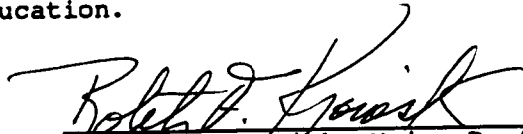
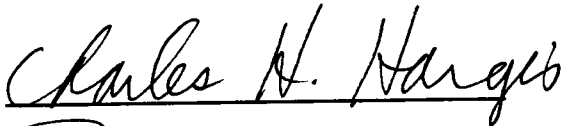


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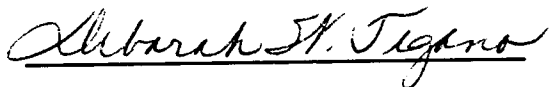
I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Rosa Lea Kennedy entitled "A Study of Four Student Pushouts from the Perspective of Four Sociological Theories." I have examined the final copy of the dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in Education.


Robert F. Kronick, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation
and recommend its acceptance.







Accepted for the Council:


Associate Vice Chancellor
and Dean of The Graduate School

**A STUDY OF FOUR STUDENT PUSHOUTS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE
OF FOUR SOCIOLOGICAL THEORIES**

**A Dissertation Presented for the
Doctor of Philosophy
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville**

**Rosa Lea Kennedy
August, 1993**

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to Dr. Jerome H. Morton for his vision of innovation in education for all students, but especially for those students at risk of dropping out.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To the Alternative Center for Learning Board of Directors, staff, and students, I owe deep appreciation and love, for without them, my study would be left undone.

To my committee members, I express heartfelt thanks for their interactive challenges and support. Dr. Robert F. Kronick, Chair, for believing from day one that I could do this, Dr. Laurence J. Coleman for challenging my thinking at all stages of learning, Dr. Russell L. French for his teaching and patience and willingness to join my committee in the final stages, Dr. Charles H. Hargis for his previous work outlining success for all students, and to Dr. Deborah W. Tegano for her vision for my work beyond the degree.

To my cheering section: co-workers in the Dean's Office, College of Education, especially Dr. Judith A. Boser, and to Linda Harrell and Melba Wilkins, my special thanks.

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Especially to Edith Saunders and Charles Atwood, who sustained my spirit throughout the endeavor, I acknowledge my enduring love.

ABSTRACT

This study explored the process by which students were pushed out from the regular public education classroom, whether because of behavioral misdeeds or because of a mismatch between student and school organization. An in-depth retrospective educational life history, elicited by informal conversational interviews, described the student perspective concerning how they experienced "school."

Each of the four students selected were represented by a narrative written from his/her "meaning perspective" reporting key events in their personal lives that affected their learning experience in school. The key events were from the wider social context, including family, peer group, community, migration, and work place. The "distorting lens" of the student was accepted as the student's reality on which he/she based decisions for social interaction at school. The past experience of the pushout affected the way in which the student interacted.

Besides the presentation of data in the form of four student narratives, the data were pooled and analyzed for emerging themes.

The three major themes described are: (1) prevalence of alcohol and drugs, (2) peer groups and gangs as influence, and (3) perceived teacher favoritism tied to a hidden curriculum of social status. A final conclusion was that key events, in the form of emotional stressors from a wider social context, interfered with a student's in-school learning. Of major importance was that the key events reported were non-curricular in nature.

The study described patterns of leaving school as well as a description of the student's place in a wider social context that produced stress factors affecting school performance. Most of the stress factors infiltrated school organization from the outside.

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CHAPTER I

THEORETICAL BASIS FOR THE STUDY

Student's Poem

Born in Baptist Hospital
in Knoxville, Tennessee.
Mom and Dad together then
till the age of three.

Lived in Californ-i-a
Dad came then, stole me away.
Age of six to New Orleans
Mom then drank and spilled her beans.

Got a place in Strawberry Plains,
moving fast and changing lanes.
The fighting of parents was getting bad.
The son, the daughter were feeling sad.

Exchanges of children to and fro--
it's time for me, I have to go.

Drinking booze, it ruled her then;
my Mom began to date the men.
It seemed to me, she was in sin;
I felt I had no chance to win.

Step-dad and alcohol sure don't mix.
At an early age, they provided the fix.

Yes, it was fun, I do admit.
The fighting made my life worth shit.
It's time for me, I have to go.
I took a knife and willed it so.

But life went on, day-by-day.
I knew by then I must change my ways.

At grandmother's house, it was cool.
I had my freedom, yet I had my rules.
I broke some rules, but I was fine.
Nothing could stop me, the world was mine.
I realized what it means to be alive.
It's not worth it, you see, I mean to die!

My Mom has calmed down a lot.
No more booze and no more pot.
My life is together now it seems.
Now I'm reaching for my dreams.

And for me, art is the way
I'll express myself each and every day.
Paint and canvas; college too--
the future is bright for me and you.

(D.J. Whitebear, pseudonym)

The poem on page 1 was written by participant D. J. (pseudonym) as an in-class creative writing project while I was Artist-in-Residence at the Alternative Center for Learning (A.C.L.), Knoxville, Tennessee. This poem represents a life with its multiple complexities. This study represents four student lives as retrospective life histories compared to four social theories from the literature base.

First, I will introduce the four social theories. Next, in Chapter II, I will share background information on the study including definitions, assumptions and rationale. The further organization of this dissertation can be found at the end of Chapter II.

The four social theories supporting this study are Mead's (1934) Theory of Symbolic Interactionism, Glasser's (1986) Theory of Control, Merton's (1957) Theory of Anomie, and Schur's (1971) Labeling Theory. A discussion of each theory follows.

SYMBOLIC INTERACTIONISM

Symbolic interactionism (S.I.) is a social theory conceived by George Herbert Mead while teaching at the University of Chicago during the 1920s and 1930s. Mead's student, Herbert Blumer (1969), revitalized the theory by writing and interpreting key concepts for others.

Following a general overview of Mead's theory, I will state his assumptions, postulates, and key concepts. An interpretation of Mead's theory will be organized by the headings of individual, group and of society as a formal organization.

What is Symbolic Interactionism (S.I.)?

S.I. states that a person derives meaning out of his social interaction with others. A person must acknowledge the action of another, analyze and interpret that action, and then make a choice of one's own future action based on that interpretation. The action of another, and the interpretation of the act, become a symbol stored in memory from which a person chooses one's action and reaction.

The theory differed from the thinking at that time because it went beyond a stimulus, response theory where outside forces alone evoked a person's response. What sets Mead's theory apart is the intervening thought process which takes place after the person "takes note of an action." Mead considered the function of the mind as a uniquely human attribute (Blumer, 1969).

Assumptions

Mead's assumptions for S.I. are the following. First, that humans are capable of a higher level of thinking than other animals. Since this is a grounded theory (Blumer, 1969), Mead observed other animals in order to formulate his concept of "mind." He compared the "society" or social group within which men/women think and act to a colony of bees. What he was trying to prove was the difference; i.e., man's capability to take note of, analyze and interpret versus a bee's "pre-established tendencies" to act within a group. Mead represented the division of labor within a society of bees with a physiological explanation. He believed that the "roles" within the colony were genetically passed along, that a drone begot a drone. This was simply something that could be observed and described in the natural world without assuming that there was any kind of intention or thought process evidenced. Humans are set apart by their ability to analyze another's action as his/her intent. Since Mead made this assumption, one must accept this as a "given" while trying to understand his theory (Manis and Melzer, 1967).

Mead believed that society is the ultimate reality and the only logical approach to understanding man/womans's behavior was through an analysis of an act within a society. While Freud started with the individual and described how that person dealt with society, Mead began with culture, and then society, organization, group and individual in that order. Sociology, then, is the study of the behavior of groups and social psychology as the behavior of individuals within groups.

Other assumptions are that a human newborn is neither social nor anti-social, but rather asocial. This assumes that there is a cultural context into which the human baby is born, and that only through social interaction will the newborn develop a self-concept and "mind." Another assumption is that a human being is actor as well as reactor; that a human being learns to expect certain behaviors or intentions through the interpretation of another's actions.

Postulates

Mead's postulates are stated as premises.

The first premise is that human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them. Secondly, the meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one's fellows. The third premise is that these meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretive process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters (Blumer, 1969, p. 2).

S.I. sees meaning as social products, as creations that are formed in and through the defining activities of people as they interact. Culture as a concept is clearly derived from what people do. And meaning is behavior!

MEAD'S THEORY DEFINED BY BLUMER

The Individual

A key concept of S.I., and one that persists throughout Mead's interpretation, is interaction of oneself with another self-as-object. Charles Horton Cooley describes this by the use of the term: "Looking glass self." We find out who we are from the reflections we get from other people, especially those in our primary group, i.e.: Parents, spouses, teachers, etc. William I. Thomas and Mead both spoke of the "Generalized Other." Thomas believed in a subjective reality. If I define a situation as real, then I will behave as if its real. Both sets of descriptors are trying to put into language the thought process that precedes a choice of future action toward another. Also, it

presumes that a person can "step into the shoes of another" in order to perceive one's social place within a culture. This social placement is sometimes termed "self-concept" or "self-consciousness." Self-consciousness is defined as an activity of viewing oneself from the viewpoint of others (Kronick, 1974a).

Mead dealt with the stimulus-response theory of his day by saying that a person must "take note of" the actions of another, and then interpret and analyze that act out of one's past experience. If a person does not take note of another's action, there is no symbolic meaning that one could give to that action. So, it appears, that one's past experience is a series of what I call "visual overlays"; a memory of a key event along with an interpretation of that event.

As a person takes note of an object or an action, he "extricates it from its setting" or makes an object of it (Blumer, 1969, p. 80). Instead of the individual being surrounded by an environment of pre-existing objects which play upon him and stimulate his behavior, the proper picture is that he constructs his objects (or symbols) on the basis of his on-going activities.

Blumer makes the point that action may be a step-by-step building up of interpretive processes. Since there is assessment of social demands as well as pressures, stimuli, attitudes, feelings, and ideas, being part of a society changes the interpretative process. Three premises that Blumer (1969) feels can be verified empirically are:

1. Society is made up of individuals who objectify oneself,
2. An individual's act is constructed through an interpretive process,
3. Group action arises out of the alignment of individual acts; individuals take into account the actions of others.

The Group and Society

In a group, acting units begin to assess and interpret in a similar way. Accommodations to each other's line of action have to be

worked out. A social act, by definition, is one in which the appropriate object is another individual. Role-taking involves the anticipation of responses from some particular other or "generalized other." The way in which an individual objectifies oneself and carries on an inner dialogue is relatively easy to understand. However, the group interaction is more complex. Interpretation is a formative process in which meanings are used and revised as instrumental for the guidance and formulation of action. The individual not only reacts because of meaning that comes through due to self-talk, but he also takes note of, interprets and assesses peer action toward him/her and anticipates another's act as a way of deriving meaning. The important point to make is that the individual within the group is first to act, and therefore, the lines of action of each must bend and stretch in order for the group "fit" to take place. Should the "fit" not be a comfortable one, the person will drop out.

Definitions

Once again, then, meaning is behavior. Language is a system of shared meanings or a system of shared behaviors. Categories are symbols grouped together for classification. Positions are socially recognized categories of actors. S.I. sees meanings as social products, as creations that are formed in and through the defining activities of people as they interact. Culture is derived from what people do. Only humans have the capability to create "mind" and "self-concept" with self-dialogue present. Language is a formative process in which meanings are used and revised as instrumental for guidance and formation of future action.

Both Blumer (1969) and Mead called for a "down-to-earth approach" to scientific study of human group life and human conduct. "If it wishes to study drug use among adolescents, it will go to the actual life of such adolescents to observe and analyze such use" (Blumer, 1969, p. 47).

The positive contributions that Mead made to social psychology (Manis and Meltzer, 1967) can be summarized by the following:

1. Distinctive human behavior is behavior in terms of what situations **symbolize**,
2. Mind and self are not biologically given, but are social emergents,
3. Language serves as a mechanism for the appearance of mind and self,
4. Mind, or the mental, is an importation within the individual of the social process,
5. Human beings are not passive puppets who respond mechanically to stimuli. They are active participants in a highly organized society,
6. Group settings, in which perceptions occur, have influential significance,
7. Members of a human group develop and form a common world with common understandings, i.e., symbols.

Final general concepts drawn from symbolic interactionism have import far beyond what he imagined. These factors, according to Kronick (1974) are:

1. The behavior of concern is social interaction, not individual or subhuman behavior.
2. Such behavior is in response to symbols and is not determined biologically.
3. There is no inherent relationship between symbols and their referent except the human ones--man defines what is meaningful for him. This defining procedure is always in motion and striving toward meaning consensus although this is never reached . . .
4. Perception is always selective (p. 10).

Mead's Theory does not appear to be "researchable." How is it possible to enter the mind of another to "view" the interpretive act? Even though qualitative research has come into its own, proof of a thought process which establishes personal "meaning" out of objects and actions is elusive at best. How a person builds self-concept and self-consciousness from social interaction is a difficult question. Mead's

Theory is a usable tool to support this qualitative research project, where the participant describes his/her past events.

Qualitative research came out of a phenomenological theory perspective of Husserl. He believed that what people "say" defines a personal reality (Kronick, 1974a). The cultural context into which we are born defines our subjective reality. For instance, the reality of poverty, racial prejudice, and low educational achievement of family members is the "context" of a black, inner-city child. He/she will speak out of this reality base in a very different way than a white, upper-class suburban child. The two "realities" are worlds apart.

The study of human behavior opened this field of descriptive research where the experiment came out of the laboratory and into the natural setting. Participant observation demands that the researcher become "the fly on the wall" in watching human action and reaction in an everyday social context. In quantitative research, theory and data are separate and the researcher makes an effort to maintain objectivity.

Qualitative research is dialectic, subjective, descriptive. The research questions are generated during the dialogue process between subject and researcher. The participant becomes the "authority" in the interviewing process. The authorities for this study are the pushouts, at risk students who will describe the experience of "school" from their personal reality.

MODERN LEADERS--A NEW PARADIGM

Two classical studies using S.I. as a theoretical perspective are Ned Polsky's Hustlers, Beats and Others (1969) in which Polsky, as a college professor "shagged around" a pool hall becoming part of that culture as context for his study. He spoke of associating with participants as though he were one of them. "Successful field research depends on the investigator's trained abilities to look at people, listen to them, think and feel with them, talk with them rather than at

them" (pp. 128-129). Being an art teacher at Alternative Center for Learning (A.C.L.) was similar in that it gave me the opportunity to "shag around" at the school informing an understanding of a social context that was previously foreign to me. Shagging around is defined by Goetz and LeCompte (1984) as "casing the joint; getting acquainted with participants, learning where they congregate, . . . the investigator examines how people categorize themselves and each other" (pp. 89-90).

Howard Becker used S.I. to study marijuana use. Becker believed that user's mental images (symbols) had to change in order for marijuana use to take place. Following are five characteristics of the S.I. perspective used in the study.

1. He rejects antecedent traits or conditions as determiners of drug use.. . .
2. He treats marijuana use as learned behavior constructed in a process of social interaction.
3. He asserts that marijuana use is the behavioral result of an individual's changing mental concepts. Thus, the meaning of things to the individual is important. . . .
4. He interprets societal reactions to the users of marijuana as a potent factor in its use, since being caught and labeled as a marijuana user plays a crucial role in creating deviance.
5. He insists on first-hand experience, participant observation, and longitudinal study as methodological tools. . . . (Larsen and Wright, 1986, p. 6)

In addition to S.I., three other social theories were used to analyze the data collected in this study. A brief overview of Control Theory, Anomie Theory and Labeling Theory follows.

CONTROL THEORY

Control Theory is a theory conceived by Glasser (1986) which defines behavior (actions and interactions) as being caused by "what is going on inside the student, rather than [by] the outside situation." This definition removed behavior from the earlier stimulus, response definition of Freud and Watson. An important assumption is that each individual chooses to do what is most satisfying at the time in order to

fulfill five basic needs. The five basic human needs as described by Glasser (1986) are:

1. to survive and reproduce,
2. to belong and love,
3. to gain power,
4. to be free,
5. to have fun (p. 23).

A further assumption of Control Theory by Glasser (1986) is that our actions and interactions are initiated by "satisfying pictures of that activity that we store in our heads as a pleasant memory" (p. 34). Glasser (1986) believes that the at risk student's positive mental image is replaced by

. . . Pictures of themselves rebelling or withdrawing. What students do in school [and out] is completely determined by the pictures in their heads (p. 36).

Starting immediately after birth, instructed by our feelings, we begin to learn what is satisfying and what is not. We learn almost all that we know through parental teaching. . . . When we learn anything that satisfies one or more of our needs, we use all of our developing senses like a multisensory camera and take a picture of this need-satisfying situation. . . . We keep only those pictures that are in some way need satisfying to us (p. 35).

This theory supports the idea of "visual overlays" as events that have been stored in memory along with an interpretation of the event as positive or negative. Glasser (1986) states that negative events are forgotten and replaced by positive mental images. These self-pictures can change as student self-concept evolves.

ANOMIE THEORY

Anomie means "misfit." The theory was derived by R.K. Merton (1957) and described a process whereby culturally defined goals and institutional means of attaining the goals were discordant. A typology of modes of individual adaptation in table form can be found on page 140 in his book, Social Theory and Social Structure. The table represents how the social structure exerts pressure upon individuals and how individuals respond behaviorally.

For the student in this study, the cultural goal is a high school graduation which should lead to employment and a "place" within our society. Barriers to a high school diploma such as low socio-economic status, poor grades, or school violence leads to feelings, on the part of the student, of helplessness about the world, normlessness, and a sense of being an "outsider" in a social environment.

"This syndrome of lofty aspirations and limited realistic opportunities . . . is precisely the pattern which invites deviant behavior" (Merton, 1957, p. 159).

LABELING THEORY

Labeling Theory as described by Edwin M. Schur (1971), states that "the ways that a person behaves and feels about himself and his behavior depend significantly upon how others respond to him" (p. 2). This is a concept very close to the "looking glass self" of Charles Horton Cooley and William I. Thomas' statement that what we perceive as being real is real in its consequences. One can see the interrelationships between these four theories, with Symbolic Interactionism serving as the precursor to the other three.

The framework for analysis of this study is derived from the four theories as stated above. Key events in a student's retrospective life history narrative are past experiences described by the student as actions and interactions within a social environment, usually family or school. Visual overlays are the pictorial images stored in the student's brain not only as memory of the event, but the interpretation of positive or negative memory as described by Glasser (1986) above. The framework for analysis of the student narrative is: key event(s), visual overlays, and behavioral outcome in school.

Chapter I was an overview of the four social theories which were the basis for this study. Chapter II presented relevant background information to the study.

CHAPTER II

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding of the change in a student's meaning perspective from "I like school" in the elementary years to the "school is not for me" mindset of the pushout population.

Trying to define the student-at-risk of dropping out of school has been a major research effort in this country. Still, no national definition exists. It is estimated that the nation's dropout rate approaches 50 percent in the major urban cities (New York, Chicago, and San Francisco). The estimated dropout rate for the Knox County School System (Tennessee), where the study took place, is approaching 35 percent. The definitions that I will use in this study follow.

DEFINITIONS

African American is acknowledged as the term of preference for Black Americans. When writing in the student voice based on quoted transcripts, I chose to use their verbiage.

Dropouts are students who leave school before graduation from high school. The rate of dropping out is computed by subtracting the number of graduating seniors from the number in the ninth grade cohort 4 years before, acknowledging student transfer, illness and death (Kronick, Morton, Peterson and Smith, 1989).

Key event is an experience in a student's life history that he/she takes note of and makes reference to.

Outcome refers to a student's behavior in school as part of the framework of key event--visual overlay--outcome used to analyze the data in this study.

Pushouts are students who are expelled or suspended for an extended length of time from the regular public education classroom (Kronick and Hargis, 1990).

Retrospective life history is a research method which enables the researcher to "know people intimately, to see the world through their eyes, and to enter into their experiences vicariously" (Taylor and Bogdan, 1984, p. 81).

Student-at-risk is a student still attending school who has been pinpointed for early school leaving because of failing grades, truancy or other factors.

Visual overlay is the memory of a key event in one's life history along with an interpretation of that event. Interpretation here refers to Mead's concept of taking note of an action and subsequently analyzing the action (Blumer, 1969).

RESEARCHER BIAS

Students attending the Alternative Center for Learning (A.C.L.), Knoxville, Tennessee, provide the participants in this qualitative study. During the time that I taught art classes at the center (approximately 6 years), I tried to be a non-judgmental listener for students as they confronted their feelings through painting and creative writing. As they told me about their problems, their bias became my bias. I saw how students must endure an educational process that is sometimes destructive to their personhood. My personal perspective on what school is like for the at-risk student is best described by anthropologists and not by educators.

Anthropologists compare the educational process in the United States to hazing initiations and abusive rites of passage in primitive cultures. In both social groups, it is imperative that cultural knowledge be passed along from one generation to the next to ensure cultural survival. The individual, within the cultural context of

either the primitive society or the society of school in the United States, assumes that by enduring the initiation rituals, that a "place" will be earned within the group.

A major difference between primitive societies and our educational organization, is that the primitives join forces in a cooperative process that allows every member of the group to succeed; the students in our educational rite of passage are set up to compete against each other in a system that imposes failure on some so that others will succeed. Alienation from school and school authorities is a natural outcome for the students at the bottom. From this perspective, the phenomenon of dropping out is culturally imposed (Trueba; Spindler, G.; and Spindler, L.; 1989).

The skills that a student needs to learn to establish a place for himself/herself changed dramatically when our country changed from a rural, farming community to an urban, industrialized society. The job market changed. In the agrarian society, a young person could walk away from school without a diploma and still assume that a place in society was easily attainable. In today's high technology society, finding a position with less than a high school diploma is very difficult. A basic assumption in this country, as a result of this change, is that all young people should graduate from high school.

EDUCATIONAL ASSUMPTIONS

High school graduation should insure a mastery of skills, both social and academic, that will allow a person a place in society. This initiation process and rite of passage takes 13 years. We believe we are preparing young people for jobs within the nation's work force when we spend 13 years with them in the teaching/learning process. We believe that by our society's assuming the expense of schooling, that every child can achieve his/her potential (Orr, 1987).

What happens when jobs are limited and not everyone has a "place" upon graduation from high school? The incentive to stay in school is undermined when the economy is depressed and there are not enough jobs to go around. An alarming 35 percent to 50 percent of our high school population is dropping out of school before graduation (Orr, 1987). A large number of students, 3,789, drop out of school every day in the United States (Trueba; Spindler, G.; and Spindler, L.; 1989).

DROUPOUT CATEGORIES

This study is concerned with a special category of dropout identified in the literature as "pushout." This label was alluded to by Orr (1987) when she wrote about students being forced out (emphasis mine) by the "treatment they receive at school or (by) the failure of school programs to meet their learning needs." The needs of the college bound student are more often the focus of school policy than the needs of the non-college bound student. Teachers tend to reward the academically capable student and ignore the student struggling to succeed. Too often the lower track student is given work that he/she is incapable of accomplishing (Hargis, 1987). A student's response to frustration and failure in school serves as a way to define differing types of dropouts as follows:

1. **Quiet Dropouts** are low achieving students who experience failure over a period of time, and therefore, simply walk away from school when they attain the age to legally do so,

2. **Disruptive Dropouts** are low achieving students who act out their frustration at lack of school success. These students are often long-term suspended or expelled from the public school classroom and are labeled push-outs,

3. **High Academic Achievers** who drop out are considered push-outs because they leave out of boredom as well as out of resistance to rigid school rules,

4. **In-School Dropouts** are those students perceived to be non-achievers or minimal achievers, but without acting-out behaviors. It is believed that these students have developed coping skills to deal with failure and frustration (Kronick and Hargis, 1990).

Pushout is the targeted population for this study. By listening to those who are no longer welcome in the traditional high school classroom, I will explore the process of a student's acquiring an adversarial position with school administrators. The study includes retrospective life histories of four youth, records their early schooling, their family histories, and their disaffection with school. I assume that the student liked school at one time and dislikes school now. I will attempt to understand the meaning perspective of the push-out from within the larger social context of family and community.

RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

Three problems are evident as one reviews the literature on dropouts. First, all dropouts are grouped together on the basis of leaving school before high school graduation. The data that we have, being quantitative, loses sight of individual reasons for a student's dropping out. The urban drug pusher as dropout is a very different person from the migrant worker or the pregnant unmarried female, and yet, each may answer on a quantitative survey that "School was not for me." Each dropout is an individual with a unique set of circumstances. A qualitative study can begin to understand a student's perspective of rational and justifiable reasons for disaffection toward school.

