martin's

Barrish, I., Barrish, H. (1989). *Surviving and enjoying your adolescence.* Kansas City, MO: Westport.

Baucomb, J. (1988) *Bonding and breaking free: What good parents should know.* Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

Bell, R., & Wildflower, L. (1983). *Talking with your teenager: A book for parents.* New York: Random House.

Brodino, J. (1989). *Raising each other: A book for parents and teens.* San Bernadino, CA: Borgo.

Busko, M. (1987). *Living with your teenager.* New York: Ivy.

Buntman, P., & Saris, E. (1990). *How to live with your teenager: A survivor's handbook for parents.* Los Alamitos, CA: Center for Family Life Enrichment.

Destisto, M. (1991). *Decoding your teenager: How to understand each other during the difficult years.* New York: Morrow.

Fontenelle, D. (1992). *Keys to parenting your teenager.* Hauppauge, NY: Barron.

Forgatch, M., & Patterson, G. (1989). *Parents and adolescents living together.* Eugene, OR: Castalia.

Gardner, J. (1993). *The turbulent teens: Understanding, helping, surviving.* Rolling Hills Estates, Ca: Jalmar.

Greydanus, D. (1991). *Caring for your adolescent: Ages 12 to 21.* New York: Bantam.

Herbert, M. (1987). *Living with teenagers.* Cambridge, MA: Blackwell.

Huggins, K. (1989). *Parenting adolescents.* Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress.

Leiter, J. (1991). *Successful parenting: A common sense guide to raising your teenagers.* Deerfield Beach, FL: Health Communication.

McCoy, K. (1991). *Crisis-proof your teenager: How to recognize, prevent and deal with risky adolescent behavior.* New York: Bantam.

McIntyre, R., & McIntyre, C. (1990). *Teenagers and parents: Teten steps for a better relationship.* Amherst, MA: Human Resources Development.

Miller, D. (1989). *A parent's guide to adolescents: Understanding your teenager.* Denver, CO: Accent.

Nelson, J., & Lott, L. (1991). *I'm on your side: Resoling conflict with your teenage son or daughter.* Rocklin, CA: Prima.

Novello, J. (1992). *What to do until the grown-ups arrive: The art and science of raising teenagers.* Kirkland, WA: Hogrefe & Huber.

Paine, R. (1975). *We never had any trouble before: First aid for parents of teenagers.* Lanham, MD: Madison.

Pappas, M., & Sadler, O. (1987). *How to survive with adolescence.* Lincoln, NE: Media.

Parsons, R. D. (1988). *Adolescence: What's a parent to do?* Mahaugh, NJ: Paulist.

Rickerson, W. (1988). *This is the thanks I get? A guide to raising teenagers.* Cincinnati, OH: Standard.

Schules, J. (1990). *Teenage years: A parent's survival guide.* Tucson, AZ: Fisher.

Shalov, J. (1990). *You can say no to your teenager and other strategies fro effective parenting in the 1990's.* Redding, MA: Addison-Wesley.

Smyth, P., & Benner, J. (1988). *Parent survival training: A guide for parents of teenagers.* Santa Barbara, CA: Joelle.

Weinhaus, E., & Friedman, D. (1988). *Stop struggling with your teen.* New York: Viking Penguin.

Wolf, A. (1991). *Get out of my life, bur first could you drive me and Cheryl to the mall: A parent's guide to the new teenager.* New York: Farrar Straus Giroux.

Books for Adolescents

Atanasoff, S. (1989). *How to survive as a teen: When no one understands.* Scottdale, PA: Herald.

Bauman, L., & Riche, R. (1987). *The nine most troublesome teenage problems and how to solve them.* New York: Ballantine.

Cohen, D., & Cohen, S. (1983). *Teenage stress: Understanding the tensions you feel at home, at school and among your friends.* Denver, CO: Evans.

Crutsinger, D., & Cohen, S. (1983). *Teenage connections: A tool for effective teenage communication.* Carrolton, TX: Brainworks.

Elchoness, M. (1989). *Why can't anyone hear me? A guide for surviving adolescence.* Ventura, CA: Monroe.

Engel, J. (1990). *Adolescence: A guide for teenagers and their parents.* New York: Tor.

Gordon, S. (1981). *The teenage survival book.* New York: Random House.

Nource, A. (1990). *Teen guide to survival.* New York: Watts.

Appendix II - Selected Amendments from the Constitution:

Amendment II

A well regulated militia, being necessary to the security of a free state, the right of the people to keep and bear arms, shall not be infringed.

Amendment IV

The right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects, against unreasonable searches and seizures, shall not be violated, and no warrants shall issue, but upon probable cause, supported by oath or affirmation, and particularly describing the place to be searched, and the persons or things to be seized.