Secondly, information has come from the authorities on dropouts i.e., the teachers, the administrators, and the researchers, but not from the students themselves. In fact, Kozol (1992) states that rarely has anyone besides himself asked the students what was wrong with school.

It occurred to me that we had not been listening much to

children in these recent year of "summit conferences" on education, of severe reports and ominous prescriptions. The voices of children, frankly, had been missing from the whole discussion (p. 5).

I propose that new information may be available on early school leaving if I ask the insiders to explain their position. This study will be from the student perspective in narrative form, documented by student quotations integrated into each narrative.

Thirdly, we have assumed that either there is something wrong with the student or that there is something wrong with the teaching of that student. Rarely have we viewed the student from the perspective of family context, mobility, educational support system, substance abuse, peer group norms and influence, conflicts, emotional traumas and more. Each student brings his/her past life experiences and ways of dealing with problems to school each day. Since we know that students do not plan to drop out and that they plan to graduate from high school (Epstein, 1991), perhaps a new theoretical model must be created to understand the process of dropping out from the student's perspective.

RELEVANCE OF THE STUDY

This data will add to the pool of knowledge on dropouts, supporting the quantitative research published on student-at-risk and adding the dimension of "in the student voice" to the growing national pool of information. The empirical justification for this study will be to determine the process of becoming a pushout and how the pushout describes a personal meaning as one perceives of himself/herself within the organizational context of school.

DISSERTATION ORGANIZATION

Chapter II informed the reader of the education assumptions in this country concerning high school graduation. The terms dropout and pushout were differentiated. Both the statement of the research problem and the rationale supporting the study were discussed. In Chapter III,

I gave a general overview of the literature on students-at-risk of dropping out. The literature review included articles and dissertations with the student voice represented. Also represented were books supporting the study. Chapter IV discussed the methodology which was created by means of a pilot study done while I was teaching at the alternative school.

Chapter V were the findings presented for each participant's narrative educational history supported by selected direct quotations. Following each narrative is an analysis based on key events, either from the home environment or from school. In Chapter VI, I pooled the data and presented it according to emerging themes. Chapter VII is the interpretation and discussion of the results drawn from this study. In Chapter VIII, I linked the study to the theories within the literature base. In Chapter IX, I shared the conclusions and implications of the study.

CHAPTER III

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Much of the extensive literature on at-risk students describes the factors used to predict a student's dropping out of school. Predictor variables can be divided into three major categories: (1) Family background traits, (2) Student personal traits, and (3) Student behavioral traits (Rumberger, 1987).

Family Background

Low socio-economic status (S.E.S.)

Minority status

Low parental educational and/or occupational attainment

Personal Traits

Low I.Q.

Learning Disability

Low self-esteem

External locus of control

Attitude of resistance toward school and teacher

Low educational/occupational aspirations

Behavioral Traits

Poor academic achievement (failed at least one grade)

Absenteeism, truancy

Drug and/or alcohol use

Feelings of alienation

Lacking in social skills

Hating of authority figures

Unwilling to defer gratification

In much of the literature to date, the dropout is blamed for school failure (referred to as the medical model) when school

organization may be the root cause (Swadener, 1990). Appendix A lists literature review choices. Topics relevant to this study included were: historical background, theoretical background and a paradigm for rethinking school organization. A brief review representing the student voice and three dissertations using retrospective life histories as methodology conclude the chapter.

BACKGROUND

What about school policy? Are there school policies which create a mismatch between the individual and the institution? Hargis' (1987) answer to that question is a resounding "yes." His contention is that as long as we continue to use a "Lock-Stepped Curriculum" where students must compete for grades along a normal standard curve continuum, that in order for 25 percent to get exceptional grades, 25 percent must fail. Besides the competition for grades, developmental factors often dictate failure for a child slower in development at least in the early grades. Once a child is placed in the "failure group," his/her chance of escape from the syndrome is negligible. Research has shown that being held back in school, especially in the early grades, is a strong predictor of dropping out of school later (Colon-Tarrats, 1988).

A second way in which schools may be responsible is that in performing their sorting function for society, they may be unnecessarily harsh and discouraging to many adolescents. The sorting and selecting function does not require schools to be negative and alienating. Selecting the college bound elite is one task schools should be engaged in, the remaining body of students should receive the kind of attention that will allow them to pursue all the schooling they can profitably use. Educators must be responsible for those students who are not ideal academic performers as well as for those who are talented. The bureaucratic structure of large high schools has added to the feeling of alienation of students (Wehlage, 1986).

Teachers, too, may be at fault. Teachers, in the upper grades, who see their role as presenters of material according to the lecture method, have too often forsaken the roles of teaching. The teaching method and the learning style of the at-risk student may be totally mismatched leading to feelings of boredom for the student. For teachers to favor the college bound student in preference to the at-risk student, is a natural outcome of a meaning perspective that educators share. Education, for them, means their essence and livelihood. For the struggling student, school is to be endured (Farrell, 1990). The meaning students attach to events, persons, self and others is of prime importance. The student responds to what he/she believes is there rather than to what is really there (Kronick, 1974a, pp. 178-180).

AN ALTERNATIVE PARADIGM

A paradigm shift proposed by Swadener (1990), suggests a meaning perspective for educators which would shake the foundations of "school" as we know it today. This shift in thinking of what school could be, will be integral to my discussion in Chapter VIII.

1. What if we replace the notion of "at-risk" with "at promise" and applied this concept to all children? . . .
2. What if the current graded, competitive, and individualistic school systems were replaced by non-graded, nurturant environments, where children were taught by the same teacher, on mutual agreement, for several years, rather than just one? What if K-12 standardized testing were banned, as has been proposed in Wisconsin?
3. What if we changed the label "at risk" to "gifted," and provided similar enrichment programs, activities, opportunities, and expectations?
4. What if we devoted the same energy we are now devoting to finding better early interventions for "at risk" children to changing curricula and teaching practices to those which are more culturally sensitive, inclusive, and relevant to all children?
5. What if we really cared about--in fact loved--all the children in our schools?
6. What if community (and global) struggles for social change became the heart of the social studies? . . .
7. What if we turned schools over, in many aspects, to parents and communities? . . . What if we turned schools over to teachers?

8. What if children saw and interacted with many more people like themselves in positions of power, leadership, and classroom caring?
9. What if teachers and teacher educators were required to show evidence of bi- or multi-cultural competence? . . .
10. What if far more alternative urban schools were available? . . .
11. What if those of us who are monolingual were considered at risk?
12. What if traditionally oppressed groups, who are indeed the global majority and are soon to be the majority in the U.S., defined, boycotted, and eventually declared a moratorium on the "at risk" label, as a bankrupt construct which perpetuates a deficit model?
(pp. 34-35)

EXTERNAL PRESSURES CREATING A GREATER PROBLEM

The number and percentage of dropouts may be increasing because of two factors: First, the national policy for "Education 2000" calls for upgraded standards of achievement and national testing procedures to evaluate students' knowledge. Education Daily (June 17, 1992) documents that a survey of teachers shows increasing support of a national system for student evaluation. If higher standards of achievement are required of students, it is assumed that more students will fail academically and leave school, thereby increasing the number of dropouts.

Second, in the Special Education (S.E.) sector, there is a "new paradigm," resulting from recent interpretations of Public Law 94-142, for placement of more students with handicapping conditions into regular classrooms according to Least Restrictive Environment (L.R.E.) criteria. It is documented that the S.E. population, who have competed in the past only with each other in the resource room, have a 20 percent higher dropout rate than those students in the regular classroom. As more S.E. students become integrated into regular classrooms, the dropout rate may increase.

I believe these two factors, higher standards and L.R.E. placement, will increase the pressure academically to force students from public schools. There are other pressures in place. The personal safety of teachers is an issue both nationally and locally. Guns and

bombs have become a recent problem within Knox County Schools (Tennessee); therefore, quality teachers are taking a second look at personal safety factors in a profession where they often take the blame for inadequacies within the system.

Still other pressures are in place. Another force, which will affect public education in a dramatic way, is the upcoming student population of AIDS babies, crack babies, and children with fetal alcohol syndrome.

A scarcity of juvenile detention centers will force some of the least offenders back into the custody of public schools. In Tennessee, the Department of Youth Development, has placed a cap of 588 juveniles that can be incarcerated at any one time in the state. This forces other organizational systems to deal with a greater number of juvenile delinquents. The changes are in the direction of an increase of "pushouts" from corrections returning to public education. This may force school officials to renew their interest in alternative and vocational programs.

Another external pressure on public education is a "widening of the net" in the court's interpretation of Public Law 94-142, via Public Law 99-457. According to Public Law 99-457, services must now be extended, not only to school aged handicapped children, but to all children with disabilities from birth to school age. Thus, many more children fall into the "Headstart" categories in order to obtain equal access to a Free Appropriate Public Education (F.A.P.E.) (Vergason and Anderegg, 1990). Although early intervention may reduce the number of children identified as handicapped, it is expected that more children will require different degrees of special services.

A last factor creating pressure on students within the public education classroom is that of poverty. According to the 1990 census, one in four children is now born into poverty in the United States with single parent families on the rise by 21 percent (Education Daily, June

17, 1992). The indicators are in place for more dropouts and fewer available jobs due to a higher technology. Due to the factors listed above such as drugs, alcohol, poverty, disability, higher educational standards and higher work standards, there can be no doubt that we have a major and growing problem as we attempt to meet the needs of an increasing number of at risk students.

LITERATURE REVIEW IN THE STUDENT VOICE

There is an overwhelming amount of literature on dropouts and students at risk, none on pushouts. Swadener, (1990) states: "In a recent ERIC search, using the descriptor 'high risk students', . . . 1,047 citations were listed."

My literature review called for a student perspective in the student voice. Also pertinent were those studies in which an in depth, long term interviewing process took place in the form of retrospective life histories. By this I mean a perspective different from teacher blaming or program blaming, but one in which the student looked at socio-cultural conditions which affected a perceptual change from "At one time, I really liked school" to the "School is not for me" consensus prevalent among A.C.L. students.

The quotes offered below are examples of how researchers have used the student voice to describe concrete education issues. Fine (1986) reported:

Every time she would write something on the board, even if students contradicted it and made a good point, if it was in her notes we had to write it down. Like there was no discussion. Remember she asked who read the New York Times magazine article on teenagers in Harlem, by the guy who wrote Manchild in the Promised Land? She asked what was the main point and Louis said it was that those boys are trying to survive, and are frustrated in their lives. She said no, that wasn't the main point. The main point was that they were killing people senselessly without reason. Then why did she ask us our opinions? I couldn't go to that class (p. 396).

Fine (1986) offers other quotes in the student voice:

Broderick left because he simply saw no relation between schooling and future income. He dropped out at age sixteen to sell drugs at a "spot" in upper Manhattan. Where else am I gonna make this money even with a diploma? (p. 396)

I just couldn't go back there. I was held over three times in ninth grade so I stopped goin' after the first time. You feel so 'shamed and stupid. I guess they figured it out. Got a letter sayin' I can't go back no more to that school (p. 397).

Besides Fine's writing in which she included quotations from students, Goodlad (1984) presents the student "voice" in his book, A Place Called School: "To be honest, I haven't learned much but I would like to, but all we do, or rather all she does, is talk and I get bored with the same routines everyday" (p. 238).

RELEVANT DISSERTATIONS

Existing literature in the student voice is minimal. In a recent search of international abstracts since 1988, three citations were found that represent "retrospective life histories." One was a study done at University of California, Berkeley on Oakland dropouts who returned to an alternative setting and got involved in school again in a positive way (Epstein, 1989). Another was a dissertation done on the Puerto Rican population of Boston called the Cimarrones (Colon-Tarrats, 1988). A third study was also conducted in California by Rowley (1989) on four dropouts in two school districts.

The Epstein (1989) study researched the process of leaving school by students who had returned to an alternative program after months or years of absence. Each reported that he or she had made no conscious decision to drop out, but that school policy and atmosphere were reasons for their getting into attendance problems. Students either felt intellectually incompetent or overwhelmingly bored. This study included four retrospective life histories (Epstein, 1989).

The Harvard study (Colon-Tarrats, 1988) researched the process of leaving school by Hispanics living in Boston. This study focused on the

cultural dimensions of family, migration and school-related reasons for dropping out. There were nine life history interviews which represented migration patterns and marriage patterns adding to the student's school non-attendance and failure. Racial tensions and language deficiencies were also factors supporting dropping out. The biographical sketches were narrative in style from the student perspective. Student quotations were absent.

The Rowley (1989) study pinpointed the lack of teacher interest, the lack of early intervention, and lowered expectations by school staff as issues for the students. Students also described the lecture style of teaching as being "overwhelming" and leading to their boredom in school.

Main themes in retrospective life histories research coincided in the three dissertations. They were: (1) Teachers in the regular public school do not care, (2) Administrative rules are so inflexible that students are forced to drop out, and (3) Out of school conditions add to multifaceted reasons for dropping out. I will choose several excerpts from each dissertation which support these themes, all of which will be in the student voice. As background information, it appears that students not doing well in elementary school get into major academic problems once they enter middle school. The reason given in these dissertations was that the changing of classes each hour promotes the alienation of both students and their teachers. The change from one classroom with one teacher, who is the responsible party for each student in the room, changes dramatically in middle school to no one being the responsible party for any one student. This allows the student a great opportunity to cut classes and never get caught until it is too late, it allows the bullies to pick on the more vulnerable student and get away with it, it allows drug dealing within the school complex. Speaking from the research done for these three studies, being

able to cut classes and not get caught for a period of time promotes dropping out to the greatest extent.

The process was reported like this: The student is in trouble academically, does not know where to go to get help, is embarrassed in front of peers to show one's lack of understanding of the material presented, feels overwhelmed by the amount of outside work assigned, begins to cut a class here and there with no real consequences, and establishes a pattern of truancy that eventually leads to automatic school dismissal.

Teachers are very demanding. Also, I did not like too much work at the time, you know. So, I tried to explain, and you know how teachers are. They don't listen, you know. Why give me so much homework? They just gave me bad grades. So I had to stay after school "siempre" (always). So I did not bother about it anymore. I did not bother because they didn't listen.

When I first started ninth grade, it was hard and I didn't feel right. Teachers spoke in a way I couldn't understand, like talking to an older person. Some kids are smart, you know, they understand what teachers are talking about. They start teaching something in another way that I don't understand, you know. I don't understand that.

The school was good, the bad ones were the teachers. Teachers don't explain. If you doesn't understand, they don't pay any attention to you . . . (Colon-Tarrats, 1988, p. 124).

The study speaks of the alienation felt by students in the new school atmosphere.

I didn't have that many friends. I felt lonely, so every time I went to school I just cut some of my classes, and then I just cut all the classes (Colon-Tarrats, 1988, p. 121).

In school one feels like a prisoner because they impose too many rules. It is like having committed a crime . . . one cannot be free (Colon-Tarrats, 1988, p. 119).

Another expression about school was that the student felt he/she wasn't learning anything.

I did not want to go to school either, you know. There comes a time when you don't want to go to school anymore. I just got tired. I wanted to go out or get a job or something; earn some money. I just didn't feel like going to school, wake up in the morning and the same old thing over and over again. I didn't feel I was learning anything (Colon-Tarrats, 1988, p. 120).

In my science class I said, "Okay, I'm going to take a shot at answering this question." I was very nervous about school. I was afraid to raise my hand because if I had the wrong answer they would damn me to hell. It took everything I had to put up my hand. And after I answered, the teacher just said, "Wrong." Everybody fell out laughing, and he said, "Somebody else, please." I said to myself, "Never again." You know I felt that big. He didn't tell me why he didn't like my answer, he didn't want to help me (Epstein, 1989, p. 40).

When students are unable to do the work demanded of them, they either act out and become behavioral problems who get pushed out or they begin cutting classes and eventually drop out because of failure. Epstein (1989) states that students drop out one day at a time, meaning they cut and don't get caught.

I did start cutting and hanging around with the wrong people. Nobody ever called my house, until finally somebody came out to tell my mom that I had been eliminated from the roll. But I was going to school every day! I just cut classes (Epstein, 1989, p. 76).

"Every parent, without exception, reported a story like the one above about their children cutting school for periods ranging from 20 to 60 days before they were notified" (Epstein, 1989, p. 31). A statement by a parent trying to check on a student follows: "They couldn't even tell me if my child was at school!" Epstein stated that working parents who kept tabs on their child by contacting one teacher in the elementary program found it difficult to keep in contact with six teachers. She also made the point that as the student advanced and took subject matter that the parent may not have mastered, that "working-class parents were prone to feel more out of place" at school.

Epstein (1989), in her summary of the chapter on "Patterns of Leaving" stated that "students described school structures, unjust treatment, a sense that no one cared, and feelings of boredom and incompetence as factors which cause early school leaving" (p. 41). But she elaborated by saying that school factors in combination with family problems "helped influence them to leave."

Although Epstein (1989) acknowledged the influences of family problems on a student's educational process, she did not deal with

family problems to any extent. In the present study, the focus is on out of school conditions such as family problems, personal problems, mobility and economic conditions that combine with school environment reasons to force students to drop out of school.

BOOKS SUPPORTING THE STUDY

Major books that were background support for the study, listed in order of importance, were as follows:

Kronick and Hargis (1990), Who Drops Out and Why--And the Recommended Action, presented an educational perspective on dropouts and school organizations with an emphasis on actions to support the at-risk population. A two-year research project conducted at the Alternative Center for Learning, Knoxville, Tennessee served as background description and quantitative data. "Pushout" was documented as a student atypical of the dropout, but a definite segment of the at-risk population. A classification of dropouts by the two authors was utilized as background for this dissertation.

Trueba along with George and Louise Spindler edited a compilation of articles entitled What Do Anthropologists Have to Say About Dropouts. The anthropologists' position is that dropouts will deal with basic needs first and learning later. It was pointed out that there are cultures in which there are no dropouts; cultures that are cooperative in their enculturation rites rather than competitive. From their perspective, dropping out of school is socially prescribed.

Farrell (1990), Hanging In and Dropping Out--Voices of At-Risk High School Students, presented a psychological perspective of a student's need to integrate the many selves. This researcher used student collaborators in an interviewing process with peers. The study represented 91 one-half hour "dialogues" from 73 participants.

Orr (1987), Keeping Students in School, presented a brief history of, definition of, and school barriers to dropouts. Orr made

recommendations on serving at-risk students based on alternative teaching situations and the use of community services by families in need.

Filstead (1971), Qualitative Methodology--Firsthand Involvement with the Social World, contained multiple essays concerned with a practical understanding of qualitative research. Major researchers such as Becker, Geer, Glaser, Strauss, and Blumer discussed methods of participant observation, interviews, case studies, collection and interpretation of data, as well as generating grounded theory. This overview of naturalistic research was invaluable at the beginning stages of this project because it was presented as "reality" in the field.

Goetz and LeCompte (1987), Qualitative Research Methods, was accepted as the handbook of choice in directing a qualitative study.

Polsky (1969), Hustler, Beats, and Others, described a participant methodology where Polsky as college professor entered into the interactive process of hustlers in a pool hall. He presented the problems of an outsider's attempt to become an insider, at least in the understanding of speech patterns and social interaction very different from his own.

Chapter III was the literature review on dropouts and pushouts. I included national descriptors and predictors of this population from the literature at large. I presented a "What if" list as well as some student quotations about educational experience from another researcher, Michelle Fine. I discussed the fact that dropping out of school is a growing problem because of outside pressures being felt within our schools. Finally, I discussed and compared three dissertations which represented both retrospective life history research and research in the student voice.

Chapter IV was a presentation of the research question, a description of the participant group and the methodology used in the present study which included four stages.

CHAPTER IV

METHODOLOGY

RESEARCH QUESTION

How do students who are pushed out from the regular education classroom describe key events in their retrospective life histories that affect their in-school performance? It was assumed that the key events would be school related events that changed a student's meaning perspective from "I like school" of the elementary school student to the "School is not for me" meaning perspective voiced by the pushout. It was also assumed that meaning was derived from memories of past interactive events.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

School dropout is a problem that affects society as a whole, especially of interest to human service policy makers. When a student chooses to drop out of school, administrators, principals, and teachers are likely to feel a sense of failure since our culture places a high value on high school graduation. This study was concerned about how a student feels when he or she was pushed out from the regular education classroom and how the process was described from the student perspective. It was assumed that a student perspective of school dropout would be different from researcher perspective of school dropout.

STATEMENT OF THE PURPOSE

The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding in the student voice of key life events which created a meaning perspective change on the part of a student from "I like school" to the mindset of "School is not for me" of the pushout population. Pushouts are a subset

of the student population considered to be at risk of dropping out of school. At the beginning of the study, it was assumed that key life events would be school related.

FURTHER ASSUMPTIONS OF THE STUDY

For the purposes of this study, it was assumed that:

1. A naturalistic approach using repeated, in-depth conversational type interviews was a sound research method for determining the students' "truth,"
2. The students' truth was accepted as their perceived reality,
3. The findings of the study were not generalizable to a wider population, but provided rich description from one site by four students,
4. The students from the Alternative Center for Learning (A.C.L.) were, in fact, pushouts since they had been expelled or had received long-term suspension from the regular education classroom.

DESCRIPTION OF PARTICIPANT GROUP

The participants for this study were four students now attending or formerly in attendance at the Alternative Center for Learning (A.C.L.), Knoxville, Tennessee. These students fit the definition of "Pushout" as they have each been expelled from the public school classroom and recommended to this alternative program. Most of the students have experienced rather severe behavioral problems in public school. It is assumed that each student has his/her own story to tell about how they acquired the "School is not for me" mindset. No student with a Special Education (S.E.) label was chosen for this study. A description of the typical A.C.L. student comes from Chapter VIII in the book Dropouts: Who Drops Out and Why - And the Recommended Action (Kronick and Hargis, 1990) as follows:

The mean age of students is 15.8 years. Eighty-one percent are white, 19 percent are black. Seventy percent of

the students are male and 30 percent are female. The majority of the students are in the 10th grade when they are referred to the school. Most come from blue collar homes where their mothers did not graduate from high school. The mothers averaged 11.84 years of school while the fathers averaged 12.14 years of schooling.

The sample reported 33.6 percent living with both parents. The other 66.14 percent reported living with one parent, step-parents, other relatives, or friends. It seems that the students come from family situations that add to them being at risk in school as well as in other social situations. Forty-four percent of the students report that their parents are married, the remaining report being separated, widowed or divorced. Forty-five percent report living with their mother (p. 9).

Past Director, Dr. Jerome H. Morton, described the students in an unpublished paper entitled "An Alternative School Program for High Risk Adolescents."

Descriptive data about A.C.L.'s students include the following: 30 percent are actively involved with juvenile court, 25 percent live in group home type settings, 35 percent receive psychological counseling from some other agency, 70 percent receive services from other agencies, 40 percent are on a subsidized lunch program, 90 percent report having difficulty following school rules, 60 percent failed at least one grade, 70 percent of the girls have been sexually assaulted, 45 percent (earlier study states 60 percent) report using drugs sometimes, 10 percent are intellectually gifted, 15 percent are gifted or talented in an art area, and 50 percent are handicapped . . . (Public Law 94-142).

The students at A.C.L. match the national "norms" in most instances. The deviations were in the educational level of parents, locus of control, and ethnicity. The education level of the A.C.L. parent was higher than the national norm, the locus of control of the A.C.L. was more often internal than external like the national norm, and there were many more white than non-white students at A.C.L. which was unlike the national norm. The inner-city urban population of our large cities, such as New York, swings the national norm to the non-white population and low socio-economic status.

The A.C.L. student's internal locus of control was a surprise. It is believed that because the counselors within the program work toward a student concept of becoming aware of one's asocial behavior, the

students begin to accept the concept of personal ownership of behavioral patterns and an unwillingness to blame others.

The higher educational level of the parents may reflect the influence of the University environment on Knoxville. It also points to the fact that students from neighborhoods other than poverty areas are getting into trouble in public education. I assume that since A.C.L. is an intervention program with a counseling component for students-at-risk, that the participants will be less likely to drop out than if they remained in the regular public education classroom.

RESEARCHER ACCEPTANCE

Because I taught art at A.C.L., I was able to view from the insider position within the school organization, how pushouts act in school. I was able to interact with the students on a daily basis. "Shagging" tends to build a greater level of trust from the student than when a university person enters the scene as an unknown (Goetz and LeCompte, 1987). In Howard S. Becker's (1971) article, "Interviewing Medical Students," he speaks of the "outsider" as being perceived by interviewees as a "potentially dangerous person" to be given the "official line" rather than an honest personal interpretation. For the interviewer's manner and role can strongly affect what the interviewee chooses to tell him, as can the situation in which the interview is conducted.

RESEARCH APPROACH

The theoretical support for this study was that of Mead's Theory of Symbolic Interaction (Mead, 1934). The three other theories, Control (Glasser, 1986), Anomie (Merton, 1957), and Labeling (Schur, 1971), discussed in Chapter I, were utilized after the study was completed for the purpose of comparison and analyses.

The symbolic interactionist is interested in questions such as the following:

How do people define themselves, others, their settings, and their activities?

How do people's definitions and perspectives develop and change?

What is the fit between different perspectives held by different people?

What is the fit between people's perspectives and their activities?

How do people deal with the discrepancy between their perspectives and activities? (Taylor and Bogdan, 1984, p. 136).

Becker and Geer (1970) in their article entitled "Participant Observation and Interviewing" discuss the following: "Things people see through distorting lenses." Filstead (1971) has come as close to what I am calling "visual overlays" as I could find in the literature base:

In many of the social relationships we observe, the parties to the relation will have differing ideas as to what ought to go on in it, and frequently as to what does in fact go on in it. These differences in perception will naturally affect what they report in an interview. A man in a subordinate position in an organization in which subordinates believe that their superiors are "out to get them" will interpret many incidents in this light though the incidents themselves may not seem, either to the other party in the interaction or to the observer, to indicate such malevolence (p. 138).

I assumed that pushouts have a personal distorting lens of visual overlays that allowed them to interpret their school experience in a very different manner than would a teacher, a school administrator, or a parent. By allowing pushouts to tell a personal story of "What's going on here," their own interpretation of in-school interaction will reveal how their meaning was derived. I was not interested in the absolute truth of a situation. I was interested in the student's truth of the situation in order to gain an understanding of a student's meaning perspective. It was assumed that the way in which a student interpreted a social action and stored that action in memory was a result of interactive experience.

RESEARCH STAGES

This project was conducted in four stages typical of an inductive qualitative study. Stage I--Pilot Study, Stage II--Legitimization and site entry, Stage III--Data Collection, and Stage IV--Analysis.

Stage I

Stage I was a pilot study looking for key events in student retrospective life histories solicited by means of one-on-one conversational type interviews. The open-ended and flexible research questions to be answered were: How does a student describe the educational experience of becoming a pushout from the regular education classroom? What events in his/her life experience affected school social interaction? How does a student justify truancy and failure from the student perspective? See Appendix B for the research interview guide.

One white female high school student identified in the study with the pseudonym Pam Walker, was chosen for the pilot study. She was an art student at the time and was not identified as a special education student. Pam was chosen because of her many statements pronouncing a dislike of school and a dislike of teachers. A level of trust had been established before Pam gave her consent to the questioning and interviewing process. I emphasize that during Pilot Study Phase I, I was a teacher in the A.C.L. organization and was, therefore, perceived to be an insider by students as well as staff.

As Pam filled out the written questionnaire, I learned that she was an only child from a family still intact. The socio-economic status (S.E.S.) was middle to upper-middle, with both parents full-time employed. Pam's profile was not typical of a pushout except for her failure in school and her record of truancy and poor grades.

Pam had at one time been an all A student and in the tenth grade had earned only one credit hour. It was assumed that Pam had experienced a meaning perspective change concerning school.

The Stage II legitimization and site entry for the pilot study was no problem because I was working at the center and was a research assistant on the dropout study for Drs. Kronick and Hargis. I was given permission to conduct my study by each student (see Appendix C for the sample Participation Consent Form), by the student's parent, by the Director of A.C.L., by the A.C.L. Board of Directors, by the Knox County Schools, Tennessee, and an added signed permission was granted by the parent of Pam Walker (pseudonym) to access the school file for documenting information.

After acquiring student and parental consent, as well as permission signatures from authorities in charge, I gave a written questionnaire to each participant and conducted informal interviews according to the guidelines of the Human Subjects Committee, The University of Tennessee, Knoxville. The questionnaire used in the Kronick and Hargis (1990) study on dropouts was administered in the initial contact with each participant as a written standardized interview (Goetz and LeCompte, 1987). All respondents were asked the same questions in the same order with oral exchange encouraged between the researcher and the interviewee. The purpose of a written questionnaire was to discover areas of content that would be a comfortable starting place for participant conversation, whether it be family relationships, friendships, early school memories, or favorite teachers and more. There were descriptive, structural and comparison questions in the student questionnaire (see Appendix D). The initial contact with each student was conducted in a style conducive to establishing trust between the two parties, in other words, slow and easy. It was assumed that intimate or controversial type data could only come later if that level of trust were established. The written

form did document complex family relationships as well as documenting each participant's comparison between the experience of the regular education classroom and the alternative school classroom. The interviews were either video or audio taped. Typed word-for-word transcripts of every interview utilized pseudonyms in order to maintain anonymity of both students and staff.

Role of the Pilot Study. The pilot study was instrumental in developing a methodology to investigate a student's change in meaning perspective. Goetz and LeCompte (1987) stressed multiple interviews over an extended period of time in order to establish trust between researcher and interviewee. The choice of setting was assumed to be critical in order to obtain intimate or controversial information. When the pilot study took place, the researcher did not have the benefit of the three dissertation studies which were in process at the time.

During the pilot interviewing process, the researcher experienced the following:

1. How to ask descriptive type questions, i.e., Tell me about _____ and Describe _____,
2. How to eliminate extraneous data by having only the interviewee present in a private, out-of-the-way place at school,
3. How to ask probing questions in order to fill in blank spaces in a continuum of events in a student's life.

Ethnographers (Spradley, 1980) speak of "key concepts" in performing naturalistic research projects. Since this study was to obtain retrospective life history information from the participants, the use of the words "key events" referring to student identified important experiences in their lives appeared to be a logical choice. Mead (1934) stated that "Our past stays with us in terms of those changes which have resulted from our experience and which are in some sense registered there The human animal's past is constantly present in the facility with which he acts . . ." (p. 116). Key event, then, leads

naturally to the way in which a person remembers and interprets a previous experience.

The label of "visual overlay" emerged from the interviewing process. A critical finding from the pilot study was the contrast of highly descriptive material in one instance versus mater-of-fact information in another. My concept of "visual overlay" emerged from the data collected during the interviewing process with Pam and continued to develop into a framework for categorizing important events and experiences in the student's life history narrative. Concepts from a study of how creative minds store information visually along with Mead's Theory of Symbolic Interactionism (1934) where the mind function of "taking note of an action" and "analyzing the action" inspired the creation of the framework of key event--visual overlay--outcome needed to consistently evaluate volumes of information from the participants. This framework was instrumental in sorting the extraneous information from pertinent data.

Stage II

Field entry for the second phase of the study took more than a year. After my initial request for Human Subjects approval under my own name, the director for whom I had worked for 5 years was dismissed by the Knox County School System in order to place a tenured school principal in the position. A.C.L. had also changed status from a private school with its own Board of Directors to an alternative school within the Knox County School System. Neither the referral process nor the philosophy and structure changed dramatically. The management style changed, but it was my perception that this did not affect the individual student directly during the first year. I left the program April 1, 1992, with the assurance by the new principal of support for my dissertation research.

Stage III

During Stage III the data were collected by written questionnaire first, and by one-to-one conversational-type interviews second. The way in which a participant answered and discussed answers to the written questionnaire directed impromptu probes on my part.

The informal in-depth interviewing is described below taken from Taylor and Bogdan (1984):

In stark contrast to structured interviewing, qualitative interviewing is flexible and dynamic. Qualitative interviewing has been referred to as nondirective, unstructured, non-standardized, and open-ended interviewing. We use the phrase "in-depth interviewing" to refer to this qualitative research method. By in-depth qualitative interviewing we mean repeated face-to-face encounters between the researcher and informants directed toward understanding informants' perspectives on their lives, experiences, or situations as expressed in their own words. The in-depth interview is modeled after a conversation between equals, rather than a formal question-and-answer exchange. Far from being a robot-like data collector, the interviewer, not an interview schedule or protocol, is the research tool. The role entails not merely obtaining answers, but learning what questions to ask and how to ask them (p. 77).

The informal in-depth interview was combined with the intent to acquire a retrospective life history on each pushout as it had to do with his/her educational experience. What distinguished the educational life history from a popular autobiography was that the researcher actively solicited the student's experiences that affected his/her education but also constructed the life history trying to understand the participants' meaning systems. Howard Becker (1966) described the role of researcher in sociological life histories:

The sociologist who gathers a life history takes steps to ensure that it covers everything we want to know, that no important fact or event is slighted, that what purports to be factual squares with available evidence and that the subject's interpretations are honestly given. The sociologist keeps the subject oriented to the questions sociology is interested in, asks him about events that require amplification, tries to make the story told jibe with matters of official record and with material furnished by others familiar with the person, event, or place being described. He keeps the game honest for us (p. 15).

The interview situation from the researcher standpoint was being nonjudgmental, letting people talk, paying attention and being sensitive

to what was being said, probing and cross checking information (Taylor and Bogdan, 1984). These interviews were taped and then transcribed word for word in a private setting.

The steps in Stage III are summarized below:

1. Student was pinpointed by an educational counselor as one willing to talk openly about his/her educational experience. The directive to the counselor was to choose a non-handicapped student male or female, black or white. Gender and race was considered only to acquire the most representative population.

2. Counselor gained teacher approval for student's time away from class.

3. I acquired principal approval to proceed with interviews.

4. I gained both student and parent informed consent signatures.

5. I met with and encouraged student during the writing of the formal questionnaire. Student might need help in reading or word definitions; student was encouraged to discuss questions and answers during the writing process.

6. Student and I arranged for first informal interview which began with a conversation directed by answers on the formal questionnaire.

7. I met with the student's teacher in this same time frame to request information concerning student's leaving class for interview.

8. The number of interviews per week was dependent upon the student's ability to complete classroom assignments and to stay current in his/her class work. Care was taken that students not be penalized in any way for participating in the research project.

9. Minimal rewards (such as a favorite candy) were shared at the end of some sessions to encourage further participation. The student, parent, teacher and counselor were initially informed that the participant could withdraw at any time with no adverse consequences.

10. Participant was informed before each interviewing session of the type of taping being used.

11. I took informal notes during the interviewing session, recording ideas and questions to pursue for the next taping session.

12. As soon as typed transcripts were available, I read and reread and compared the data to past transcripts in the ongoing analysis and thematizing process.

13. I searched for "key events" in the retrospective life history that were referred to over and over during different interviews.

14. I was able to verify events by soliciting yes, no answers from teachers and counselors who were identified only as staff by request of the Human Subjects Committee.

15. I accessed school files to verify events at school by written consent of parent and school principal.

16. The length of time and the number of interviews per participant were dependent upon the amount of repetition of information as explained by Goetz and LeCompte (1987).

Stage IV

Stage IV was the inductive search for recurring themes in the data according to methods described by Goetz and LeCompte (1987). The formal analysis was the grouping of themes in the pooled data. The informal analysis was the writing of each student's narrative while looking for key events, visual overlays, and outcome in the student's retrospective life history.

The data were interpreted and analyzed in three phases. The first phase was a search, while writing the narratives for key events and visual overlays, that were backed by actual quotations from each participant. After the narratives were written, each was read to the participant for verification (see Appendix E for member checks). The second phase was coding the data according to key words, collapsing categories into major groupings, and thematizing using major group

headings. The third phase was linking the data to four theoretical frameworks and interpreting how the pushout adopts the "School is not for me" meaning system.

First, I will give an example of "search for key events." When I began the interview process with Pam Walker, I knew that she had received only 1 hour of credit during her sophomore year. She had at one time been an A student, now she was an F student. There were many events in her educational life history that were of importance. But in reading and rereading her transcripts, I discovered the key event unique in her narrative was a major move from North to South by her family when Pam was in the fifth grade. During many interviews conducted over a 5-month period of time, she referred to and compared attitudes concerning diverse issues, such as money, work, men, and teachers to "before the move" and "after the move."

The second phase was coding the transcriptions using key words. As an example, key words such as mother, father, grandmother, peer groups, illegal substances, teachers, etc. were used to sort critical data from extraneous transcript. The data were then collapsed into categories that incorporated several coding word groupings.

"Family" would include code word grouping of mother, father, siblings, step-family members, etc. Major themes concerning school from all the participants were pooled to gain an understanding about students' meaning systems concerning teacher attitudes, school policy, illegal substances and gang/peer groups and more.

Finally, the school themes were compared to see where there was consensus and where there were diverse opinions in the pooled data. Interpretation of how the meaning system of the pushout was derived through social interaction was linked to social theory.

This chapter presented a step-by-step methodology that included giving a written questionnaire, conducting in-depth interviews with four participants, reading and rereading written transcripts of taped

data, writing narratives including supporting quotations from each participant, running member checks, and, finally, pooling data to discover emerging themes. For analysis, the themes were compared to conclusions from three dissertation studies that were in the student voice. The study was then compared to four social theories.

Chapter V, after a brief introduction, presented the following for each participant: (1) a brief description, (2) a narrative theme in bold print, (3) the narrative representing the student perspective, and (4) discussion beginning with key events from the students history. For Chapter VI, the data were pooled looking for emerging themes.

CHAPTER V

IN THE STUDENT VOICE

INTRODUCTION TO STUDENT NARRATIVES

The data from multiple interviews, representing each participant, is presented in the first section of this chapter in a narrative form written as though the student himself/herself were speaking. I wrote each narrative to represent the transcript as closely as possible deleting large amounts of extraneous material. The reader must realize that information collected by multiple interviews does not flow as one story. Incorporated into the text of each narrative are the actual word-for-word transcripts, single spaced, that support as evidence the narrative which I present. I have included data about family and outside events, experienced by the student, when those events had a bearing on how the student was feeling about school. I included minimal descriptive material for each student, believing that the descriptors provided on pushouts attending A.C.L. to be more relevant to the study. Each of these students had self esteem problems, each was believed to have an internal locus of control, each had at least an adequate I.Q., each was non-identified Special Education (label). The age range was from 14 to 19. Three of the four had been retained at least 1 year in the early grades. Each participant represented major behavioral problems in the public school classroom. The student names, as well as the Knox County school names are pseudonyms, with the exception of A.C.L. already documented by name in the literature.

The sentences in bold type, preceding each narrative, present the themes of each students' history. I chose to write the stories in the first person, singular, to present the data in the student voice and from the student perspective. These short narratives, however, represent up to ten interviews per participant. For Pam Walker it took

a period of 5 months to gather the key points as written in her narrative. This student was not talkative, giving only bits and pieces of information, even though she was willing to share her history. I took many pieces of information from different interviews and sequenced them into a flowing narrative. Even though I interviewed Iesha fewer times than I did Pam, there was much more extraneous material to sort through for Iesha. She was more talkative in her description.

D.J. represents the mobility of this population and the resulting difficulty of access once a student leaves the formal school setting. In the process of interviewing D.J., he left A.C.L. and was placed back in the regular school classroom. He described his decision to break the rules in an effort to be placed again at A.C.L. He risked being sent to Juvenile (Juvenile Detention) in order to be recommended a second time to the alternative school. He did so well at A.C.L., he was again placed in a local high school. In the tenth grade, he walked out of school and never returned. He then moved to North Carolina. D.J. returned to Knoxville before my other interviews were completed. At that time, I was able to interview D.J. three more times. Before the data were written, D.J. had moved to South Carolina.

Access to the pushout population was a particular problem in my getting data from the African-American population. Of 120 students attending A.C.L. when the Phase II interviews were taken, only two students represented African-American males who were not identified as Special Education. Each student agreed to the interviewing process and took consent forms home for parental approval. One student never returned the signed form even though he was reminded daily to do so. The second student returned the signed form, finally, after a long stay at his grandmother's house. These two students were then expelled from school for weeks at a time, eliminating any chance for interviews. One of these two was to be a fifth participant in the study. The African-American male pushout is not represented in the data which

follows. The participant, Iesha, represents the African American female.

PAM'S STORY - PARTICIPANT 1

Participant Description

Pam Walker (P.W.) was white, 17 years old and in the twelfth grade at the time the interviews took place. Habitually absent in public high school, she lost all credit except for one unit for her entire sophomore year. She lived with both parents. Her father and mother both completed high school and some college. The father was a supervisor with Bendix Corporation and her mother was a secretary at a local hospital. Pam worked up to 20 hours per week. She had held several positions since beginning work at age 15. She reported never using drugs. Her G.P.A. (Grade Point Average) at regular school was F. Her G.P.A. at the alternative school at the time the formal questionnaire was taken was an A or B. I knew when I began the interview process that Pam was labeled a School Phobic and that school truancy was a major problem. She openly voiced her hatred for public high school. It puzzled me how an all A student could become so angered at school and at teachers to allow herself to "flunk out." She was obviously a capable student. I discovered the key event in her retrospective life history that led to her "School is not for me" meaning perspective after five months of weekly interviews. Here is Pam's story.

Narrative Theme

After the Move, School was Never the Same Again!

Narrative

When I was in the fifth grade, my father got laid off from his job in Detroit. Until then, I was very happy both in school and at home. I went to a private school where I was the center of attention. I did very well--an all A student. At home I was daddy's little girl.

Then, we moved south to Tennessee. I will never forget how awful that first day of school was for me. My parents decided that I should take my fifth grade end-of-year exams in the new school. I was an outsider and terrified. On that first day, I was called a "Yankee" by the other kids. I got in a fight with another girl who pulled clumps of hair out of my head. School was never the same again. I was always on the outside looking in!

At home too, I was no longer treated in a special way by my father. I guess, looking back, that he was probably busy in his new job.

P.W.: So if I go to my dad, he says, "Go to your mom." I don't see my dad a whole lot. I don't see my dad much. He's gone when I get up. I'm gone when he gets home from work. Opposite schedules.

For most of my school years, I was still a good student. But I did think the teachers were unfair. They had their favorites and I was no longer one of them. I guess what I hated the most was that everyone labels everyone. I got categorized by friends, by teachers, by the company I kept, by the clothes I wore, by what I said, by what I did. See, first I hung out with the Preps. They had rules I didn't agree with. It was really hard to live up to the Prep's standards. I "had to have the right boyfriend, he had to have the right car, he had to wear the right clothes along with me, parents had to have the right profession, had to say the right things."

P.W.: In order to hang (out) with the Preps, I had to put down my own friends. I wasn't going to do that. The Hoods won't judge you by what you have, they will judge you by who you are.

I simply got tired of trying to live up to it. I was trying to be something I am not. I thought it was dishonest. "When I hung out with the Preps, there was no trouble to get into . . . they weren't into getting in trouble!"

In high school it made me feel angry to see students playing up to the teachers for good grades. I call it "kissing butt." And the teachers were so unfair.

R.K.: What about the teachers?

P.W.: They have their favorites. The people who "kiss butt."

R.K.: What about school rules?

P.W.: They had lots of rules, but no one ever got caught--no one did anything about it.

R.K.: Did you have art when you were in school?

P.W.: I tried to get in but the classes were full.

R.K.: Are you a joiner?

P.W.: No.

R.K.: Does that bother you?

P.W.: Sure doesn't, not a bit!

In high school, besides not getting into art class, I couldn't get into Pom Poms or Cheerleaders either. I knew the competitions were rigged, I didn't have a chance. The teachers were the judges and everyone knew in advance who would be the chosen ones. Because of knowing how unfair things were, I didn't participate at all.

The Preps were always chosen as teacher's pets and cheerleaders. Because I thought the Preps were uppity, I began making friends with the Hoods. Where the Preps had been exclusive, the Hoods accepted everyone--and they accepted you the way you were, no pretense. I guess switching groups was when the trouble began.

P.W.: I was friends with everybody--I hung out with Metalheads, Hoods. They taught me how to lay out and not get caught. That's not hard at Jefferson High anyway. I'd lay out the first day, and then be sick the second day. Then mom would write a note. I would sneak out - out all night, meet friends. Just walk to the next subdivision or get picked up--didn't drive.

I managed that with ease, I got more brave. Next step was to skip school and hang out at one of the guy's houses during the day, just for fun. I would get back to school in time for my ride home.

Then, the Hoods invited me to join them at Brookline Mall at night. I started sneaking out of the house after my parents were asleep. I slipped out the glass sliding door, leaving it unlocked. I

knew I had to be home before 6 a.m. when my dad's alarm went off. A couple of times, I got caught by my mom. But I simply lied my way out of it.

P.W.: Occasionally mom found out. And then mom grounded me, but I was already grounded! Mom would get mad--nothing unusual. Knoxville's curfew starts at 11 or 12. When they feel like bugging somebody, they use that! Cop stopped us--called parents, getting milk.

When I got picked up by the police downtown after curfew one night, they didn't believe my story about being out to buy a quart of milk for my parents. That's when my parents finally figured out what was going on.

My sophomore year, I received only 1 credit hour. The pattern was, sneak out every night, sick every morning. Both my mom and dad work, so I could stay home alone and have a nice day. Then, I would be ready to roam again that night. I was eventually labeled a "school phobic" by a professional counselor. When I was forced to go back to school (threatened by juvenile detention), I really was sick every morning from anxiety, I guess.

A.C.L. was recommended to my parents by my professional counselor. There, everyone was friends, because we all knew we were there because of our problems. We were all in it together. I liked my teacher at A.C.L. a lot. When I first arrived on the scene, my teacher talked to me about a possible law school career. She gave me credit for being smart and encouraged me to think of college. But the teacher's aide, I really hated. She reminded me of my mother. "She treats me like I'm 8, I can't stand it!"

P.W.: She (teacher's aide) said I came in running my mouth, and I didn't say a word when I walked in the door. I walked in the door, sat in my seat, and started doing my Algebra. I told Steve this morning, "If this keeps up, I'm getting kicked out of here today."

R.K.: Does she get more demanding when Ms. Hill (pseudonym) is away?

P.W.: She nags!

R.K.: Does she nag when Ms. Hill is there?

P.W.: Not so much . . . (mumble). See, if I sit and I work on something else, uh . . . when Ms. Hill is there, I sit right in front of her. If I work on something else, she doesn't care. It's more important. Ms. Zimmer trotted her little butt over to Ms. Fine and said, "Are we supposed to be working on something else when it's journal time?"

R.K.: OK tell me about Ms. Hill.

P.W.: She understands. Ms. Fine is kinda like a mother--nag, nag, nag! This is what me and mom would get into. Mom would nag at me and nag at me. And I can't stand nagging. Mom's the kind of person when she knows you're mad, she'll just keep nagging at you and (it) makes it that much worse. When she starts picking, she don't . . . I would get so mad at my mom that I'd be afraid I'd blow up, would go to my room and she'd follow.

R.K.: Tell me more about "mom."

P.W.: Whatever your parents say, you do just the opposite--something to get you in trouble . . . The stuff I did wrong, I did to irritate my parents. Mom said, "Why do you ask my opinion? You know everything, anyway."

Narrative Discussion

Pam was the first interviewee in the pilot study. My purpose in interviewing Pam was twofold: To discover the process by which Pam became a school truant and to begin a naturalistic inquiry in an effort to develop a personal interviewing style. I was looking for her reasons to hate school. I wanted to know if that hatred was tied to any past events. I interviewed Pam at least once per week from January, 1991 until May, 1991. During that time she experienced many illnesses and one surgery; each one had to be excused by a doctor's note in order for Pam to remain in the A.C.L. program. At one point, she was dismissed from the A.C.L. roll when she walked out of school voluntarily in an extreme display of anger. She was readmitted through her mother's efforts of scheduling an M-Team (Multi-disciplinary) Meeting which is the formal process of entry for the A.C.L. program.

The key event which was the pivotal point for Pam having a positive and productive school experience to one of hate and alienation was the move her family made from Michigan to Tennessee when Pam was in the fifth grade.

In Michigan, Pam had attended a private school. She was an excellent student and a teacher favorite. She was nearing the end of the 5th grade year when the move took place. She still spoke with anger in her voice when she talked about being forced by her parents to take end of year exams in a new and unfamiliar school situation. Her first day at the new school was a disaster with Pam experiencing a physical fight with another girl. A clump of Pam's hair was pulled from her head. She remembers being called a "Yankee" by a classmate.

The reason for private school in Michigan and public school in Tennessee may have been due to the father's loss of income. It appears that they lived an affluent life style in Michigan. Another reason may have been the time frame of the move, near the end of the school year. For entry into the major private high school in Knoxville, a student must be tested to prove a high academic capability.

After the move, the family dynamically changed. It appears that Pam's father became so involved with his new work, that he gave little attention to Pam. Pam, up to this time, was daddy's little girl. It appeared that Pam's father became aloof and the mother took the role of guiding parent. Pam described her mother as not dealing well with stress. After the move, her mother would borrow money from Pam in order to go on major spending sprees. Pam said, she decided then, that she would never live like that (implication being without enough money for what she wanted). As soon as Pam was able to work, she always had after-school jobs. As Pam said, "No trouble getting to work on time, only trouble getting to school on time. Can't get fired from school (stated with humor and sarcasm)."