Amendment V

No person shall be held to answer for a capital, or otherwise infamous crime, unless on a presentment or indictment of a grand jury, except in cases arising in the land or naval forces, or in the militia, when in actual service in time of war or public danger; nor shall any person be subject for the same offence to be twice put in jeopardy of life or limb; nor shall be compelled in any criminal case to be a witness against himself, nor be deprived of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor shall private property be taken for public use, without just compensation.

Amendment XIV (excerpt)

(1868)
Section 1. All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the state wherein they reside. No state shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any state deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the law.

Amendment XV

(1870)
Section 1. The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude.

Section 2. The Congress shall have power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation.

Amendment XIX

(1920)
The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of sex.
Congress shall have power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation.

Amendment XXV

(1964)
Section 1. The right of citizens of the United States to vote in any primary or other election for President or Vice President, for electors for President or Vice President, or for Senator or

Representative in Congress, shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or any state by reason of failure to pay poll tax or other tax.

Section 2. The Congress shall have power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation.

Amendment XXVI

(1971)
Section 1. The rights of citizens of the United States, who are 18 years of age or older, to vote, shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or any other state on account of age.

Section 2. The Congress shall have power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation.

(source: http://lcweb2.loc.gov/const/bor.html and http://lcweb2.loc.gov/const/amend.html , both [Accessed Dec 25th 2001])

Appendix III - BMC Student Dress Code

Shirts & Blouses

Plain White, NO logos, NO printing, and NO hoods
NO low cut or cropped shirts or blouses exposing chest or midriff
Shirts must not be thin or see through
Shirts must be worn right side out
Shirts & blouses must be tucked-in at all times
Plain white shirt may be worn
No short sleeve shirt worn on top of long sleeve shirt (layering)

Sweatshirts

Plain white, NO logos, NO printing, and NO hoods
Shirt must be worn right side out

Pants, Shorts, or Skirts

Plain dark blue or blue jean blue pant/short (NO side stripes)
NO overalls or suspenders
Shorts are to be worn no shorter than the tips of the fingers when arms are extended at side
NO sagging pants or shorts, and NO bagging pants or shorts
All belts must be worn through pants loops
Extra length of belt MUST be tucked into pant pocket if too long

Shoes

NO sandals, thongs, slippers, or open back shoes
Only black, brown, or white shoes with matching laces
Only white laces with multi-colored shoes
NO steel-toed boots or shoes

Jewelry

NO jewelry except for wristwatches

Other

NO hats
NO purses
NO backpacks
NO hairbrushes or combs
NO make-up cases or cosmetic cases

Anything that is distracting or may be constructed as Gang-Related is unacceptable

Revised 11/98 [received 09/99 – transcribed for this thesis, but original text intact.]

Examples

The students at BMC were graded each day on a point sheet. The examples that follow are definitions for the categories students are given points for:

Anger Control means:

- No fighting, yelling, threatening, arguing, name-calling, making fists, making inappropriate gestures, slamming doors, chairs, tables, books or desk

Verbal Control means:

- No cursing, yelling, talking back, arguing, name-calling, talking without raising hand, talking during instruction, noise-making

Acceptable Social Behavior means:

- No touching yourself or others inappropriately, play fighting, gang signs, tagging, using obscene or inappropriate gestures or language

Non-disruptive means:

- No fighting, yelling, threatening, arguing, name-calling, cursing, talking back, refusing to follow directions, inappropriate gestures or language, talking without raising hand, talking during instruction, play fighting, gang signs.

Getting Along/No arguing means:

- No fighting, yelling, threatening, arguing, name-calling, making fists, making inappropriate gestures, talking back, refusing to follow directions

Preparation means:

- Coming to school everyday with a pen, pencil, paper and whatever your teachers require for the classroom; doing any assigned homework; turning in the previous day's ping sheet signed by your parent/guardian; coming to school on time.

Following directions means:

- Doing exactly what all BMC staff ask you to do, immediately and without arguing or talking back or refusing.

On Task means:

- Doing assignments when told to do so and not talking, sleeping, drawing, passing notes, writing notes or getting out of your seat without permission

Task Completion means:

- Finishing everything that has been assigned to you

Quality means:

- Doing and completing assignments with effort and attention; doing your very best every time.

Attention means:

- Making eye contact with the teacher, sitting up in the chair, not putting your head down, not sleeping, not writing or drawing or talking while the teacher is talking

Showing Interest means:

- Making eye contact with the teacher, sitting up in the chair, not putting your head down, not sleeping, not writing or drawing or talking while the teacher is talking; participating in discussions and assignments

Self-Evaluation means:

- Correcting yourself or others appropriately and doing the right thing when faced with a difficult situation

Cooperation means:

- Controlling anger, controlling language, acting appropriately at all times, not disrupting, not arguing, being prepared, following directions, staying at task, completing all assignment, showing attention, showing interest, and correcting yourself and others appropriately when you have the opportunity; no gum, candy, drinks or lunches from outside

Showing Concern means:

- Helping and encouraging the teachers and other students when there is a difficult situation in the classroom, cafeteria, gym, hallways, or library

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