"Money" was a symbol that aroused anger for Pam. When I tried to understand Pam's meaning system about money, I remained confused. Tied to a meaning perspective of money was (1) Preps, (2) Labels, (3) Wasteful spending, (4) Allowance, and (5) Father--daughter

relationship. I will describe this meaning from Pam by giving some examples from her interviews.

"Money" triggered memories of Preps being given daily allowances by their fathers. She described a young female friend in a frenzy to spend that day's allowance so that her daddy would give her more money the next day. Her description of labels from the narrative includes words like "the right house, the right car, the right clothes" and also speaks to teacher prejudice as well as to the Preps. [This anger is to be compared with similar statements by Iesha, Participant 3, who lived in the housing projects. To find narratives so close in content from such a diverse S.E.S. was a surprise.] She described wasteful spending that reminded her of how her mother acted directly after the move South.

"Money" also triggered memories of how her female friends would use clothes to compete for boy's attention in a competition that obviously angered her. She described inviting one friend to meet her at the mall, and the anger Pam felt because her friend was so dressed up! Pam spoke about clothes as status symbols and competition. According to Pam, the friend had dressed this way consciously trying to look better than Pam.

During the interviewing process, Pam referred to "before the move" and "after the move" in discussing many different subject areas. One was the way in which her mother dealt with the stress of the move, another was the difference at school, one was Pam's experience with the Preps, who flashed their money and purchasing power in front of their peers in order to maintain their position.

It appeared that Pam aspired to be a Prep, but was never accepted in the circle. [This perspective was described by Pam's School Counselor.] It appeared that both in school and in family, she experienced alienation. In high school, she tried out for Pom Poms and refused to try out for cheerleader saying that the competitions were

rigged so that teacher favorites were the winners. It was obvious to her that she was no longer a teacher favorite.

From Pam's description, one would assume that there were only two peer groups in her high school with which to associate. She called the Preps dishonest, pointing out that they were acting out the status game of wealth. The other group, called both Hoods and Metalheads, would accept you for what you are--no pretense. She never described them as "druggies" nor did she include anything negative in her description. Several times, she stated that the Hoods would accept anyone.

Once Pam made the choice of identifying with the Hoods, her meaning perspective of school had to change. The Hoods were anti-school. The Preps were pro-school. With Pam's association with the Hoods came the beginning of her truancy. She described a learning process whereby the Hoods taught her how to skip school and not get caught, a peer group socialization process. It appeared that instead of putting forth effort to pass her academic subjects, her focus became how to outsmart school authorities beginning with the "cop" in the school parking lot. She said that she felt so smart for laying out and not getting caught. It appears that she did not consider the long term effects.

"What I did, I did to irritate my parents!" Beating the system became the challenge in place of school work as challenge. The Hoods had day time gathering places and night time gathering places. In order to spend time with her new friends, she began sneaking out of the house at night. She was forced to lie to her mother on a couple of occasions to cover her tracks. This dishonesty was a drastic change in meaning perspectives. After all, it was because the Preps were dishonest that she chose to join the Hoods.

The symbolic interaction became anti-school, anti-teacher, anti-cop, anti-parent, anti-Prep and anti-men. She described men as pigs in regard to perceived sexual harassment to herself and favoritism shown to

guys in the work place. Her attitude toward men did not fit the picture as well as the anti-school, anti-teacher mindset. It may be that for Pam, men were perceived to be authority figures and she was definitely anti-authority figure.

The issues of Preps and their symbol of being the monied class, her mother's misuse of family funds as a stress release, her friend's need to look better than Pam when they went to the Mall, and teacher favoritism were full of rich description in the interviews. I call these visual overlays as they appear to have connections one to another in Pam's storage of symbols. She justified personal interaction choices based on how she interpreted actions mentioned above.

Pam's willingness to accept failure in school paralleled her desire to belong. Sneaking out from the house at night left her with no desire to attend school in the daytime. She feigned illness for so long that she became ill at the thought of school. [Two other participants, Iesha and Delores described a similar behavior, but not to this extreme.]

Pam liked A.C.L. She said that they all leaned on each other like a crutch because they all knew they were there because of problems. Ironically, Pam acted like a Prep at A.C.L. She was described by a staff member as Barbie-Doll cute, fashionable clothes, not looking the part of a dropout. She was one of very few who had her own car. She said she never thought about the Hoods anymore. Never gave them a thought. The reason was that her mom no longer grounded her.

D.J.'S STORY - PARTICIPANT 2

Participant Description

D.J. was 19 at the time of the interview. He was in the tenth grade when he walked away from public high school. He had long blond hair and appeared both shy and sensitive. He described himself as a "loner." He was slight in build, medium height and quite thin. When I

first met D.J., it was common knowledge at school that D.J. lived with his father in a log cabin with no running water. D.J. worked cleaning office spaces at night. His father expected D.J. to give him all of his money for car payments and later for trailer payments.

Narrative Theme

Drugs were part of my family life. My mom is my best friend. "My mom, she's an alcoholic for as long as I can remember."

Narrative

I was told that as a newborn infant, my mom blew marijuana smoke through a straw into my face to calm me down and stop my crying. Ironical, isn't it, that most of my problems in school have been over smoking or drugs?

I didn't understand, when I first went to school, why there were rules against smoking.

D.J.: I remember the first time I was smoking it was in the third grade and I would come home everyday and my mom and I would smoke and watch cartoons and stuff and then I had to get in the shower before my dad got home. But . . .

R.K.: So your mom is the first one to give you pot?

D.J.: As far as I can remember . . . they say I did it when I was in the crib to help me go to sleep. I don't know.

R.K.: She would do it through a straw.

D.J.: Yea, my mom. My mom said my dad did it and my dad said my mom did it. I know my dad didn't do it because I use to have to take a shower and put eye drops in so (pause) so I know it was my mom. It was my mom.

My favorite time was smoking pot and watching cartoons. I must have been 8 years old. My worst time was being hunkered down in a corner with my arms up over my head, protecting myself from family fights--fights between my mom and dad. When things were really bad, I would run away to the woods by my house and sometimes stay overnight. A friend and I lit a fire contained by a tire one time, and I had to get my mom to help put the fire out.

I hate fights. I always wanted people to get along well with each other and to show some kindness for one another. An early memory of

mine is of watching my dad hold a gun to my mom's head and threaten her while she was brushing her hair in front of the mirror. Neither she nor I knew whether the gun was loaded or not. My dad held the gun at her temple so that she could see it in the mirror. He said, "This could kill you anytime."

D.J.: In my family everybody hates everybody. Everybody is always talking about everybody. Putting down each other. Everybody is better than everybody else. I will never make anything out of myself. What else, John? They don't want John around unless they need something done. Like mowing the yard, and doing the dishes, whatever. The weekend he was graduating, instead of going out and partying, we were going to go back to my grandmother's house and just sit around and listen to music and whatever, we did end up not going partying anyway, but she said I don't need him this weekend. I don't have any use for him this weekend. That is how they are . . . no use for you anymore.

At first my parents fought over who would get me because they wanted me. Now they fight over who gets me because no one wants me.

When I was quite young, 5 or 6, my mom and I moved to California. I can just barely remember school there. It was pretty good. The playground was on the beach and I used to mess around with the girls. That was a pretty happy time.

My dad came on my birthday, maybe my sixth birthday, to bring me and my mom back to Tennessee.

D.J.: Brought me and my mom back. What I heard was . . . what my mamaw says was that the reason my mom got married back with him was because he broke into a pharmacy and he was looking to go to jail, so she came back with him to marry him to keep him out of jail. That is what mamaw says.

My mom has had it rough She's an alcoholic for as long as I can remember. Both my dad and my step dad threaten her, smack her silly. One time I stood up for her against my step dad. That's when I got kicked out of the house.

D.J.: This was why I left my mom's house. Because . . . so I was taking up for my mom and then she said, she was trying to convince me not to do that and stuff. And I told her "F___ you" and so a couple of days later and everything was alright and everything so I went to visit my aunt and uncle who were at my grandmother's house, Nanny--not mamaw and they called me up and everything and I all in a good mood and everything they called me up and my mom said, "You are going to have to find somewhere else to live. We can't put

up with you anymore." I was thinking it was partially because they could not afford to keep their drinking habit up and keep me too. But they said it was because I told my mom "F___ you," that is not a very good reason because I was taking up for her. She is still in the same situation--same situation. Now she can't . . . every time she tries to get a bite to eat she pukes. She can't eat. She has voices in her head. I use to have voices in my head too, but I got rid of them. The medicine may have done that for me.

Maybe "being between my mom, my dad, and my grandmother, and my other grandmother and all around in a circle," maybe that affected my time at school. Early on, I was first in school in Tennessee, then in New Orleans and California, and then back to Tennessee. "I went to Creston, Madison, Oakview Middle, Madison, Jefferson, and A.C.L." two different times. But I thought nothing really bothered me about all the school moves.

I always had trouble with math; I was held back in the third grade--give a social pass. But all my problems in school had to do with smoking or having pot or whiteout on me. I never blamed teachers or school for that.

Teachers do play favorites to Preps and Jocks and that sort. In one math class I noticed that Jocks never attended but still passed. Of course the math teacher was a coach! I figured maybe the Jocks were smart enough to pass the tests without having to study much. Maybe they were smart in math. That never bothered me even though I heard other kids talking about it. What did bother me was that most teachers didn't like people with long hair. And I always had long hair! They just stereotype, I guess.

When I finally walked away from school, it was because I wouldn't fight the punks at Madison. "They chase you around everywhere and try to beat you up."

D.J.: Like one time at Madison this big old black guy, his dad taught martial arts, and he was a black belt and he just came up to me and said, "I heard you were in my locker." I said, "Where is your locker?" He pointed right behind me and said, "Right there." I looked around and turned back around and he had all these rings and went "pow" and I turned around and he hit me in the back of the head and I got up. And the office was about from here to there, and I

said you are not worth me going to juvenile over and I told on him, but he was a football guy and they were in favor of him, you know, and they didn't want to suspend either one of us.

I just started laying out because I didn't want to fight. I thought if I reported the incident that I would be the one to end up in juvenile. And the punk simply wasn't worth that. No one ever called my dad about the cuts because we didn't have a phone.

R.K.: Did they ever call and wonder why you were not in school?

D.J.: I don't know I was at my dad's.

R.K.: So nobody ever tracked you to find out why you were not at school? You could just walk out the door and that was the end of it and nobody ever said anything.

D.J.: Yeah, they never did bother me. I think after a while my dad went down there or something, I don't know I wasn't there I went to my grandma's.

R.K.: What grade were you in when you left?

D.J.: Tenth or eleventh. I don't know.

My dad didn't care whether I went to school or not anyway. He thought I should be working to help him make trailer payments and pay board and room to help him out. He doesn't want me to go away to school, but I guess it would be alright with him if I go to U.T. or Mississippi State. He doesn't value education like my mom does though.

I never blamed the schools for my problems, except maybe for not stopping the fights. I never saw any fights at A.C.L. Things were different there. I did my work there, but I always had help. I thought the teachers there were my friends and that they wanted me to succeed. I believe I would have graduated regular rather than G.E.D. if they would only have let me finish there. But they were good about explaining why they needed to send me back to regular school. I just couldn't fight. My dad blamed me for not fighting, but I just couldn't fight.

Narrative Discussion

For D.J., the key event was being born into a household where acceptable behavior was drug and alcohol use and abuse. After his

parents divorced a second time, no one wanted him including his grandparents.

D.J.'s best memory is coming home from school to watch cartoons and to smoke pot with his mom. D.J.'s worst memory is protecting his head and body while his parents fight. His mom is his best friend. His mom has been an alcoholic for as long as he can remember. These seeming inconsistencies to an outsider appear to be integrated in the meaning system as little boy's perception versus adult perception. Both of these statements are the "truth" for this participant.

D.J.'s reason for walking away from school was school fights (threats). A school jock was waiting for him at his locker one day and slammed D.J. around a bit. D.J. would not fight back because he had the most to lose. He was already in trouble with the court system on drug charges and needed to keep his record clean. Besides, no principal would take his word over the word of one of the Jocks. [During the member check, D.J. said that, in fact, he did report the incident to the principal who chose to do nothing about the incident. The Jock was a black-belt in karate, well respected at school.]

D.J. expected stereotyping by teachers, especially over his long hair. D.J. expected to be treated like a druggie because of his several expulsions from school over illegal substances. He did not participate in school activities, only wishing to get school over so he could go home. But home changed a lot. He sometimes lived with his mother and stepfather. He sometimes lived with one grandmother and then with the other grandmother. He sometimes lived with his father, sometimes with his stepfather. He had problems with both father and stepfather, concerning the perceived abuse of his mother by the two. His father thought D.J. should quit school and go to work. His mother always supported D.J.'s staying in school. D.J.'s perception was that his mom could not afford to support him and her alcoholism too. His stepfather was also a heavy drinker.

As D.J. spoke about his mother, his conflict concerning how to represent her was evident. The conflicting symbols of good mother as best friend and bad mother as alcoholic were in direct opposition.

When school expelled him for something he accepted as normal behavior, smoking, he was rejected again, this time by social group rather than by family. School, then, promoted the low self-esteem syndrome that he brought with him to school.

There were conflicting meaning systems on substance abuse evident everywhere. School rules versus family use, alcoholic mother versus best friend, were other conflicts in D.J.'s meaning system.

A staff member at A.C.L. shared a story about D.J. which added more dissonance to D.J.'s meaning perspective about "father." She said she knew D.J.'s father cared about him very much. At one time, D.J. was in trouble at A.C.L. D.J. asked for arrangements to be made for him to go to the runaway shelter fearing his father's punishment if he went home. The staff member, new at her job, was terrified of informing the father about the arrangements. When D.J.'s father arrived at school and was informed of D.J.'s plan, the father's eyes filled with tears. He said he would go along with D.J.'s decision.

This inconsistency was typical as I interviewed pushouts. D.J. represented his father as a drug user, thief, abuser of his mother: A father who didn't care about D.J. The tears in his father's eyes represented another's perspective.

The important point here is that D.J. and others described sitting in school as passive learners, disengaged from the teaching method in place, not able to concentrate because of worries at home. His poor academic record was often labeled as "boredom" when in fact there were more important issues for him to deal with in terms of his personal survival. His non-participation in school activities was another risk factor pinpointed by Kronick and Hargis (1990).

Once the school authorities labeled D.J. as a druggie, even though he was passive and not a troublemaker, he was treated like one. He was perceived to be low S.E.S. (no running water, no phone, sometimes no electricity). This, too, gives the pushout little status at school where white, middle class standards prevail.

D.J. couldn't change his family and he couldn't seem to change his addiction to nicotine, even though he tried. He felt some success at both Jefferson High and at A.C.L., but was continuously getting caught with illegal substances at school. He had trouble believing that carrying a pack of cigarettes to school could get him expelled. He believed smoking to be acceptable, normal behavior. He never understood why there should be a school rule against smoking. After all, he was addicted. When he got the "jitters" in the classroom, he needed a cigarette in the worst way.

He walked away from school. That was his choice. He didn't blame school for his failure nor for not following up on his absences. His father didn't have a phone.

IESHA'S STORY - PARTICIPANT 3

Participant Description

Iesha (I.) is a 14 year old African American who lived in the housing projects. Her family was on welfare. She had jet black hair--nicely styled, sparkling black eyes, light brown skin, a small gold leaf in her left nostril. She was average height and size. She was highly verbal telling her stories with the visual details of an artist.

Narrative Theme

Violence is Where the Action is!

Narrative

You may have played with Barbie Dolls for your fun, but I want to be where the action is. I love violence.

R.K.: So how many times did you see that happen in the projects?

I.: I seen, I seen at least 25 people shot. And I seen about 6 people die.

R.K.: Do you think it was all drug related? Or were there . . .

I.: Well, most of them were all different reasons. I seen my sister's boyfriend die because some guys called him "nigger" and they started fighting and some guy just broke out with a gun and started shooting. Then . . .

R.K.: What was the first fight in school that you got in trouble for?

I.: It was in the fifth grade. This girl called me out by name and talking about my uncle. And my uncle had died that year. He had got killed. And she said, "Your uncle stinks and your mother smells. Your mother went to heaven and your uncle went to hell." And it just got to me and I just grabbed her hair and rammed her head into a brick wall and I got in trouble for it. All they did was suspend me for 15 days.

I watched as my sister's boyfriend got shot in the stomach. I watched as some of my friends found a dead body in this guy's backyard.

R.K.: In the yard you mean?

I.: No, it was in an electrical box. And he went up to get his keys out of his car cause he left them in his car. He was coming back and he just happened to glance in the electrical box and he seen a foot. He thought maybe it was a foot stuck in there or something, hurt or something, so he ran and opened it up and he just--it just shocked him. He called the police and the police questioned him cause they thought he did it, cause he found it. Well, he got . . . they let him go. They hassled him and hassled him. And I seen them pulling that body out of that electrical box, and I seen it when it was in there and the man had been beat, had big old gashes out of his head. It looked like someone had broke baseball bats on him, it looked like someone took a whip and whipped his back, it was all these slashes all over his back. He was not blue, he was not green, he was red. And he had been there for like a day and a half. And his mom . . . his brother had got kill two days before; they found his body.

During a drug deal, I saw another man get splattered against a dumpster. The police came and drew the chalk line around the splattered remains of the body so that we, in the neighborhood, were reminded of the killing everyday until the weather finally washed the chalk away.

I.: There was a guy--it was on Conright about 5 years ago. I was walking down the street and he was supposed to have picked up someone's drugs. Well, this guy named Ricardo, he had just got a new gun; a sawed off shotgun, and he shot the guy in the back of the head. And he fell in the middle of the street, but it was like the dumpster was right here and he was right here and he shot him right here and, I mean, the whole back of his head was on (the dumpster--pause in tape) magic marker before the police got here and where his

brains were went up like this and outlined it and after the police washed it down, they chalked the body after they washed all the blood down and after they washed the blood off the dumpster, they seen this mark and it was like someone who done this has like no sense. No one told on Ricardo because Ricardo was real crazy. They finally caught up with him, but, I mean, after that happened, I mean, it just tripped everybody's mind out. And they just chalked it out and left. I seen someone poured red paint all over the chalk line. Painted it red. If you go on Dugan today you can see where the red was; the paint. And they painted the inside of that line.

Just recently, there were four children caught in a terrible fire while their mothers were away from the building. I knew it was over a drug deal gone bad before the police ever arrived to question people. That is the way it is in the projects. Everybody knows everybody else's business. You know whose into drugs and where to buy them if you want them. You know all of the gangs and who belongs and which gangs get along and those that don't.

R.K.: And he blew up a house?

I.: Yeah, you heard about Sunshine Heights about killing them kids? Yeah, he did it.

R.K.: So that is just recently? Did the people know who did it?

I.: Yeah, Anton is locked up. They got him and they got her cousin too. He had something to do with it. They got him at the funeral.

R.K.: So two children were hurt and two . . .

I.: The third one died Tuesday.

R.K.: And why did this guy do this?

I.: Because they said Karen took his dope. Karen did not take it. Andrew took it. And Andrew was selling it and her, Andrew, hid it under a rock and they said Karen came and got it from out from under the rock. And she said that she did not have it, that she was walking to the store. And she left "Big Man" with the kids and they said the next thing they know they was all asleep and nobody heard him come in the house, but he came in the house and put the couch, chair, and loveseat together. Went in David's bedroom, it was her little brother and took his clothes out of his drawer and dumped them in there. Went in there and went in her kitchen and got some bleach and he put her TV, stereo, she had four TVs in her house. He put them all around the couch and loveseat and put the stereo right in the middle. He had some gas with him. He put gasoline all around and bleach all the way around it. Then, as he was walking out the door, he flipped a cigarette in there. And he did not throw a cocktail bomb, that is what made the explosion, the TV. All that was so hot and it impacted it one time, and that is what exploded. All of them kids would have been dead if it had not been for "Big Man" dropping them kids out that window. They don't know now if he going to live or die.

R.K.: So you live close to where that happened?

I.: No, that happened on the other side of town. But I know people who did it.

R.K.: So you are telling me that this is what life has been like?

I.: Yeah.

R.K.: For you?

I.: All my life I have been around violence!

If you live in the projects, the rules are different from those on the outside. I have been lucky enough to have had a few teachers who lived in the projects. They understand. When I attended Kingston, school went pretty well for me. The reason was that we were all poor and there was a pretty even mix of black and white. The same groups that had come to an understanding in the neighborhood carried that same understanding over to school. We respected each other and got along with each other.

Then, school officials closed Kingston down over integration issues. I was forced to go to Jefferson Middle School--The most racist, richest school in the entire system. I am labeled as black because my father is black, my mother is white.

During that year at Jefferson Middle, I attended only 54 days out of the entire year and they still passed me. The white rich kids knew exactly what to say to get me to see red. When I see red, I am physical and out of control. There is no time to think, I just fight!

My dad raised me to accept people for who they are as individuals, and not see color. Well, at Jefferson Middle, I was called "nigger," "nigger-honkie," and "nigger-ghonkie." My mom was called "nigger-lover." The rich kids use to come and put their heavy gold chain necklaces in my face and report to me how much they cost at the same time mentioning that my family was probably on welfare. I was expelled so many times, but they wouldn't transfer me to another school or let me out. They kept saying they would deal with the problems themselves. They didn't want anyone to know just how bad things were. Or else they didn't care. They threatened me with 24 hour treatment which means

lock-up in a mental ward with no visitation. They threatened me with juvenile detention, but they wouldn't let me out of Jefferson Middle.

It was so bad, I even had teachers there announce at the beginning of a school year, "You blacks, leave me alone and stay out of my face. I don't want any trouble from you, see, because I don't like you very much."

My mom was there for me through all of this.

I.: Well, my mom, she don't put up with it. That is why she has to know where I go and that is why I ain't been out in the projects. I stay out there with my sister out there, but I got to be in the house. I am not allowed to go outside, you know, without my sister. So she ain't been letting me in the projects lately.

R.K.: That is an effort to keep you out of gang wars?

I.: Yeah, but she knows I am not going . . . I might fight but I am on probation. I really can't--I suppose to come in the house at 7:00 anyway.

R.K.: Really is that what the rules are?

I.: Yeah.

R.K.: What are some of the other probation rules?

I.: No drinking, no fight, not miss school; we have to go to school everyday, no feuding at home, if you get out of the way with your parents, then, they call and tell your probation officer. They will lock you up. You have to be home at curfew. You have to report to your probation officer if you going to be out of town. You can't go out of town without your probation officer's permission. You have to call two weeks before you going. No parties, no clubs, can't be around violence, can't be around anyone drinking. If you get caught at the scene of a crime, get caught in a club, you get locked up for 30 days.

My mom, she understands racism and hate. When I would lose my temper in official meetings in front of school principals, she would try to get me to respect my elders.

I am 14 years old. I am a gang member. I have tried both alcohol and drugs. I have been picked up by the police. I have spent time in juvenile detention. I have been expelled from and cannot attend most schools in the Knox County School System. I have a probation officer assigned by the courts. I have experienced day treatment at a mental health center. I have experienced (severe) depression.

Finally, at the end of 1992, I was released from Jefferson Middle to attend A.C.L. I have not had one incident at this school and the

academic year is more than half over. I am getting good grades again. I am attending school every day unless I am really sick. I get along well with my teacher, counselor, aide and classmates. My therapist is now a counselor at this school. I am still under treatment for depression.

When I look back at my early school years, I wonder if some of that pattern doesn't affect my schooling now. During my first 4 years of school, I spent the first half of every year in the North (Ohio) and the last half of every year in the South (Tennessee). The reason that happened was because my mom and dad were divorced and my dad lived in Ohio. Every summer I went to live with my dad. When school started in the fall, I was never ready to give up my friends and return home. So mom would let me stay until Christmas, but she wanted me home for Christmas. Then I would attend the remainder of the academic year in Tennessee.

This worked well for me because the grades are more advanced in the North. Third grade in the North is similar to fourth grade in the South. That meant that I worked hard the first half of each academic year and coasted through the last half. I'm really smart, especially in math. So I never had trouble in school until I met racism face-to-face. My first encounter in school was when my teacher accused me of poor speech. She told me I talked funny and put me in Resource. There were two teachers who used to argue over whether I was "slow" or "smart." But I remember doing my older sisters' homework for them, wondering why they thought it was difficult.

[Iesha, for all of her seeming maturity, is still only 14 years old with rather unusual career goals.]

I want to be a professional football player when I grow up. I figure if I play football to get myself through college, I will study architecture so that I can earn a living when I get out. I can't draw very well, but I hear that there are computer programs that can do the

drawings for you. Or maybe I could be a professional ice-skater when I grow up. I'm a good skater!

Narrative Discussion

Iesha's key event was being born "racial" as she called it. Her father was black and a Northerner. Her mother was white and a Southerner. Iesha had been taught by her father, very early on, that the color of a person's skin did not make the person. She expected to be treated according to the symbols her father had given her.

She did quite well for 5 years, kindergarten through fourth grade, attending Ohio schools in the fall and Tennessee schools after Christmas each year. Her reasons for being able to do well were twofold: (1) Northern schools were approximately one year ahead of Southern schools; and (2) She had always done her older sisters' homework for them. She found it easy.

She generally spoke of her early teachers with love in her voice, remembering each one by name. In first grade, she was held back. She said her classmates and teachers told her she talked funny. But she remembered not being able to understand what she called "country" talk of her Southern teacher. She said it sounded to her like, "I wearing a bird mop . . .," nonsensical combinations of words that meant nothing to her. Putting her in "Resource" when she had always been in accelerated classes was one visual overlay of teacher unfairness. But the ultimate unfairness came from what Iesha called "racial" when the projects school was closed and she was forced to attend the white, west-end middle school, the rich school to Iesha.

Her reports of teacher harassment because of her being black were full of visual description. She spoke in detail of an incident where a school helper, probably a parent, caused her and her best friend to be separated into different classes. Iesha believed that this happened because her friend was white.

Another highly descriptive episode was one where Iesha hit a teacher over the head with a lunch tray for separating her from the same white friend. She was told to sit next to a boy with body odor. The anger that was triggered was similar to other episodes interpreted as black, white issues.

Iesha also described having to wear her brother's coat in school because her teacher said she was dressed inappropriately. Iesha said that the incident stemmed from a white boy complimenting her on her outfit that day.

All of the violence, suicides, killings, and murders, were described in great detail. She could recall word for word the telephone conversation she had with her boyfriend just before he shot himself in the head. She blamed herself for his death, as he had called wanting to come and pick her up for a party and she had asked him to wait until later in the evening. Before he was scheduled to arrive, he had killed himself. She is in treatment for severe depression because of all of the violence she has experienced in the last year.

School authorities said she was unruly and had a bad attitude. She reported, however, that they would suspend her without listening to her side of the story. The principal, in front of her mother, accused Iesha of being prejudiced. The mother asked him how he thought Iesha could be prejudiced with a mother as white as she was!

Being black was not the only "key event" for Iesha. Being from the Projects and being from a family on welfare were tied together almost as the same issue. Her defense of the value systems of families living in the projects as well as her rich description of Preps at Jefferson Middle were evidence of her mindset of the "haves" and the "have nots." She also supported this meaning perspective when she described the teacher who had lived in the projects versus the teacher who could only say she understood what the Projects were like: The latter having a physician father and a lawyer husband.

Being Black, living in the projects and coming from a family on welfare were visual overlays that Iesha perceived to justify violent (unruly) behavior. She simply would not tolerate racial or welfare remarks without a fight. Suspending her from school or threatening her with 24 hour treatment meant nothing to her since she felt justified in striking out over directed comments.

It is interesting that in more than six months of nearly perfect attendance at A.C.L., she had not had one incident (verified by staff) of unruly or violent behavior.

DELORES' STORY - PARTICIPANT 4

Participant Description

Delores (D.) was 17 years of age at the time the interviews took place. She was anticipating her 18th birthday in five and one-half months so that she could "escape" the household in which she lived with her father and stepmother, brother and cousin. When I asked about why her cousin was a member of the household, she did not wish to talk about the subject except to indicate that everyone in the family knew her father and her aunt had something going. Her cousin was female, a year different in age from Delores. The cousin had already had an abortion, sometime in the past, which made Delores very angry. She did not talk about it much; she dismissed it as not being her issue.

Delores is an attractive white female: short blond hair, a very pretty smile, medium height and build. She was ready to share most any information about herself, but was concerned about protecting the identity of others. She shared information with me that she had not discussed with her teacher, school counselor or parent. She never spoke of a "best friend" other than the black males she had dated.

Narrative Theme

I Never Wanted to Hurt My Daddy!

Narrative

D.: Yeah, cause my dad is like everything to me cause he has always been there for me, always. You know how girls when they first have their first (pause) things, their mother is always there to help them through it and everything. Well my mother wasn't there it was always my dad. I had to depend on my dad for stuff.

R.K.: So what happens when you go home after school?

D.: I just . . . if my dad is home I just stay with my dad. If my dad is not home I try to find someplace else to go. Over at my friends or something. When my dad is there I want to stay there with my dad.

And then I ended up in the hospital emergency room with a blood alcohol level of 0.17. I had been beaten badly. The gold herringbone necklace that my daddy had given me had been stolen during the beating. I was caught! I had been sneaking out at night to be with my friends. We would stay up and party and talk. At first I snuck out only when my dad was away driving a truck; later, I simply made sure that I got home before 6 a.m. But now he knew what I had been up to!

[This abrupt jump from "I never wanted to hurt my daddy" as a meaning system to the meaning perspective that allowed hurting behavior apparently directed toward her father, is the inconsistency that belongs to Delores. She simply laughed at the dichotomy when we read her narrative aloud together for member check.]

R.K.: So how did you begin drinking, was that through school groups?

D.: My Black friends. I got to where I was sneaking out of the house and going over to a person's house, this guy's house, and we would stay up and party and talk.

R.K.: This was at night you sneaked out?

D.: Yeah. Well, really like two o'clock in the morning. Then I would come back at 6:00 in the morning and I would not have no sleep for two or three days, just as long as my dad was gone. So one day I got, you know, I can't handle this, I have got to go somewhere and sleep. So I went over to a friend's house cause I couldn't just keep laying out and staying at home because that was what I was doing. The days I had ISS (In-School Supervision), I went to school. I had two days of ISS. Then two days that I didn't have ISS I stayed home. I complained that I was sick when I really wasn't. I was just . . . I really did not feel sick I was just sleepy, you know, I was real sleepy. I hadn't really got drunk on alcohol except on the night my accident happened.

I guess maybe it all started when I was in the eighth grade. A whole bunch of us used to smoke pot out in the back field, right at school. I remember one time my papaw was visiting; I snuck some of his beer out of the house and shared it with my friends at school. That same year, I began sneaking beer into the house so I could drink one before I went to school in the morning. Besides liking the taste, I used it to kind of relax me.

My dad didn't drink, but he kept Jack Daniels in the house for medicine. I liked the taste so much that I would pretend to be getting a cold so dad would tell me to get a sip to soothe my throat. I was like "Man, that is some good stuff."

I started sneaking Jack Daniels and drinking pure grain alcohol. I would go to my friend's house just up the road, and we would get drunk and smoke joints. One time I took some pills along with the other, and I didn't even know what they were! That was in the eighth grade!

D.: I don't know I just loved the taste of it. And then I just started drinking it. It was like some people have coke in the morning--I wanted a beer. I was like I need that, you know cause I would have beer snuck in my house. I would have people buy them for me and I would sneak them in my house. That is what I would drink in the morning before I went to school.

For a long time in the eighth grade, I smoked a joint every morning and every lunch period along with my friends--just to get relaxed. One time, we all got caught taking pills before a history test. The pills were supposed to help us pass the test according to the guy passing them out. After we got caught, the story was that the school was going to run drug tests on all of us, so there I was in the girls' room trying to puke up those pills. The tests were never run, but all parents of involved students were called to school. I was the one accused of supplying everyone. But it wasn't me, it was one of the guys. I'm not sure anyone ever believed me though, especially my dad. When we got home from school that day, I was wanting to help cook in the

kitchen. My daddy really hurt my feelings, because he said, "No, you might put some drugs in our food or something."

In eighth grade, one of my teachers got wise. We were all sleeping in his class one day, heads down on our desks. See, smoking pot and drinking beer both enhances the effects of your mood of the day. If you are hyper, it makes you more hyper; if you are relaxed, it relaxes you more. We had all been out in the back field for lunch smoking and drinking. He would slap a ruler against a table trying to wake us up and get our attention. Then we got the lecture about using drugs. But the strange thing is, he never told anyone about the incident. He never did anything about it.

That was eighth grade. In ninth grade I was too paranoid to get into much trouble. I had entered a new school. I took my bad reputation with me so I was extra careful in ninth grade.

In tenth grade, I started hanging out with black guys. My dad is really prejudiced so I had to sneak around and be dishonest with my parents. I dated two black guys who were cousins. I went with one, Roshawn, for about 6 or 7 months. Then I met Anthony. at a restaurant one night. I have never seen anyone so handsome in my whole life. He still gives me butterflies when I see him. I never thought I would date Blacks because of the way my daddy feels, but Anthony is so gorgeous! And he makes me feel so good about myself. You know, he puts me way up on a pedestal. I can't believe he dates me.

R.K.: So do you have any . . . has your dad ever asked you why you like to date black guys?

D.: He doesn't approve of it. He gets mad every time he finds out. So I just don't want him to know. And I want to see . . . like a black guy I am going out with, I am talking to one right now, I have to sneak around, you know. I hate doing that. Because I am being dishonest with my parents. It is like the only way I can. It seems to me that black guys treat me better. They put me on a pedestal. And a white guy doesn't. It is like he don't see me for what I am.

But Anthony is the one who had me beat up. He got so jealous, especially if I talked to his cousin, the one I used to date. He was

the reason I don't trust blacks anymore. This was how the beating happened so that I ended up in the emergency room.

I had been sneaking out with this guy, Anthony, and one night he called me. He wanted to know if I had been talking to his cousin. He got real upset with me. He said, "I am coming to get you." I was excited because I was going to get out of the house. Usually when they came for me, I would get in the front seat, but he said, "You are sitting in the back seat this time because you are being punished." At this point, I thought it was a big joke. We got to Sammy's house and both cousins were there. I was leaning up against Anthony's body when Roshawn walked in. It made me feel uncomfortable with both of them in the same room, so I got up and went to the bathroom. After Roshawn left about 5 a.m., I leaned back against Anthony again. He said, "No, no, just get off me now. If you didn't want to lay on me while Roshawn was here, then get off me now." It was like a major temper tantrum. We got into a "yes" and "no" battle and I punched him really hard in the stomach. He smacked me very hard on top of my head and held me in a head lock. I fell asleep in the choke hold, I was real tired. I had only one or two beers. That night I went home.

The next day I went to Sammy's house to see Anthony. Anthony said, "What the hell are you doing here?" I said, "I came back to be with you." We laid on the couch together and slept through the entire day. After we got up, Anthony was getting ready to go to the mall when his ex-girlfriend arrived. She had had a baby by Anthony. I had never talked to her before so I thought I wouldn't like her. We hit it off real well. She and I talked everything out, but I could tell that Anthony was still really mad. He told Sammy to take me home, but I wouldn't go with him. I decided to wait for Anthony. Sammy said, "Man, come on, you know he ain't coming back for you. He didn't want to see you anyway." It was after 3:30 p.m. I was supposed to be back at school because my parents pick me up every day at that time. So I

called my mamaw's house. My cousin, the one who lives with us, told me my dad had kicked me out of the house.

Well, that was it! I just drank trying to drown my problems. I wanted to feel better and forget the mess I was in. I drank a quart of Bud and a quart of Red Bull. I got blasted. Sammy got scared and called my friend Danny to take me home. I was so drunk! I said, "Don't take me home. Take me back to Sammy's (house)." I was so drunk, I would have got out of the car while it was going rather than face my father. When we got back to Sammy's, I crawled up onto the front porch. I don't know how I got to the couch inside. I know my shoes were off and that I was about to pass out. About that time, this big black woman came in and started beating me up. She stole the gold necklace my daddy had given me. "I was weak, I couldn't do nothing cause I was just so drunk." And next thing I know, I'm in the emergency room and my daddy was there. I never wanted to hurt my daddy.

To this day, I won't tolerate anyone smacking me around. From the time my daddy remarried (I was about 6 years old) until I was 14, my stepmother "smacked me around" when my daddy wasn't around. I was 5 or 6 when my parents divorced. My worst memory is of me clinging to my daddy's legs and the police trying to drag him to jail. My daddy and I lived together for about 3 years after the divorce. He and I got real close. The police came because my mother reported that he kept her from seeing me. That was a lie!

D.: And I remember my mother called the cops on my dad cause she said that he refused to let us go with her--when he didn't. And he got put in jail and it killed me. I was holding on to my daddy's legs while they was telling him . . . I remember the exact thing. They knocked on the door, he come to the door, and I was standing behind him cause I always followed him and they told him to remove everything from his pockets--so he did. Then they said, "You are under arrest." I was holding on to him saying, "Daddy please don't leave, please don't leave me." But he had to go. It upset me really bad.

I remember how much I hated my step mom after my dad remarried. Here's the way it was: ". . . I always thought I never wanted to lose

my dad's attention or his love." I always wanted my mom (step mom) to get out of the house cause I hated her. I mean, I hated her. She made my life awful. I just wanted her out of my life. I felt like she was ruining it. I always had hatred in me for her.

D.: I hated her. I was like . . . no you are trying to take the place of my mother and you are never going to do it. I just hated her for it. I did not think she loved my dad. I was like--you don't love him you are just trying to make our life miserable.

D.: I don't know but she use to slap me around a lot. I mean I was tiny.

D.: He didn't know it until one night he was upstairs asleep and I said something about her mother. I said, "I am not going over there, that brat," talking about my uncle. Well she slapped me in the face and I was down there and she was smacking me around and my dad came down there and he got mad.

Like kids at school, I would not take any crap off anyone at school and I feel like that kind of brought it on me too. Cause, I was like . . . you know . . . I always had anger or hatred built up in me. So when I got mad at somebody, I did not hold it in, cause it was like a little bit too much. I would always end up getting in a fight. And then I carried that reputation to Madison (High School) with me.

That was my step mom. My real mom was extremely prejudiced about my dating black guys. She puts me down now, because of black people, back to my accident that happened. She just puts me down. She says, "Well if you wouldn't hang out with all them niggers, if you would stop calling (phoning) them niggers and dating them." I was like I am not talking to any. I would just get so mad cause people accuse me of stuff I am not doing. It just makes me furious. I go crazy. I think maybe she is trying to be protective of me. But then I think about the fact that "she didn't even try to get us (my brother and me) in court. You know. She didn't even show up. So why does she care so much (now)?"

Because my dad filed a petition with the juvenile authorities charging me with public drunkenness, "I have to appear in court next week, I have to pay \$60.00. I have to go to drug and alcohol school and pass it. If I don't pass, then I have to pay \$25.00. I have to go for

a month. Four days out of the month." I just got a job at Wendy's in order to pay my bills. I am in training right now, but after that I will be working 40 hours a week besides going to school.

I need to make money so that I can move out when I turn 18 in 5 and one-half months. I can't wait to move out.

R.K.: Why do you feel so strongly about wanting to move out of the house where you live now?

D.: Cause I hate it, I hate it so much.

R.K.: And tell me what you hate about it.

D.: I hate our rules and everything.

I hate living with my step mom. I hate the rules. I hate it so much. The only way out right now is to elope with Anthony or have a baby by him. I don't want to get pregnant by him, but if he asked me to marry him right now, I would do it in a minute. Just to get out of my house. I would run away with the guy who had me beat up--just to get out!

Narrative Discussion

For Delores, a key event in her life was the divorce of her mother and father when she was about 4 years old. The richest description was from her memory of clinging to her daddy's legs as the police came to put her father in jail. Another key event was that of being rejected by her mother's non-appearance in court. Her mother had acted out her lack of desire for custody of Delores and her brother. This did not go by unnoticed by Delores. This was rejection.

Tied to Delores description of the divorce events, were her description of living with daddy before his second marriage. She described a time when she had daddy's undivided attention. She could not remember much of a dating process by her father nor the marriage to her stepmother.

Also linked to the above memory was the "slapping around" she described in her story and a major desire on her part to escape the household. Even though she knows Anthony may be a drug dealer, she

denies this as a possible truth. She sees Anthony as her only way out. She admitted that she would elope, if she were given the opportunity, with Anthony who had arranged for her beating (according to Delores).

She felt the key event for her lack of interest in school to be her friendships with black males, her dating of black males, and her smoking, drinking, sneaking out at night, as a result of her association with this group. At the beginning of the interviewing sessions, she said she would never trust a black boyfriend again! By the end of our interviews, she was sneaking out at night to meet Anthony again. She admitted a similar behavior of sneaking out at night and skipping school in the daytime to that of Pam Walker, Participant 1. Delores also became ill from being so exhausted from her night life. It appeared that some of Delores extreme behavior may have been an effort on her part to get her father's attention and to hurt him.

The major drinking episode which landed her in the emergency room with a blood alcohol level of 0.17 (0.25 means clinically dead), was because her cousin had informed her on the telephone that her daddy had kicked her out of the house. She said that if her daddy was going to be mad at her, then she simply didn't care what happened to her.

The reasons she gave for being so in love with Anthony were: (1) He was gorgeous, (2) He put her on a pedestal, and (3) He acted out his jealousy of her in front of others. To Delores, this meant that he cared about her. She also felt certain that Anthony was the one who had arranged for her beating. He had promised to "make it up to her, to take care of her, and to buy her a new gold chain."

The way in which Delores talked about Anthony made me believe that past experiences with her father were linked to and replayed with Anthony. When she talked about getting into trouble as a little girl, when her daddy spanked her, she had to quickly love on him and "make up." She never wanted her daddy to be angry with her. She described similar actions with Anthony in her narrative. It appeared that after

Anthony arranged for Delores to take a beating, that she couldn't wait to make up with him.

Again, Delores' low impulse control to meet her short term needs without her thinking of any long term consequences, is typical of the pushouts with whom I have worked. She, again, has been labeled a trouble maker. She and her cousin, who live together as sisters, are treated very differently by the school principal. Now, Delores is at further risk, because of trying to work 40 hours a week while going to school.

In Chapter V, I have discussed key events and visual overlays described by each of the four participants. Key events in student's lives that kept them from functioning well in school were family or peer related reasons, rarely school related. Three of the four students talked about not being able to concentrate in school when they had concerns from the outside. Especially problems involving one's parent or one's sex life were disruptive to the learning process. It must be noted that even though the first participant did not initiate conversation about her mind being on problems outside of school, that Pam simply dismissed herself from school to be with her friends who were anti-school.

These key events and visual overlays affected the way in which each of these students chose to interact with peers, with teachers and with school officials (outcome). It was easy for them to justify their position from the meaning perspective which they held. School suspension appeared to have little impact on these students. As D.J. said, being suspended only meant the pushout needed to be more slick the next time around.

Chapter VI presented the same data after it was pooled together. The themes which emerged are presented in this chapter and discussed in Chapter VII and linked to the theory in Chapter VIII. Conclusions and implications follow in Chapter IX.

CHAPTER VI

EMERGING THEMES

Each of the four participant spoke of a time when he/she enjoyed school and liked the teachers. Two of the four said, "I just loved (teacher's name)". Iesha had experienced many teachers that she "just loved" and could call each by name. D.J. spoke of school on the beach with great pleasure. These were his early years when he wrote stories and "messed with the girls" in the second grade. This was his California experience.

KEY EVENTS

The key events in the students' retrospective life history which triggered the beginning of school hatred and the student's alienation with school officials is documented in Chapter V. They were: (1) a major move from North to South (Pam), (2) illegal drug use and violence in the home (D.J.), (3) perceived racial issues precipitated by two events: (a) having a black father and a white mother and (b) living in the Projects, being on welfare (Iesha). The fourth participant, Delores, described the divorce and subsequent remarriage of her father as events which triggered a change in her meaning perspective. She targeted "hanging out" with the wrong crowd as the beginning of her problems of drinking, smoking pot, and sneaking out of the house at night. The sneaking out and resulting truancy from school was similar to Pam's joining the Hoods, socializing at night and the skipping of school because she didn't feel well the next day. Table I is a comparison of student life events that affected their school interaction.

TABLE I

A COMPARISON OF STUDENT LIFE EVENTS THAT
AFFECTED THEIR SCHOOL INTERACTION

Variable	Participants			
	#1	#2	#3	#4
Grade Failure	X	X	X	X
Drug Use		X	X	X
Sneaking Out	X			X
Feigned Sickness	X		X	X
Major Moves	X	X	X	
Violence		X	X	X
Teacher Unfair	X	X	X	X
Parental Divorce		X	X	X

From the table, one can see that commonalities are found across the studies, but not always in the same combinations. Three of the 4 participants had experienced the divorce of their parents (2, 3, and 4). Single parents or divorced parents are stated as variables identifying potential dropouts (Kronick and Hargis, 1990). D.J.'s parents had then remarried, in order to keep his father from serving a jail sentence for theft, and then divorced a second time. Three of the 4 were involved in major moves across the country (1, 3, and 4). This supports theory in place concerning migrant workers (Kronick and Hargis, 1990). The 3 female participants (1, 3, and 4) described patterns of first pretending to be sick in order to stay home from school, and the varied outcomes of that early behavior. This sick role function is described by Kronick (1974b) as a social model in which the student plays a role and others

respond in kind. Two of the 4 participants (1 and 4) shared the method of sneaking out of the house during the night in order to be with peers (peer influence) who would have been unacceptable to their parents. Three of the 4 (2, 3, and 4) were involved with substance abuse and violence (2, 3, and 4). All of the participants spoke of teacher favoritism as a school issue. School rules appeared to be a problem only to the extent that the students perceived that teachers and principals enforced rules differently for different students. The three girls each brought up cheerleading competitions as unfair and possibly "rigged."

Drug use at school was discussed by each participant except for Pam Walker. Pam chose as her peer group the Hoods or Metalheads, who were identified by the others as druggies. Pam idealized the Hood's willingness to accept anyone into their social order to the point of not saying anything negative about the chosen group. I do not believe that Pam used drugs. For Pam the issues were somewhat different because she lived in West Knoxville and came from a more affluent family than the others (S.E.S. influence).

THEMES

In a review of the table listing student life events for pushouts, only that of teacher favoritism appears to be a school issue. Kronick and Hargis (1990) discussed the issue of teacher favoritism. Too often, either the student is blamed for dropping out of school or the teacher is held responsible for lack of flexibility concerning school rules. My findings pinpoint the major issues in students leaving school as being from a wider social context than simply school or teacher or pushout. The themes which emerged from the pooled data were: (1) Drug and alcohol prevalence among students, (2) Perceived teacher favoritism, and (3) Gangs and peer group influence.

DRUG AND ALCOHOL PREVALENCE

The first major emerging theme from the pooled data was that of drug and alcohol prevalence among students. This generally began within the family context and later became an issue in school. To discover that D.J. was given marijuana from the time he was brought home from the hospital was shocking to hear. To discover that Delores was introduced to pot by a friend's father when she was in the eighth grade was equally shocking. Both Delores and Iesha were given small amounts of liquor within the home. Delores was given Jack Daniels as medication for colds. She acquired a taste for it that developed to what she termed addiction. By the time Delores was in the eighth grade, she was combining alcohol and the smoking of pot in order to achieve a greater high. This took place on the school grounds with a group of friends when she was approximately 13. Iesha was given sips of beer which her biological mother drank as medication for a kidney problem. At the time, Iesha was only 3 years of age. Iesha later developed a drinking problem which, with the encouragement of her boyfriend, she was able to control.

Quotations From Interviews to Support the Data Above

D.: Yeah, well in middle school too, in the 8th grade, we would smoke a joint every morning before we went to school. Like maybe the last semester I smoked a joint every morning before we went to school. We would smoke a joint every lunch time every day out in the field. And nobody ever knew (Emphasis mine).

R.K.: You had to be in the in-group (to smoke)?

D.: No, whoever wanted it (could have it). We got to where one time, my papaw was in visiting and he always drunk, so I stole some of his beers and we . . . I mean I had a big cup of beer and I would take it to school and mixed it with some Jack Daniels and we all drunk that with our pot.

R.K.: So if you drank beer or Jack Daniels with pot what happens?

D.: I don't know, it kind of gives you more high.

R.K.: Makes you more high than if you do either one by itself?

D.: I know I would sleep. School was boring anyway and I would just sleep. Cause you kind of take on the actions. If you get high and you're in a happy mood, you get real hyper. If you are in a sad mood, you get real depressed.

R.K.: So you would sleep cause you . . .

D.: It was boring. (Emphasis mine, "School was not for me.")

R.K.: Eighth grade, so a lot of this started in the 8th grade?

D.: Yeah, one night we . . . in the ninth grade we would go to Yoke, that was for middle schoolers, I could get in, which I couldn't. Me and one of my friends drove. We would go out, get drunk, smoke some pot. One time I remember us climbing on top of Ridgecrest, on top of the roof, drinking with this guy. We were drinking some Vodka or something. I would come in drunk every Tuesday night. My parents, my mom would never know. My dad wasn't there, but my mom would never know.

Iesha was only 14 at the time of the interview. She admitted having had an alcohol problem at one time, and admitted "selling" for a couple of weeks mostly out of curiosity and out of an opportunity provided in the projects.

I.: My dad knew nothing about it (her drinking) till it was too late. I was about 9 years old when my dad finally found out I had been drinking. My dad, you know, he couldn't stop it, so it, you know, I mean you, he could not contribute to it, but it was my choice. My dad always gave his kids choice. And he lets us learn. My daddy is not the type person who is going to say, "Well, don't do it." He is going to let you learn from your mistakes.

R.K.: Are you the one who decided to quit? With his help?

I.: Well, it wasn't like that. I drunk and drunk and I and a cousin who just loved it. She loved to see me drunk.

R.K.: So what were you drinking then, beer or stronger?

I.: I used to drink nothing but gin and everyone else would drink it with a chaser, but I am the youngest one out of the bunch, but I would not use a chaser. And everyone used to be curious why I am like that. And she never contributed to that, but my mom's step brother does for a while, but still . . .

R.K.: This was the cousin you say?

I.: Uh huh.

R.K.: That liked to see you drunk?

I.: Then my sisters would drink at a party or something. I would say, "Hey, I am going over in the corner. I am going to drink me some too." But then finally, you know, I started thinking, you know, I had _____, my

boyfriend who shot himself, he would make you think. He would get down to it and make you think about things. Well, he wasn't the type to drink. He got down to the nitty gritty. I mean, he said, "Do you know what you are doing to yourself?" And he made me go home one night and really think. I don't need it. I got a whole life in front of me. And you know, he was this kind of person that you really talk to and he would tell you straight up and say, "You know, I (you) don't really need this." And my mom had been telling me this for years and I never listened, but finally I realized it. (Emphasis mine. This sounds like Pam's, "What I did, I did to irritate my parents.")

R.K.: Is alcohol more of a problem in the Projects than drugs? No? Drugs are a bigger problem? (R. responding to body language.)

I.: Among young teens, alcohol is a big problem. But and also marijuana is a very big problem. Cause I know I was . . .

R.K.: Is it easy to get marijuana in the Projects?

I.: Yeah, you hey (exclamatory).

R.K.: You have to have money, don't you?

I.: Yeah. Unless you got the right friend. And I was pressured a couple of times to smoke marijuana and sometimes I did, but, you know, I know now, hey, I will never try the stuff again, cause I turn blue in the face. Cause something about it, they said I inhaled it wrong and something, and I just started choking and I couldn't breathe.

Iesha also described how a girl at Jefferson Middle had tried to set her up by asking her to bring marijuana to school. But Iesha claimed that she didn't "do that stuff no more."

D.J. and his friend, J., who had recently graduated from high school, spoke about the prevalence of drugs within the family and within the community.

R.K.: Was it in Tennessee or New Orleans when you and your mom smoked pot together?

D.J.: Tennessee, but I remember before that in New Orleans me and my cousins used to smoke it.

R.K.: So how did you have it this readily available? Does everybody in your family smoke? Your dad must not.

D.J.: Everybody I know does. Is that not true, J.? Almost everybody does . . .

J.: Just about.

R.K.: So it is the Tennessee thing to do, is it easily accessible here?

J.: It is easily accessible anywhere. There is so many do it. Just as many people do it, if not more, than don't. Lot won't admit it, but.

R.K.: Ok, did they, this is the group that smoked pot sometimes? (Speaking about a peer group at Jefferson.)

D.J.: Yeah, I don't think of it as anything wrong though.

D.J.: Me and M. and all of us would smoke pot sometimes in the morning over at Glacial Springs and then walk over to auto mechanics. It was fun.

D.J.: (Talking about smoking at school.) I think they (the teachers) kind of understand that when you smoke and you don't have a cigarette for a long time, you get nervous and that is going to mess with you. I think you should be allowed to smoke. (Meaning perspective of one who admits addiction to nicotine.)

Of the four participants in the study, not one was introduced to drug or alcohol use at school. It appeared that substance abuse began within the family or community, and infiltrated the school system as a problem from society at large. School officials did not appear to be very well informed about substance abuse behavior. Delores described in detail when her history class was asleep in their seats from the noonday smoke and drink session on the school grounds. The teacher rapped a ruler sharply on the desk in an effort to awaken them. He lectured them on substance abuse, but never reported them nor did he follow through in any way. It appeared that both parents and school officials were either naive about the symptoms or choose to ignore the problem until the behavior was well ingrained.

A list of "member checks" used to validate this student information can be found in Appendix D.

TEACHER FAVORITISM

A second major theme which emerged during this study is that of teacher favoritism. The Preps and Cheerleading competitions were also mentioned by each of the three females independently as an example of teacher favoritism in the schools. From the student perspective, the

three categories of (1) teacher favoritism, (2) cheerleading competition, and (3) the "Preps" are presented as one issue.

The Preps are described as rich, white, all A students who strive to be "perfect" in dress as well as in class work. One could easily understand that teachers could justify their position by saying that students who strive to do their best on assignments are rewarded by special privileges. The students, without special privilege, viewed this issue differently. Pam was not one of the favorites because of being a Northerner in a Southern school. D.J. said that he was stereotyped because of his long hair. He also had the reputation of being a marijuana user as well as coming from a home without running water (poverty--low S.E.S.).

It is of interest that D.J. spoke only of teacher favoritism in regard to Jocks. Jocks didn't have to attend math class and received passing grades on their exams and therefore, received passing grades for the course. D.J. assumed that the Jocks already had the math skills necessary to pass the course rather than perceiving this to be teacher favoritism. D.J. did state at the conclusion of his description that the math teacher was also a coach.

Iesha's description of Preps and Teacher Preps and the interrelationship of the two can be found as quoted material at the end of this discussion. Iesha also described a classroom episode where all of the favorites are gathered around the teacher and Iesha, as she entered the classroom, was directed to sit in the far back corner. Because she refused to do this, she was expelled from school. She perceived this incident to be teacher favoritism. Since Iesha had been labeled "unruly" by this school system, the teacher could probably justify his/her position as separating Iesha from the group in order to maintain classroom order.

Delores described teachers as using school rules as a power play against the least favored student. For example, she was physically ill

in the girl's room one day. Her cousin, who lived within the family as Delores' sister, was with Delores as a care giver. Both came out of the girl's room together. Her cousin was sent back to her room with no consequences. Delores was told by the principal that she was not sick, that she was in the hall without a hall pass, that she must go to the office and wait for the arrival of her parent who would be called. Delores was given In-School Suspension (I.S.S.) because of this episode. She refused to serve this I.S.S. stating that the principal was lying. Her father finally believed Delores' account over the principal's account because of the degree of Delores' reaction. Delores' father knew that she would take her punishment if she were in the wrong. He also knew that she became extremely agitated when someone was lying to her. In this melee, Delores, in front of her father, had told the principal to "kiss her ass." This was out of character for Delores who was expected by her father to respect school officials.

Iesha also described situations where she felt wrongly accused of instigating school fights. She perceived that she would be expelled without being given an opportunity to tell her side of the story. This is dehumanizing action on the part of school officials and is documented in the literature (Woods, 1979). The anger represented in the student interviews concerning Preps is understandable once I realized that Preps and teacher favoritism were linked together from the student's meaning perspective. Following is Iesha's description of Preps and Teacher Preps:

I.: Ok, this girl last year named Buffy Mills. I mean her clothes had to be perfect, her hair had to be perfectly curled, her fingernails had to be perfect. Her makeup had to be perfect and everything about her just had to be perfect. No one could beat her she thought she was the most prettiest thing. She was a cheerleader, she thought she was everything because she was a cheerleader. And she use to walk around flashing her money and talking about how much money she had. If she seen a person who didn't look as wealthy as her she would talk about them. She would say, "You look like you ain't got no money." And she would say, "Are you on welfare?" And stuff like that. And she was just the biggest snob there and she use to just walk around looking primpy--go in the mirror after every period--go in

the bathroom and primp in the mirror. She said, "Oh does my hair look alright?" It use to get on everybody's nerves and I . . . some of the white kids wanted to beat her up because she thought she was Miss Perfect. I mean, if she got a B on her work she would cry. That is how perfect she had to be. And everything she did had to be perfect. We had to write a report about a state, she brought in more like a book. It had to be perfectly typed and I mean she could not miss a word. Everything was spelled correct. She said I even used my encyclopedia. I mean, she use to come to school and say, "Do you see this charm bracelet, it cost \$12.99 and each charm I add to it cost \$20.00 a piece." And she had already about 50 charms and everyday she would come in with a new charm on it. "Do you see my charm?" I just wanted to rip her little charm bracelet off and throw it up against the window. Cause she loved her little charm bracelet. And I mean, her hair bows, "My hair bows cost this and that." She has braces she would actually break them, she would sit and pick on them until she broke them. And say, "Oh that is another \$500 my dad has to pay." And she use to say, "My braces cost \$5,000.00." Cause she had the clear kind and I mean everything--her hair, and she was talking about she use to wear glasses then she got contacts. She has green contacts and swore up and down her eyes were green. And they were like a brown blue. I mean she was just, . . . Miss Perfect. Nothing could go wrong and then one day she fell and that was the biggest thing. We hated her. She fell and everybody started laughing and she got up crying and she said, "Well I am going to tell my dad and he is going to get a lawyer and he is going to sue all of you for laughing at me." And she just "OHhhhhhhhhhhh" we just hated her.

I.: The cheerleading teacher.

R.K.: Uh huh.

I.: She taught science, but she was also with the cheerleaders. She . . . her and Buffy . . . I thought they were mommy and daughter; first time I met them. Cause Miss Primps . . . she picked Buffy not for her talent in cheerleading, because she . . . but because Buffy was so much like her. Buffy couldn't even jump. But she picked her. Buffy was so much like her.

R.K.: And she said that.

I.: Yeah, she . . . there was one girl named Taja on the cheerleading squad . . . who was real sweet and Taja asked her why she picked Buffy over this girl named Carol? Carol has real good jumps, but she is not the person, she is not real outgoing and she keeps to her self, but you know she is fun to be with and stuff if you get to know her, and she didn't pick her because she didn't talk as much and she picked Buffy because she was more like her. And I mean the teacher use to stand around every 5 minutes putting on her lipstick, or fixing her hair, up there primping and I think she had a crush on another science teacher. She would get around and give a big smile from ear to ear and she would just start blushing and think that she was pretty and her clothes. When she taught the girls how to cheer she taught the girls in church shoes and in a skirt, and a nice neat

blouse. I mean, she would not put on a jogging suit, or pair of shorts. Then if she did come in shorts . . . stockings and a real cute shirt with them. She never dressed regular. I mean, even at try outs, clinicals, she dressed the same. And Buffy she use to come to clinicals with her stockings on and a pair of shorts on and a nice shirt and then look down she had on a pair of socks with her tennis shoes. When clinicals was over she would put back on her dress shoes. "I use to "OHhhhhhhhh."

R.K.: Were there competitions for cheerleading?

I.: Yeah.

R.K.: Did you think they were fair?

I.: Sometimes I thought they was fair and then again I didn't cause a black girl named Letha tried out and Letha was real good. She could do the split, the high toe touch. I mean she was a real good cheerleader. And the only thing . . . the reason she didn't get it is because they wanted the money right up front and her dad said that he would pay it when he got his pay check.

R.K.: I don't understand money up front. You mean you had to pay to compete or what?

I.: You had to pay. Like if she would have made it but you would have to had paid the money the day they said you made it. And her dad said he didn't get his pay check for another 2 weeks so he would pay it then. Well she said, "Well I can't wait on that." And I didn't think that was fair because the money would get paid. She was a good cheerleader. I think they should have went ahead and let her did it, but . . . one girl Bridgett she paid hers in three installments. But they would not let her.

R.K.: What was this money for?

I.: For your uniforms, shoes, socks, your earrings, socks, stockings, jackets.

R.K.: Things that look alike?

I.: Yeah, I mean they had book bags, jogging suits, socks, stockings, tennis shoes, hair bows, sweat bands, I mean everything.

R.K.: So what kind of money are we talking about?

I.: \$550

R.K.: You have got to be kidding!

I.: And that was just for middle school. Five hundred and fifty dollars. I said, "Mom I am going to try out for the cheerleading squad." She said, "Do you really want to do this?" I said, "Yes." And then she was like for sure you want to do this, if you make it you are not going to drop out. I said, "Forget it, I don't want to do it." Because it is not but a one year thing and they change uniforms every year. So if you make it the next year you have to buy

a whole new uniform, new tennis shoes, everything . . . they get everything new each year. They will not have the same uniform for two years. That is just a rich, preppy, school and I mean all the kids go there they are always bragging about all the money they got . . . I mean that one teacher and half the teachers cannot stand to be around her. It was that bad. She would just get on your nerves.

A third major theme which emerged from the interviews is Peer Group Influence. Pam, in her description of peers, introduced only Preps, Jocks, and Hoods, or Metalheads as choices at her school for group membership. In contrast, Iesha described multiples of different gangs as well as a definition of turf or territory. The difference in description appeared to be the wider cultural context: West Knoxville (Upper S.E.S.) versus the Projects (Lower S.E.S.).

The projects, according to Iesha, could only be understood by someone who had lived there. She had experienced 25 stabbings and killings including deaths by suicide in her lifetime. Several of these were gang related. She described turf and territory as issues she had grown up with and understood. Because I could never be an "insider" to either peer group or gang participation or the projects, then I could only conclude that there is a negative influence similar to the participation in the Hoods by Pam. Pam had to learn how to skip school and not get caught. I assumed that Iesha learned her need for violence as action and excitement in her life from the neighborhood in which she lived. She described having seen street corner drug deals as part of her early memory. Farrell (1990) described the influences of peer culture for at-risk students as follows:

What we as adults see as adaptive behaviors do not always seem to have a payoff to young people. Our notions of adaptive behaviors, e.g., staying in and doing your home work rather than hanging out with friends, seem to them to be maladaptive. Your peers give you more reinforcement . . . From peers you learn techniques of self-expression and social interaction. Avoiding peers (from the student perspective) is maladaptive. If there is no future in hanging out, well, there's not much future in school either. And hanging out is much more enjoyable.

If the values you construct with peers are disdained by parents, teachers, and the greater society, you might come to disdain the competing values, if only as a defense (p. 25).

It appeared, then, that peer group influence, may be anti-school and that behavior that supported the anti-school meaning perspective was learned as social interaction within the group. This supported Howard Becker's (1953) classic study on marijuana smoking as learned behavior discussed in the next chapter.

Another comparison Iesha made was that of a neighborhood school near the projects (which was closed down) to the West Knoxville school to which she had been assigned. She related that, at Washington Heights (pseudonym), everyone was poor, black and white alike. Since all of these students had grown up together, they understood each other. As a result, there were relatively few issues brought up at school that had not been dealt with in the neighborhood. This school did practice conflict resolution which forced the two factions to face each other and to attempt to work through the issues at hand.

In contrast to the neighborhood school, the West Knoxville school was represented as the rich, preppy school where a poor, black student whose family was on welfare, was expected to get along. Detailed description by this student of a Prep flashing money around, announcing how much her braces cost, asking Iesha if her family was on welfare were presented. Many of the issues appeared to be exacerbated by trying to force low and high socio-economic students together. Further, Iesha's perception was that there was no attempt in this school toward conflict resolution. One was expelled with no opportunity to defend one's position. She was only more anxious to finish a fight when she returned to school because she had been suspended.

Two participants, Iesha and Delores described wanting out of their school situation by means of a student transfer. In both cases, the school officials were unwilling to release them (Social Control Theory). The school authorities represented their position as one of having to work through their problems. From the student perspective, no effort was made to resolve issues and nothing changed. Both students described

being forced into a position of sitting isolated in a classroom with head on desk, often sleeping through class in order to avoid further confrontation.

The violence in the wider social context is infiltrating the schools. The Knox County School System, in 1992, has had loaded guns and bomb scares within the school buildings in grades as low as the fifth. D.J. walked away from school one day because he had been threatened by a bully who assumed D.J. had taken something from a locker. Iesha described how teachers were afraid to enter the hallways when students were changing from one class to another. Descriptions of hate provoking words between students often triggered major physical confrontation. Iesha said that she would not attend a football game without something on her. When I asked her to describe what she meant, she said she would not attend a football game without a knife on her for protection. It appeared that gangs and violence and substance abuse are infiltrating our schools from the outside in.

Of the three major themes, drug and alcohol prevalence, teacher favoritism, and gangs or peer group influence, it appeared that the only issue pinpointed by students as an issue from the inside was that of teacher favoritism. The other issues become school issues as they infiltrated the schools from family or community at large. This study gave a wider perspective to the pushout problem than simply that of a school at fault or a student at fault. To become aware of the student's wider social context as a continuum of ongoing events often precipitated by family members or the family members of very young peers within a neighborhood, is to say that there were circumstances in place which were beyond the control of either the student or the school system. In the past, the fault had been directed at either student or school. This mindset must change to one of strategies instigated by school officials to care enough about the individual to assess problems early on, whether personal, family, or learning issues. Prolonged truancy without

immediate attention on the part of school officials, set up a series of events that promoted student failure and subsequent dropping out. The individual loss and the loss to society is too great.

This chapter presented the findings as emerging themes from the pooled data of the study. In Chapter VII, I discussed how this study supported and challenged some of the other studies presented in the student voice.

CHAPTER VII

DISCUSSION

I first presented data as narrative in the student voice from the student perspective (emic = the native point of view, Trueba; Spindler, G.; and Spindler, L.; 1989). Secondly, I pooled the data and discussed the data according to emerging themes. Thirdly, I will compare my findings to those discussed in the three dissertations cited in Chapter III written from the dropout's perspective. I will discuss and link my findings to the relevant literature base on pushouts.

I ask the reader to consider as mindset the following anthropological perspective rather than that of failure due to deficits within the child (the medical model discussed by Swadener, 1990).

An anthropological perspective insists that every individual does his or her best to preserve self-esteem and survive as an intact person (emphasis mine). This struggle to preserve and survive often results in behavior that is perceived as deviant, destructive, and dysfunctional by observers who are operating out of different contexts than are those individuals being observed and evaluated--the "natives" (Trueba; Spindler, G.; and Spindler, L.; 1989, p. 1).

Along with the framework of the dropout's desire to preserve self-esteem and to remain intact, I ask the reader to keep in mind a statement made by Dr. Morton in regard to the pushouts attending A.C.L.

"(A) . . . lot of very bad things happen to young people outside of the school environment" (Kronick and Hargis, 1990, p. 101). From the narrative and emerging themes data, I will summarize some of the "very bad things" the participants talked about which create emotional stress for them. The reader should note that although three of the four participants had experienced parental divorce, only one of the three spoke of divorce as a personal issue. Therefore, I include divorce as a "very bad thing" only for the participant named Delores. Following is the list of events that I am labeling "stressors" from the wider social context categorized according to each participant named.

STRESSORS FROM THE WIDER SOCIAL CONTEXT**Pam:**

1. a major move from North to South,
2. nonacceptance in a Southern school, feelings of not belonging, alienation,
3. poor choice of peer group, anti-school learned behavior,
4. parental control unsteady--both parents working, change in relationship with father after the move,
5. truancy,
6. the threat of juvenile detention by school authorities for truancy,
7. illness as excuse for truancy becoming a phobia,
8. low impulse control, poor response to stressful situations.

D.J.:

9. alcoholic mother,
10. drug using father,
11. fighting between parents,
12. major move East to West,
13. cigarettes and pot possession and use at school,
14. four different home situations, feelings of rejection by family members,
15. D.J.'s income more important to father than school attendance,
16. first grade retention,
17. grandmother dying of cancer, D.J. is caretaker,
18. perceived sexual abuse of mom described,
19. believed to be learning disabled in math, but non-identified special education.

Iesha:

20. racial slurs because of Black identity,
21. housing projects, violence as learned behavior,

- 22. major moves yearly from North to South,
- 23. first grade retention,
- 24. poor speech patterns--resource,
- 25. depression reported due to experiencing death and killings,
- 26. 24-hour treatment in mental institution threatened by school authorities, means separation from family,
- 27. teacher favoritism and racial comments,
- 28. lack of social activities due to busing and lack of resources,
- 29. gang involvement--Projects.

Delores:

- 30. divorce of parents,
- 31. rejection by mom at court hearing,
- 32. step parent control and perceived abuse,
- 33. alcohol use,
- 34. drug use,
- 35. Black males chosen as social group,
- 36. family rejection experienced, kicked out of house as living place,
- 37. truancy,
- 38. illness pretended--real sickness not believable by school administrators,
- 39. fear of pregnancy,
- 40. desire to leave home at any emotional cost.

The point of listing these outside stressors, is to say that little in-school academic learning could take place when the student was experiencing emotional stress. In summary to this first point, the student's need to preserve self-esteem and survive as an intact person emotionally, affected the way in which the student made decisions (Trueba; Spindler, G.; and Spindler, L.; 1989). Because students were immature, they rarely made decisions based on long term effects. Sometimes, as Pam stated so clearly, the choices were made simply to irritate parents.

Next, I would ask the reader to enter the mindset of the history of education and the history of trying to identify and explain the phenomenon of "at risk of dropping out." This discussion will link my data to the extensive literature base in regard to "Who is to blame: the school, the teacher, or the student?" A visual model (Figure 1) follows where "blame" is represented by the inner triangle, and stress factors from the wider social context are represented by the outer circle. I will briefly discuss how others have held the school, the teacher, or the dropout responsible for failure.

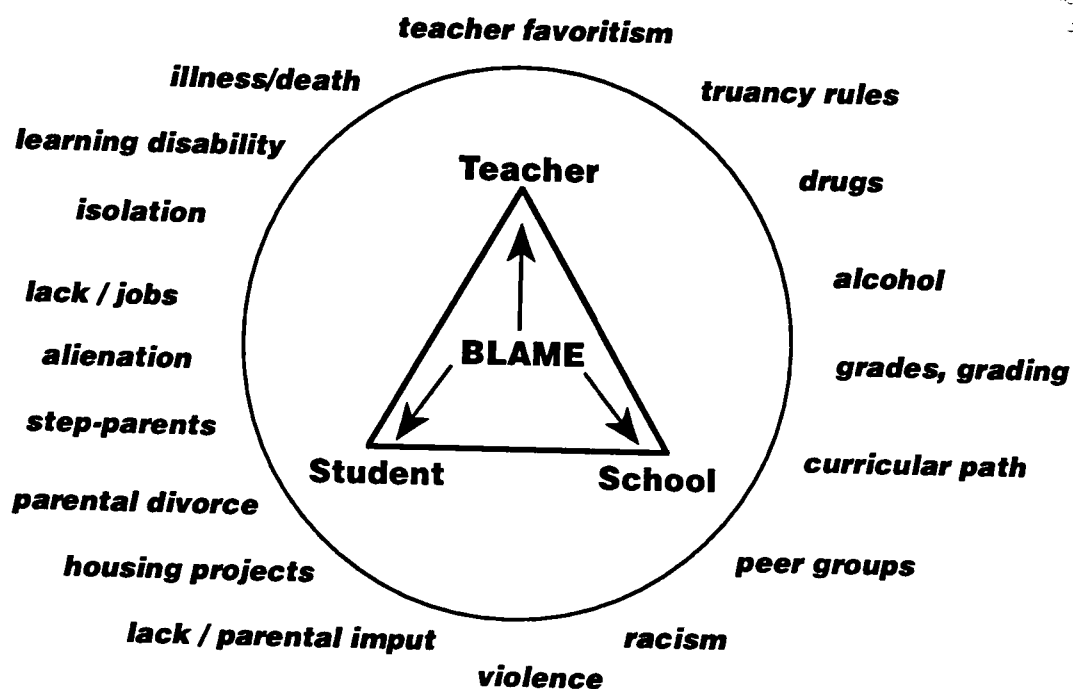
SCHOOL AT FAULT

Kronick and Hargis (1990) described an early form of instruction known as subscription schools. Their description follows:

The subscription school worked this way: A group of parents of school-age children would contribute money for each of their children to employ a teacher to instruct this group of children. The teacher would be required to teach the total age range from 6 to as much as 21. All the students would be in one room, often in a building cooperatively constructed by the same parents . . . Teachers would work with individual students at whatever level they were capable of performing at and then proceed to the next level when the student demonstrated mastery. Progress was reported to the parents by written accounts describing what the student was learning and what had been mastered. There were no grades of any kind and there was no failure. If there was failure it was that of the teacher (pp.15-16).

Student failure, then, is a social construct perpetuated by our public education system. Dropping out of school may be a result of the way in which school was organized at the foundation level of public education. Competition for grades, rather than cooperative interaction between teacher and student as described above, results in a meaning perspective that allows a student to fail! Lack of success at school may be a result of a lack of teaching at school.

If we accept the notion that school organization cannot change, then there still are further reasons for the school to accept the responsibility for dropouts and pushouts alike. The tracking system which separates students into the college bound and "all others" directs



*Circle represents actual findings (wider social context);
triangle represents literature.

Figure 1. Stress Factors that Force Student to Dropout.

major school resources in the form of teacher expertise and technology to the upper track student. The better students are challenged with new learning experiences and taught chemistry, physics and biology. The lower track students are rarely given access to challenging material of any kind and report boredom as a major factor in the "School is not for me" meaning perspective. Swadener's (1990) challenge of "what if we changed the label "at risk" to "gifted" and provided similar enrichment programs, activities, opportunities, and expectations? Swadener also pinpointed "graded", competitive, and individualistic school systems" at fault and requested a nurturant environment where children (are) taught by the same teacher for more than one year. She made the plea for all of us to care more about what happens to the children (Swadener, 1990).

It has been reported by the news media that safety at school is an issue for our students. I believe that our tendency is to think of safety in terms of safe from guns, bombs, or drugs because of the sensationalism of the news reporting. My participants were concerned about issues of safety from the point of view of personal threats in the hallways on the part of bullies, either racial threats as it concerned Iesha, or physical threats as it concerned D.J. D.J. described his reluctance to go to the principal and report a physical attack by a bully because of D.J.'s belief that a complaint would not be taken seriously or in good faith. Once a student was labeled as a trouble maker, his credibility with school authorities limited what he was able to do. We must look at school safety as a concern for the students at the bottom end of the pecking order.

TEACHER AT FAULT

Kronick and Hargis (1990) explained that once a grading system was initiated to report student success or failure, that the teachers began to perceive their role differently. Since learning became the responsibility of the student, then the teachers were "off the hook" in

terms of responsibility. They came to perceive their role only as presenting the material. It was up to the students to learn. The idea of teaching and caring for the individual as a whole person in the process of personal growth appeared to be a concept out of the past. "Teachers don't care" was a major issue for the four participants.

A second issue pinpointing teachers at fault, was the specialist system that encouraged the shifting of blame (Kronick and Hargis, 1990). Teachers as specialists are isolated from each other and from the students. The specialist system encourages numbers--how many students can I teach in one day or one week. Often, one teacher is asked to teach as many as 150 students per day and a different 150 the next day. "The specialist system not only encourages shifting blame, it spawns the proliferation of still more specialists and special programs" (Kronick and Hargis, 1990, p. 45). The specialist system allows the teacher to perceive his or her responsibility to course content rather than to the student. This means that if a student can't keep the pace in a lock-stepped curriculum, he/she has no recourse for getting special help or consideration.

THEORETICAL LINKS BETWEEN THE STUDY AND THE LITERATURE

Since each of the four participants was influenced by a peer group holding anti-school values, the most pertinent study was that of Howard Becker, when, from a symbolic interactionist point of view, he analyzed marijuana use. If we can interpret his important characteristics as learned truancy leading to school failure, his approach exemplified the findings of this study. This summary can be found on page 9.

LABELING THEORY

Labeling Theory is represented by the following constructs:

1. The basic premise is that deviance is a socially created category,

2. The consequent primary focus should be on societal reaction, rather than on the characteristics of deviance or other perpetuating factors influencing the deviating individual.
3. An attempt should be made to understand deviance from the view point of the deviant rather than that of society at large,
4. The importance of the definition of the situation is to be remembered by human service workers. The fact that these definitions are sometimes negotiated is to be recognized,
5. Careful observation is the basic research technique to be utilized (Kronick and Hargis, 1990, pp. 86-87).

Becker stated that society's reaction to deviant behavior was a potent factor in the continuance of that behavior. In the study by Kronick and Hargis (1990), one student was quoted as saying, "Everybody's here because they did something wrong. Ain't nobody here for being on the honor roll." One of my participants said, "Most alternative school students lean on each other like a crutch for support because we are all in here for one problem or another." The point I am making about being labeled a deviant by the school, is that when all the problem students were pooled together in an alternative situation, there was no audience left to support the concept of their being truant or failures or any of the other socially imposed labels. It appeared that when there is no audience for the deviance, deviant behavior may subside. Pam said that she no longer gave a thought to the Hoods since she was no longer grounded by her parents.

STRAIN THEORY AND SOCIAL CONTROL THEORY

My findings support both of these theories, even though they are opposing concepts.

Suspension and expulsion are the means by which these students are purged or pushed out of the system. They are punished for their behavior while in school and they are punished if they try to avoid school (Kronick and Hargis, 1990, p. 8).

Each of the participants was expelled from the regular public school classroom and had experienced the purging described above.

Not obvious until the study was completed, was that two different high schools refused to allow the student to change to a different system or to be referred to the A.C.L. until a prolonged amount of time had passed (Social Control Theory). I cannot explain this for either Iesha or Delores, but for each of these students, this was a major issue and stressor. It appeared that there may have been other issues at stake than simply an effort to keep the student in school and off the street.

ANOMIE THEORY

Anomie means "misfit." The participant named Pam is a classical representation of this theory. When her cultural context changed dramatically with her move from North to South, her symbols representing norms and values did not change. She did not adapt to her new culture. Her feelings of alienation from peers at school led her to join the Hoods, the anti-school group who taught her how to lay out and not get caught. A theoretical hypothesis posed by Kronick and Hargis (1990) follows:

1. Failure in school institutes a search for more satisfying group membership which typically results in the acquisition of delinquent friends (differential association),
2. Dropping out is a consequence of internal attribution of blame, social isolation, and experiences that influence the dropout (differential association),
3. If failure in school leads to delinquency, then dropping out of school should result in decreasing involvement in delinquency.

COMPARISON TO PREVIOUS DISSERTATIONS

The results of this study supported conclusions made in three previous works representing the student perspective. Those studies were conducted at Harvard in 1988 (Colon-Tarrats), Brigham Young, 1989 (Rowley), and the University of California, Berkeley, 1989 (Epstein). It is important to note that these were the only research efforts that I

found concerning early school leaving that were written from the student perspective.

I will first summarize the conclusions of the three studies in list form. I will then discuss how my data matched and supported the findings. Thirdly, I will present issues that appear to be in conflict with previous interpretations.

The exacerbating conditions for the Puerto Rican population to drop out of school were: (1) frequent school changes, (2) family problems, and (3) feelings of alienation supported by teacher actions that were both punitive and inattentive.

A second study on early school leaving concluded that: "A student brings with him all his past experiences in school." The author of that study explained that sometimes those past experiences are something like an abusive parent. Two major points discussed by Epstein (1989) concerning patterns of early school leaving were: (1) No student made a decision to drop out of school. Instead, it was a gradual process of truancy and a process of getting too far behind in academic work and (2) the parents did not support either (the truancy of their child) nor did they support the student dropping out of school.

A third study by Rowley (1989) discussed the student problems in the form of emerging themes as follows: (1) low self-esteem on the part of the student, (2) family problems beyond the scope of the student, (3) the alienation from school experienced as a result of the school staff, and (4) the teaching style of the instructional staff in opposition to the student's personal learning style.

RESULTS COMPARED TO PREVIOUS DISSERTATIONS

Using the theoretical framework of symbolic interactionism, meaning is defined as behavior. Another way to define meaning is that a student interprets the actions and interactions of another and stores the interpretation as symbols in memory. Therefore, I agree strongly

with Colon-Tarrat's (1988) statement that a student brings to school with him all of his past school experiences, and that those visual overlays (interpreted actions and interactions) for this population are something like those stored by a person with an abusive parent. This fits my earlier description of visual overlays as being a positive interpretation by that student who has had a positive school experience and negative visual overlays for that student who has had negative school experiences. In other words, the student interpretation of interaction with school officials is dependent on the past interpreted experience of school as it is experienced by each student. The retrospective educational life history then, provided a window of understanding into the meaning perspective of each student and a basis for trying to understand how a student interpreted interaction at school. I would ask that Colon-Tarrats (1988) expand his statement to include not only past educational experience of each student as emotional baggage, but also the cultural experience of each student as it affects a student's choices concerning in-school behaviors. This cultural experience would include: (1) frequent school changes, (2) family problems, (3) alienation in school due to punitive actions by school officials, (4) inattentive teachers in the classroom, and (5) a teaching style that is in opposition to the student's learning style. The above five conclusions were those made in the third study.

According to the results given in both Chapter V and Chapter VI, one can see that my study supported all major findings above. There are, however, some minor findings that I would like to discuss.

Could it be that a major area of student anger resulted from a perspective on the part of three of the four participants, from major moves across country? It appeared that due to the alienation encountered from a cross-cultural experience, that they gained insight into the hidden curriculum of schools that supports the reproduction theory in education (Epstein, 1989). In other words, because of major

relocations, they were able to perceive teacher favoritism toward the white, upper social class and to realize that they were not the favored ones. Why they were not the favorites was dependent upon how they interpreted past interactions. For example, anytime Iesha interpreted lack of social favor, her conclusion was that it was due to the fact that she was black. D.J. assumed teachers stereotyped him as a "druggie" because of his long hair. Delores expressed her attraction to Black males because they "put her on a pedestal" and that felt like a good place to be. Pam expressed in one interview: "I hate money!" This statement appeared to be inconsistent in that Pam had always worked to earn her own spending money. Her anger was evident as she described the "Preps" and their position of social power which was dependent upon money. This position did not arouse anger for Pam as long as she lived in the North, because in the North, she was the social elite.

Cheerleaders for the three female participants represented "Preps," money, social status and teacher favoritism richly described by Iesha in Chapter VI. They were angry about the inequality of how a girl becomes a cheerleader, and were reduced to not trying out again calling the competitions "rigged in advance." Money was again a major issue in that the figure quoted by the three was \$550, required if you were to win the competition. It is of interest here to note that the only male in the study spoke of teacher favoritism to "Jocks" in the math class.

Rowley (1989) stated that at-risk-students lacked social values and a sense of responsibility as illustrated by their poor attendance records at school, their lack of preparedness for classroom learning, and their unwillingness to keep interview appointments. I would argue that the researcher did not understand the student social value code which often times is in direct opposition to that of authorities. I found that the ethical code or belief system of each of my participants was extremely strong and responsibly enacted. One of the participants, unnamed by request (-), stated one set of rules as follows:

-: _____ don't sell to no kids; that is bad.

R.K.: So they were all adults that you sold to?

-: Well . . . like some ladies come up with babies and stuff and I say, "You got to go over to one of them other dudes." _____ no pregnant girls come there, I say, "They better go elsewhere 'cause I ain't giving you nothing 'cause what you got in your belly you better wait until you have it and do what you want to do."

R.K.: So you had more integrity than they did?

-: Some of them did not care what . . . hey they was making a buy.

R.K.: They did not care if they hurt their babies.

-: Yeah 'cause making a dollar is all they worried about.

In this Chapter, I presented 40 stress factors from 4 participants that affected their academic learning. I then discussed the literature that tried to blame the student, the teacher or the school organization for the dropout problem. Next I discussed my findings in terms of three theories: Labeling, Control and Strain Theory. Lastly, I discussed my findings in comparison to three dissertations from a student perspective.

Chapter VIII linked the results with the theory already in place. Conclusions, implications and recommendations are found in Chapter IX.

CHAPTER VIII

RESULTS LINKED TO THEORY

The student brings past experiences to school in the form of symbolic meaning which affect his/her social interaction in school (Mead, 1934). An understanding of the student's meaning system provided a basis for understanding the student's rationale for making choices such as the following:

1. use of drugs and alcohol,
2. peer group affiliation,
3. the breaking of school rules,
4. disruptive classroom behavior,
5. truancy as behavior,
6. good grades/bad grades,
7. anti-school, anti-authority behavior.

PAM WALKER - PARTICIPANT 1

Pam Walker (P.W.) was chosen as a participant in this study because she voiced her hatred of public high school openly on a regular basis. She was, otherwise, atypical of the students attending the Alternative Center for Learning (A.C.L.).

She was called "Barbie-doll cute" by a staff member, who spoke of how nicely dressed and how socially interactive Pam was. She was popular with her peers, an attractive blonde, a senior, one of very few students at the center who drove her own car to and from school.

From the written questionnaire, I discovered that her family was intact, that Pam was an only child, that both parents had graduated from high school, that both parents worked full time, that the family valued education, that Pam expected to attend college, that the family was middle to upper-middle socio-economic class. In terms of predictor

variables, there appeared to be little reason for Pam to be a pushout from the public education classroom in attendance at A.C.L.

From the staff at A.C.L. I learned that Pam was labeled a "School Phobic," that she had failed tenth grade, that she had attended at least two high schools locally only to become truant with failing grades at each. In the classroom, Pam had days of resistant and rebellious behavior, that she would become so angry, frustrated and out of control that on one occasion, she walked out of school knowing that she would be expelled once again.

Pam was, for the most part, performing well at A.C.L., with all A's and B's, working at the upper level in the high school classroom considered to be the best group academically. Interviews over a 5 month period revealed that Pam was a classic case representing Anomie Theory. Both Labeling and Control Theory concepts support the analysis that follows.

The key event in Pam's retrospective life history was the move south when Pam was in the fifth grade. Her classmates labeling her on the first day of school as "yankee" placed Pam in the school organization as "outsider" with the other students attending being the "insiders." Because Pam's culture changed due to the move South by her parents, Pam's social code and value norms, as learned in the private school of the North, were different from the new group consensus. Pam brought the symbolism of the North with her in the form of dialect, dress, desire to be popular, and desire for a college education. The institutional means of the southern schools were tied to the southern cultural norms which Pam did not understand. Pam no longer had full and equal access to opportunity. And, according to Merton's (1957) axiom, genuine failure leads to a lessening or withdrawal of ambition.

"When the institutional system is regarded as the barrier to the satisfaction of legitimized goals, the stage is set for rebellion as an adaptive response" (Merton, 1957, p. 156). For Pam, the acute

disfunction between cultural norms imported from a private school in the North and the barriers set up by the public southern institution of school in the South, provided a rationale for Pam's later joining the Hoods who would accept her as an insider too.

Acute anomie is marked by a deterioration of value systems, or in the extreme, by disintegration of value systems, marked by anxieties. When Pam joined the Hoods in order to become an insider somewhere, she was forced to accept a meaning system very different from the one she brought from the North. For acceptance in the Hoods, she gave up valuing of education, regular attendance in school, valuing of good grades, acceptance of authority figures, both teachers and parents. In order to satisfy her immediate need to belong and feel loved, she gave up her long term goal of attending college after a high school graduation. Her immediate goals were adapted from the peer group culture of the Hoods, to "beat the system" by practicing truancy and not getting caught. This gave Pam the feeling of "power," one of the five basic needs stated by Glasser (1986).

If their friends work hard in school, then they, as the haves, will be motivated to work hard to keep these friends. But if they are friends with the have-nots and those friends are dissatisfied with school as they are, their friendship is strengthened by the fact that they all hate school (Glasser, 1986, p. 11).

By joining the Hoods, Pam satisfied two of the other basic human needs besides the need for power: (1) to have freedom and (2) to have fun. When Pam skipped school, part of the fun was to see if she could leave school and not get caught. At first, she went to a boy's house within the neighborhood where a party gathered. Later, she began sneaking out of the house at night to attend gatherings at Target Square Mall. "If they are lonely, they will spend their time looking for friends rather than knowledge" (Glasser, 1986, p. 15).

Pam was not only lonely at school, but lonely within her own family. She had been "Daddy's little girl" when she attended private school in the North. Her father's loss of employment in Detroit

initiated the move to the new location. Pam described a change in her relationship to her father after the move; that he was now too busy on a different schedule than her own, and that parental authority had shifted to her mother. Pam, then, was not only a "misfit" at school, but became a "misfit" within the family group due to the move. It appeared that the socio-economic status may have been lowered by her father's loss of position in the North since Pam was now attending public rather than private school.

Along with the key event of the move South, were visual overlays connected to the move that I did not fully understand. The highly descriptive material from the transcript connected with the move, were issues surrounding "money," "teacher favoritism," and "work place favoritism." The theme of "money" was tied to descriptions of her mother having to borrow money from Pam, after the move, to go on spending sprees which angered Pam. This visual appeared to be related to southern girls accepting generous allowances from their fathers, allowances that must be spent each day in order to receive another. This image was connected with teacher favoritism and cheerleading competitions and male chauvinism in the workplace. Pam had a lot of anger about everyday life that appeared to come from a change in values from North to South. This value system change was likely adopted from the membership in the Hoods.

All of our behavior, simple to complex, is our best attempt to control ourselves to satisfy our needs, but, of course controlling ourselves is almost always related to our constant attempts to control what goes on around us (Glasser, 1986, p. 17).

From the perspective of a person's needing sex, love, power, freedom, and fun as a psychological desire to belong, Pam Walker's behavior is acceptable and understandable. From the educator's point of view, Pam was perceived to be sick (School Phobic) of school and at risk of dropping out, even though she was academically capable of high school graduation and college entrance.

The "looking glass self" that Pam saw after the move South, was one of misfit and being the outsider to the culture which had changed. It was easier for Pam to accept the meaning system of the Hoods than to change the meaning system that she brought with her from the North. What Pam perceived to be real, was real in its consequences as she made the choice to belong to the Hoods. A capable student became highly at risk for dropping out of school.

D.J. WHITEBEAR - PARTICIPANT 2

D. J. Whitebear (D.J.) was chosen as a participant for this study because of a poem he wrote about his personal story. He was an art student, who resisted the creative writing assignments until I asked him to tell his life history. At first, he refused to put pencil to paper. After I convinced him that his ideas were more important at the moment than spelling or grammar skills, he began to compose with me acting as secretary. It was during this process that I learned about his family life and how his relationships at home affected his school behavior.

D.J. was enculturated by a drug using family so that his favorite positive memory was coming home from school in the third grade to smoke pot and to watch cartoons with his mom who was his best friend. His positive picture of belonging (Glasser, 1986) linked mom as best friend and marijuana smoking. D.J.'s group of choice within the social construct of school was naturally with the Hood-type. D.J. was never rebellious as Pam Walker had been, even though he too, perceived himself to be a loner and a "misfit." D.J. fits into Merton's (1957) scheme as a "retreatist"; one who has abandoned both the once-esteemed cultural goals of getting ahead by means of education and the institutionalized practices directed toward those goals.

D.J.'s choice of retreatist behavior in school parallels his retreating to the woods as a young boy when his father and mother were fighting. His past experiences of seeing his father hold a gun to his

mother's head and the physical abuse of his mother, by both his father and his step-father as negative images, supported D.J.'s creation of positive fantasy images of everyone in his family being able to get along with each other. Glasser (1986) described negative visual images as being replaced by positive ones.

There has been little research carried out on retreatist behavior, since the behavior is passive and does not create problems within the classroom in terms of disruption to teaching time. Merton (1957), however, did describe this social response as being identified with "problem families." Problem families were described as those families who do not "measure up to the normative expectations prevailing in their social environment" (p. 187).

During the interview with D.J., I asked, "Any early school experiences that made you feel like you couldn't do your school work, or lack of teacher help or . . . ?" D.J. interrupted my question about early school experiences to answer, "I guess, problems at home. I had them in my head at school." He went on to say that there was nothing he could do about the problems at home when he was in the fourth grade. "Went to the woods and stayed in the woods." I asked him, "Was that on the weekend or were you cutting school in the fourth grade?" D.J. said, "I think I was cutting school." Cutting school in the fourth grade with no adverse consequences paralleled later retreatist behavior when problems arose at school.

In discussing the labeling of deviant behavior, Schur (1971) described rule changes that force a person who is socially acceptable in one group (D.J.'s family), being labeled "deviant" by another group (school) because of their acceptance of different rules. D.J. was raised to believe that smoking pot was a normal and perfectly acceptable behavior. He openly stated that there was no way that he knew that smoking of any kind was against school rules. "I never thought there was anything wrong with it (smoking pot). I was brought up, there

wasn't anything wrong with it." Both D.J.'s mother and father smoked pot regularly during his early childhood.

When Glasser (1986) speaks of basic needs beyond survival, it appeared that at times D.J. was concerned with survival itself. His visual overlay of protecting his head during fights between his father and mother was real to him. His reason for walking out of school and never returning was the threat by a fellow classmate at D.J.'s locker.

D.J. described satisfying his basic need to belong as smoking pot with his friends at Jefferson High. "Me and Michael and all of us would smoke pot sometimes in the morning over at Glacial Springs and then walk over to auto mechanics. It was fun." He spoke of being expelled for smoking as 3 days of freedom. This matched with Glasser's basic needs for freedom, fun, and a sense of belonging. After his group of friends dropped out from Jefferson, D.J. risked being placed in Juvenile Detention when he broke school rules in order to return to A.C.L.

Fun and freedom were threatened continuously by school authorities who had rules that dictate non-smoking as an institutional policy. D.J. in school chose friends who smoked pot. D.J.'s interest in school was aligned more strongly with smoking pot with friends as symbolic interaction in the back lot than with the long term goal of getting an education in order to gain power. The short term need of having fun with friends was stronger than any long-term need of gaining an education.

Students like D.J. generally do fairly well in elementary school where there are self-contained classes with caring teachers. D.J.'s positive memory of early school, however, was described as a recess situation where he played with his friends on the beach in California. In Junior High, teachers became less available and less personal and for D.J. with all of his family issues, school became less and less a place where he felt a sense of belonging.

If they [the students] flunk and feel powerless, they . . . use drugs, mostly alcohol, to try to gain the feeling that they have some power. If no one respects them, drugs give them the feeling of power and respect that they desperately want (Glasser, 1986, p. 15).

As school work became more difficult, smoking pot or skipping school became more fun, and that was D.J.'s choice. "Teachers are well aware that hungry students think of food, lonely students look for friends, and powerless students for attention far more than they look for knowledge" (Glasser, 1986, p. 20).

Glasser (1986) stated that negative images are dismissed and that positive images control our choices for behavior. D.J. is classic in his choice of pot and not alcohol. His image of alcohol use was that of his mother unable to keep food down during her binges, and having to cope with "voices in her head." D.J. smoked pot, but chose not to drink alcohol.

"But it is always the difference between the pictures in our heads and the situation in the world that starts us behaving (Glasser, 1986, p. 52). A student may have to behave defiantly in order to get expelled from school in order to gain control of his or her life. If there is no visual of satisfying any personal need by learning in school, learning will not take place simply because a teacher demands that a student learn (Glasser, 1986).

IESHA WILSON - PARTICIPANT 3

Iesha Wilson (I.) was chosen as a participant in the study because of violent and unruly behavior at school. She was enculturated by a social group that practiced violent behavior; she was similar to D.J. in that her early enculturation affected her choice of behavior that was considered deviant by the school. School rules and neighborhood school rules were in opposition to each other. Iesha was similar to Pam in that she chose rebellious behavior as her way of acting out her feelings of being a "misfit" (Merton, 1957).

In analyzing Iesha's life history in regard to school interaction, an important finding was that while Iesha attended a neighborhood school close to the projects, she was not considered a troublemaker. Her neighborhood school was closed, and she was forced to attend Jefferson Middle which she considered the rich kid's school. Her behavior was rebellious, unruly, uncontrollable and she was expelled many more days than she attended school. After she was recommended to the Alternative Learning Center, she once again became the model student.

Labeling Theory evolved from that of Symbolic Interactionism whereby the continuous interaction between the individual's behavior and the responses of others dictated how a person feels about oneself; one's identity and self-concept are affected by reactions of others. As long as Iesha was accepted as an insider, she was not forced to respond in a rebellious way. Once Iesha was perceived or labeled by others as a "misfit," Iesha's behavior changed dramatically. It appeared that Iesha's positive image of self demanded that she rise up using violent behavior in an effort to defend the Black culture against racial slurs by whites.

Iesha was labeled a "Black" in a white, rich kid's school. This stereotyping called "pictures in our minds" was explained by Walter Lippmann in 1922 and quoted from Schur (1971) as follows:

. . . We do not first see, then define, we define first and then see. . . . We are told about the world before we see it. We imagine most things before we experience them. and those preconceptions, unless education has made us acutely aware, govern deeply the whole process of perception. They mark out certain objects as familiar or strange, emphasizing the difference, so that the slightly familiar is seen as very familiar, and the somewhat strange as sharply alien (p. 40).

The "whole process of perception" on the part of Iesha as she entered Jefferson Middle, and the perception on the part of Jefferson students to an "outsider" especially a Black, low socio-economic status outsider, appear to be the crux of the negative social interaction that took place. Iesha reported that even one teacher announced at the

beginning of one class period, "You Blacks don't get on my bad side cause I don't like Niggers." This kind of stereotyping based upon one personal characteristic of being either white or Black, places the other on the defensive in social interaction.

Labeling Theory also described role engulfment in the form of immersion in a deviant subculture, as a possible condition of the individual's developing a strong deviant self-concept (Schur, 1971). Iesha's identity with gangs and gang culture in the projects appeared to place her in the adversarial position of defending African-American and/or low socio-economic meaning systems that were contrasted by Iesha herself, from the white middle class standards evidenced at Jefferson; standards that Iesha found offensive. Again, what came into play was the "looking glass self." Iesha very quickly became aware that she was perceived as the "outsider" at Jefferson, and the prejudice she experienced did not make her feel good about herself. Back to Symbolic Interactionism: The prejudice Iesha perceived to be present was real in its consequences for her.

- R.: Can you tell me about your fifth grade teacher and why you liked her?
- I.: Well, she, you know, trusting and honest and helped us out because she was once from the projects too. And she understood what we was going through and all the pressure we had on us in the projects. And she used to keep our courage up high and tell us we could do it. You know, she did not think low of us because she was from the projects. . . . And, you know, didn't no whites get treated better than Blacks. It was all equal because, you know, we all came from the same place . . . all of us grew up together and everybody knew everybody in the whole school.

Iesha then described gang membership. She spoke of gang fights that led to killings. She described unwritten rules about territory and drugs and beatings. She described action, "Because they beat up one of our boys. It was like 20 on 1. They put him in the hospital for 4 weeks," and reaction: "you can just get killed for saying 'Hi' in the wrong way."

Iesha made an attempt to explain gang rules to me. Her meaning system had been learned as part of a gang culture that was foreign to

me. Iesha's "looking glass self" was a person with integrity who would stand up and fight against racial remarks as if her life depended upon it.

In terms of Control Theory and Anomie Theory, Iesha was a "misfit" in the white rich school she was asked to attend. She still had the cultural goal to do well in school and to attend college after high school graduation, and the institutional barriers were in place to keep her from accomplishing her educational goals. This placed her in Merton's "rebellion" category, similar to Pam Walker.

When rebellion is confined to relatively small and relatively powerless elements in a community, it provides a potential for the formation of subgroups, alienated from the rest of the community but unified with themselves. This pattern is exemplified by alienated adolescents teaming up in gangs or becoming part of a youth movement with a distinctive subculture of its own (Glasser, 1986, p. 191).

DELORES COOK - PARTICIPANT 4

Delores Cook (D.) was chosen as a participant for this study because she was labeled a "troublemaker" by public school officials, and yet, was well liked and performed well at the A.C.L. Her truancy behavior in regular school paralleled both that of Pam and Iesha, in that she sneaked out of her house at night to be with her chosen peer group for fun. After having a good time during the night with her friends, she then was not willing to go to school the next day. She often pretended to be ill simply from being tired.

Delores described the divorce of her parents as a key event with connections in memory to (1) a special period of time with her father after divorce and before his remarriage, (2) rejection by her biological mother when her mother did not ask for custody in court, (3) being mistreated "slapped around" by her stepmother. In Merton's terms Delores had lost her "place" of belonging within the home as well as losing her own sense of power. This is similar to D.J.'s being rejected by family as well as Pam's perception of rejection by her father.

She described the racial prejudice of both her father and of her biological mother. It appeared, then, that her seeking a place for herself within a Black male group was not only motivated sexually (a basic human need as described by Glasser, 1986) according to how "gorgeous" Anthony was, but was also an act to gain power or control over her own life (power being another basic human need, Glasser, 1986). Delores described a need to feel placed "on a pedestal" and that only Black boyfriends made her feel this way.

Delores was labeled by school authorities as a trouble maker and was treated in a similar way to that described by D.J. When Delores and her cousin were caught in the girl's room, the cousin (who lived in the same household as Delores) was sent back to the classroom, Delores was given in-school suspension (I.S.S.). When there was a classroom problem of someone handing out drugs before a history test, Delores was held responsible for the incident even though she named the young man who had been the supplier. These are examples of how students are stereotyped by school officials, and this affected a student's meaning perspective (Schur, 1971). Both Iesha and Delores requested placement outside of their respective schools because of having a "reputation," and yet both were held within the system for undue lengths of time (Social Control Theory). Both served many days of suspension which only added to their getting further behind in academic work.

For Delores, the strong positive visual (Glaser, 1986) was no longer academic achievement, but to escape the household in which she lived. She did expect to graduate from high school as her means of getting a job to support living in a home of her own. She did not dismiss running away with Anthony as one possible avenue of escape.

She blamed her association with the Black peer group as the beginning of her problems in school. Her pattern of sneaking out of the house when her father was on the road driving a truck, was similar to that of Pam Walker. Pam, Iesha, and Delores each joined a peer group

first that supported truancy, anti-school, anti-authority behaviors and secondly got into academic trouble at school. Each acted out illness to avoid school attendance and to associate with an outside group.

In Chapter VIII, I have linked the findings in this study to four social theories defined in Chapter I. Chapter IX presented the conclusions, implications and recommendations for schools.

CHAPTER IX

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The assumption at the beginning of this study was that past experiences in school, either positive or negative, led to a change in a student's meaning perspective from "I like school" to one of "School is not for me." Each participant was asked questions concerning earliest school memory, favorite teacher, best friend, school attendance, substance use and others.

The students described key events that changed their perspective on school as being non-curricular in nature. The key events were experiences outside of school from the wider social context, triggered by events outside of school but supported by school interaction, often by peer groups.

The meaning perspective about school described in the student narratives by each participant follows:

Participant 1. There was no way for me to get from the position of "outsider" to the position of "insider" after my family moved from North to South.

Participant 2. I learned from my family to be drug dependent before I was old enough to make a logical choice; my family enculturation and school rules were in conflict.

Participant 3. I am justified in using violent means to react to racial prejudice and racial remarks; I learned that people are to be accepted for who they are and not judged by the color of their skin.

Participant 4. I need to feel "special"; the only way I have found my "place on the pedestal" is with Black males.

For the four participants in the study, outside stressors led to poor grades and truancy from school. This represented findings

different from (1) curriculum as being mismatched to student skill level, (2) a teacher's style of teaching mismatched to the student learning style, or (3) a student deficit such as a learning disability or low I.Q. (Intelligence Quotient).

The four participants described emotional stressors from the wider social context that interfered with their engagement in the learning process. It appeared that a student's emotional needs directed the student to a peer group that would befriend the student offering a place to vent one's stress. For Pam the peer group choice was the Hoods, for D.J. the Potheads, for Iesha the gangs in the neighborhood, and for Delores her association with a Black peer group. Each of these groups represent an anti-school, anti-authority meaning perspective that had to be learned by the participants.

In this study, instead of students not being able to accomplish the curriculum, then getting poor grades which led to school avoidance and truancy, there was evidence that the association with the anti-school peer group was a choice by the participant to find a "place" to vent feelings or to find a "place" simply to have fun. Having fun is one of the basic human needs described by Glasser (1986), and was described by him as the opposite of boredom. This study suggested a triggering by outside stressors for a student to join a peer group. The outside peer group then supported an anti-school, anti-authority meaning system which, in some cases, actually taught the student how to skip school and not get caught. Skipping school and fooling authorities became a mindset opposed to academic learning. The truancy then led to poor grades, failure and expulsion from school.

This study supported the four social theories introduced in Chapter I. Mead's (1934) Theory of Symbolic Interactionism along with Cooley's concept of "Looking glass self" and W. I. Thomas' (Kronick, 1974a) idea of "If one believes it to be real, it is real in its consequences," were matched perfectly to the data. The student's

problem of poor self-esteem, a major risk factor for dropping out of school, was reinforced by teacher favoritism, by family rejection, by parental divorce, and by being labeled as a troublemaker in school. Once a student was so labeled (Schur, 1971), he/she virtually lost "voice" at school to present one's viewpoint to administrators.

Anomie Theory, i.e., the student's perception of being a "misfit" in school, appeared to influence his/her outside peer group choice. That choice by each of the four participants was to join an anti-school, anti-authority peer group. The peer group in every case supported a choice of truant behavior. In applying Becker's (1963) study of Outsiders to my findings, a meaning perspective change by the pushout must take place before truant behavior can become a student choice. The rebellious and retreatist behavior described by Merton (1957) matched the findings of this study perfectly.

The concept of "visual overlay" as part of the framework I used to analyze the student's history was described by Glasser (1986) as positive or negative visual memory of social interaction. Glasser's description of how students' interpret and remember key events supported the original assumption of this study. Glasser described our developing senses as a "multisensory camera" taking pictures that we store in our heads (p. 35). Glasser believed that we store only the satisfying pictures for need fulfillment.

In contrast to the above model, Lippman as early as 1922 stated that . . . "we do not first see, then define, we define first and then see . . ." (Schur, 1971, p. 40). This statement was supported by findings in this study concerning "stereotyping" from Labeling Theory (Schur, 1971). As an example of negative visuals initiating behavior, both the teachers and students at Jefferson Middle behaved toward Iesha as though she were a bad person simply because she was "Black" (really biracial). Lippman's statement represented a learned prejudice, which, according to the findings in this study, appeared to be prevalent in our

schools. It is to be noted that Iesha was not perceived to be "unruly" in her neighborhood school. At Jefferson Middle, Iesha was so "unruly" that she was threatened with 24-hour mental treatment in seclusion. At A.C.L., Iesha was perceived to be a model student by the staff. Iesha's label changed due to the change in her social context. This is a direct match to Labeling Theory (Schur, 1971).

As a final conclusion, the framework of key event--visual overlay--outcome was perceived to be a useful construct for interpreting retrospective life histories. Key event was defined as an important life experience referenced by the student during the interview process; visual overlay was defined as the memory of a key event along with the interpretation by the student of that event; outcome was defined as the behavior of the participant based on past social interaction and the participant's analysis and memory of the event perceived through the "distorted lens" of personal meaning.

FINDINGS COMPARED TO DISSERTATION RESEARCH

This study supported the conclusions made in the three doctoral dissertations cited earlier. Those conclusions are:

1. No student made a decision to drop out of school,
2. No parent supported either the truancy or early school leaving of their child (Epstein, 1989),
3. Frequent school changes affected early school leaving,
4. Family problems became risk factors for early school leaving,
5. Teacher actions that were both punitive and inattentive initiated feelings of alienation on the part of the student (Rowley, 1989),
6. Low self-esteem was a major factor in student alienation from school,

7. Alienation of the student was due to the treatment by school staff,
8. Family problems were cited as risk factors,
9. Non-interactive teaching style was a reason given for poor student performance (Colon-Tarrats, 1988).

This study differed from the conclusions made in the three doctoral dissertations in three ways.

1. Students displayed a lack of a sense of responsibility (Rowley, 1989),
2. Students felt intellectually incompetent (Epstein, 1989),
3. Students felt overwhelmingly bored.

First, a discussion of the students' sense of responsibility from the student perspective follows. In this study one participant's unwillingness to sell drugs to a pregnant woman with a sense of responsibility to the unborn fetus, represented a responsibility to human-kind. It appeared that a lack of responsibility for homework may be linked to the meaning perspective change that has taken place concerning "school." Each of the students in this study liked school at one time and performed well in school before key events placed them on the "outside" from their own meaning perspective. Again, what the student believes to be true, that of being a "misfit" in school, is real in its consequences, i.e., student behavior.

Pam described a responsibility to herself when she initially stayed home from school. She viewed school as being so stressful for her that staying home in the safety and seclusion of her room was responsible behavior in order to keep her emotional well-being intact. This ties in with the anthropologist's perspective described by Trueba, Spindler, G., and Spindler, L. (1989).

Iesha described responsible behavior as that of standing up to outsiders, whether gang members or teachers for what she had been taught was right, especially over racial issues. Standing up for Blacks and

for those living in the Projects was perceived to be responsible behavior by Iesha.

The findings by Epstein (1989) that students felt intellectually incompetent and overwhelmingly bored were not supported by this study. "Boredom" was mentioned by participants in this study, but not considered important enough to be an emerging theme.

Study Findings Representing the Student Voice

1. Stressors from the wider social context have greater impact on student performance in school than in-school factors (see Figure 1, p. 100).
2. A teacher's method of presenting materials in a non-interactive manner allowed time for students to disengage from learning in order to think about and try to solve stress factors in their lives. A teacher's teaching style may be a "mismatch" to student learning style.
3. Students with similar problems to solve, who are grouped together in alternative schools, may lose their incentive for acting out behavior due to lack of an audience.
4. In this student population, there was prevalent drug and alcohol abuse in school with little consequence by school authorities,
5. Violence appeared to be learned behavior from the wider social context which infiltrated the school environment,
6. Teacher favoritism toward the "haves" can be devastating to the "have nots."

IMPLICATIONS

1. Studies in the student voice at other sites,
2. A wider population sample at the same site,
3. A comparison of teacher teaching style versus student learning style to verify statements made in the literature base,

4. As Swadener (1989) suggests, a project to teach at-risk students in the stimulating way gifted and talented are taught, to see if at-risk students will again engage in learning,

5. Support of student major transitions such as cross country moves, divorce, death of significant other, etc.,

6. Use of this new framework of analysis based on Symbolic Interactionism and Glasser's Control Theory.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SCHOOLS

1. Schools could target at-risk students for special services,

2. Schools could involve parent or guardian support for students,

3. Schools might flex the rules when such things as student absence or tardiness is due to family problems and are beyond the student control,

4. School personnel could practice better listening skills,

5. Schools might initiate peer group counseling for major student transitions,

6. Course content should be matched to student ability,

7. Schools could reward good behavior first and reprimand by means other than school expulsion,

8. Schools might involve community agency collaborative support for students at-risk as well as for families at-risk,

9. Schools should prepare students for community life whether college bound or not.

Full service schools incorporating community services already in place, such as family support agencies, drug and alcohol abuse clinics, child and family services, and representatives from the court systems may be the model of the future. Self-contained classrooms in the style of the one-room schoolhouse, where a sense of "family" could be established as a support group at school for students-at-risk and

struggling to remain in school, was a model used at the A.C.L. for 10 years. A closer relationship of student to teacher was valued highly by these four participants, supporting findings from the Kronick and Hargis (1990) study.

For the four participants in this study, experiences from the wider social context triggered the student's disengagement from learning at school. However, both family and school can choose to undermine or to support student involvement in the learning process. Educators can help the student create a positive image of himself/herself as having a "place" in our society after high school graduation.

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APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A

LITERATURE REVIEW CHOICES

LITERATURE REVIEW CHOICES

Topics on Dropouts and At-Risk Students Excluded:

1. "How To" articles, especially those that were not research based,
2. Elementary school materials for dropout programs,
3. Handicapped students as at-risk,
4. Prevention programs,
5. Technology programs,
6. Foreign articles,
7. Teachers of alienated students,
8. Environmental programs,
9. Intervention programs,
10. Keeping at-risk student in school,
11. Property versus ethnicity,
12. Financing dropout/at-risk programs,
13. American Indian problems,
14. Benefits versus cost of dropout/at-risk programs,
15. Reading/literature for the use of dropouts,
16. Rural programs for dropouts,
17. Early school (7th grade and under) dropouts,
18. National study of tests,
19. Evening classes for dropouts
20. Criminal behavior of dropouts
21. Parent involvement in dropout programs,
22. High school size and dropouts,
23. Classroom structure and dropouts,
24. Labor market problems.

Areas of Interest--Dropouts and At-Risk Students

1. Historical approach to the study of dropouts/at-risk,
2. Characteristics of dropouts/at-risk,
3. History of dropouts/at-risk,
4. Longitudinal studies either elementary, middle or high school,
5. Problems with defining dropouts/at-risk students,
6. Research done in the student voice,
7. Challenging writing tasks for dropouts/at-risk,
8. Counseling components of programs for dropouts/at-risk,
9. Locus of control studies of dropouts/at-risk,
10. Case studies of at-risk students "teetering on the edge,"
11. Retrospective life histories of dropouts/at-risk students.

APPENDIX B

RESEARCHER INTERVIEW GUIDE

RESEARCHER INTERVIEW GUIDE

Definition: "Presupposes a certain degree of knowledge about the people one intends to study (at least in-depth interviewing) (Taylor and Bogdan, p. 92). The guide simply reminds the interviewer to ask about certain subject areas.

1. Describe the event that led to your being suspended or expelled from school.
2. What is your earliest memory of school?
3. Describe your favorite teacher. How was she different from teachers you did not like as well?
4. Tell me about your family. Do you have brothers and sisters? Is this your real (meaning biological) mom and dad? Further probing questions were asked to ascertain family context and family relationships.
5. Describe your best friend in regular school. Describe your best friend at the Alternative Center for Learning.
6. Did you belong to school organizations at regular school? Did you take part in any sports? Are you a joiner? Are you a loner?
7. I tried to find out about any drug or alcohol use without blatantly asking the question.
8. I tried to get a student perspective on school authority figures, and whether or not that meaning perspective had changed.

APPENDIX C

PARTICIPATION CONSENT FORM

PARTICIPATION CONSENT FORM

I understand that the purpose of this study is to learn about a student's experience of "school" and that my participation involves responding to a series of questions, both written and oral, about my suspension from the regular public education classroom. I understand that the oral responses will be taped, either by audio-taping or by video-taping, and that I will be made aware of that process. These tapes will be kept locked in a file in Dr. Kronick's office, Claxton Addition, Room 133, U.T. Only Rosa Kennedy, Dr. Kronick and Linda Harrell (Dept. Secretary) will have access to the tapes. The tapes will be held for seven years and then destroyed.

I understand that all of my responses will be held in confidence by the researcher, with pseudonyms used instead of real names identifying my answers to questions. My answers to questions will be typed and grouped with others to form the data of this research project. I promise to tell the truth from my perspective as I experienced the process of "school".

I understand that my participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that I may withdraw from participation at any time and/or refuse to answer specific questions without incurring any penalty. There are minimal risks involved. The benefits to me are in the process of reflecting and responding to the research questions and also in the knowledge gained from the project's findings. This project ends July 1, 1993.

I understand that I may contact the researcher at any time if I have further questions about the project or about my participation in it.

Researcher Name: Rosa Kennedy Telephone Number: 974-2272

The above project has been explained to my satisfaction.

Student Signature _____

Date _____

To the best of my knowledge, I am confident that this student is capable of understanding his/her participation in this research project.

Student's School Counselor Signature _____

Date _____

APPENDIX D

STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE

STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE

1. My age is _____.
2. My race is _____.
3. My sex is _____.
4. My grade is _____.
5. My father's job is _____.
6. My mother's job is _____.
7. My father completed College Some College
12 11 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 DON'T KNOW
years of school.
8. My mother completed College Some College
12 11 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 DON'T KNOW
years of school.
9. Parents: Widowed _____
Married _____
Divorced _____
Separated _____
10. Who do you live with? both parents _____
 mother _____
 father _____
 stepmother/father _____
 stepfather/mother _____
 other _____ specify _____
11. I work 0 1-10 11-20 21-30 31-over hours after
school - i.e. McDonalds, etc.
12. I would rather work than go to school. Yes No
13. I work after school because I have to. Yes No
14. On the average I miss 5 4 3 2 1 0 days per week
from regular school.

15. On the average I miss 5 4 3 2 1 0 days per week
from the Alternative Center for Learning
16. My G.P.A. at regular school is A B C D F.
17. My G.P.A. at the Alternative Center for Learning is
A B C D F.
18. I feel good about myself.
- | | | |
|------|------|-------|
| Most | Some | Never |
|------|------|-------|
19. I participate in athletics at regular school.
- | | | |
|------|------|-------|
| Most | Some | Never |
|------|------|-------|
20. I participate in band/chorus at regular school.
- | | | |
|------|------|-------|
| Most | Some | Never |
|------|------|-------|
21. I do my homework when assigned at regular school.
- | | | |
|------|------|-------|
| Most | Some | Never |
|------|------|-------|
22. I do my homework when assigned at the Alternative Center for
Learning.
- | | | |
|------|------|-------|
| Most | Some | Never |
|------|------|-------|
23. I use drugs.
- | | | |
|------|------|-------|
| Most | Some | Never |
|------|------|-------|
24. I get along well with my family.
- | | | |
|------|------|-------|
| Most | Some | Never |
|------|------|-------|
25. I get along well with the teachers at regular school.
- | | | |
|------|------|-------|
| Most | Some | Never |
|------|------|-------|
26. I get along well with the teachers at the Alternative Center
for Learning.
- | | | |
|------|------|-------|
| Most | Some | Never |
|------|------|-------|
27. I like regular school.
- | | | |
|------|------|-------|
| Most | Some | Never |
|------|------|-------|
28. I like the Alternative Center for Learning.
- | | | |
|------|------|-------|
| Most | Some | Never |
|------|------|-------|

29. Regular school is boring.

Most Some Never

30. The Alternative Center for Learning is boring.

Most Some Never

31. No matter what I do things don't go my way.

Most Some Never

32. If I do something that is wrong my peers generally support me.

Most Some Never

33. I feel very alone.

Most Some Never

34. I find social activities at regular school a waste of time.

Most Some Never

35. I find social activities at the Alternative Center for Learning a waste of time.

Most Some Never

36. I follow the rules at my regular school.

Most Some Never

37. I follow the rules at the Alternative Center for Learning.

Most Some Never

38. I have no trouble keeping up with my school work at regular school.

Most Some Never

39. I have no trouble keeping up with my school work at the Alternative Center for Learning.

Most Some Never

40. I am in a club at regular school (Latin, Chemistry, Key).

Yes No

41. I am in the right grade for my age.

Yes No

42. I have failed at least one grade since I have been in school.
Yes No
43. Most teachers at regular school like me.
True False
44. Most teachers at the Alternative Center for Learning like me.
True False
45. Most teachers at regular school don't care about me.
True False
46. Most teachers at the Alternative Center for Learning don't care about me.
True False
47. I have received help at regular school.
True False
48. I have received help at the Alternative Center for Learning.
True False
49. No one at regular school cares enough to help me with my problems.
True False
50. No one at the Alternative Center for Learning cares enough to help me with my problems.
True False
51. If I got pregnant I would still stay in regular school.
True False
52. Getting pregnant is a good way to get out of going to school.
True False
53. My parents need me to be at home.
True False

54. I am sick a lot.

True False

55. My family wants me to graduate from high school.

True False

56. I plan to get married by the time I am 17.

True False

57. What I do has very little influence over what happens to me.

True False

58. Most of my peers consider me attractive.

True False

59. It is important to me to be accepted by others.

True False

60. I would rather be involved with my peers than do well in school.

True False

61. School work is not important to me.

True False

62. I consider myself a warm, affectionate person.

True False

63. I like being in groups.

True False

64. I like to hug and be hugged.

True False

65. Family is very important to me.

True False

66. In social situations I must be in control.

True False

67. I enjoy working for what I want.
True False
68. Money and power are important to me.
True False
69. I don't like to hug or be hugged.
True False
70. I consider myself shy.
True False
71. I am accepting of those who have lifestyles different from my own.
True False
72. Do you have brothers and sisters?
_____ yes
_____ no
73. How many of each?
sisters (include half/step) _____
brothers (include half/step) _____
74. Have any other brothers/sisters attended the Alternate Center for Learning?
yes _____ no _____
75. How long have you been at the Alternate Center for Learning?

76. For what reason did you arrive at the Alternate Center for Learning?
77. Have you been back to your regular school to:
visit _____
attend classes _____
work on future attendance _____
never _____

78. How were you received at your regular school?

79. Do you look forward to going back to your regular school?

yes _____ For what reasons?

no _____ For what reasons?

80. What are some of the differences in the Alternate Center for Learning and your regular school in regards to:

Teacher: _____

Counselor: _____

Rules: _____

Individual help in school work (tutoring): _____

Classroom organization: _____

Students: _____

81. At which school have you learned more:

(a) academics ACL _____ Regular _____

Why do you think this is so?

Who has been the most helpful? teacher _____

aides _____

counselor _____

other _____ specify _____

(b) about life: ACL _____ Regular _____

Why do you think this is so?

Who has been the most helpful? teacher _____

aides _____

counselor _____

other _____ specify _____

(c) about career opportunity: ACL _____ Regular _____

Why do you think this is so?

Who has been the most helpful? teacher _____

aides _____

counselor _____

other _____ specify _____

(d) about yourself: ACL _____ Regular _____

Why do you think this is so?

Who has been the most helpful? teacher _____

aides _____

counselor _____

other _____ specify _____

82. Are you treated differently at each school?

yes _____ no _____

How? ACL _____

Regular _____

83. Do you think ACL has been beneficial to you in the educating process?

yes _____ no _____

In the growing process? yes _____ no _____

84. Do you think ACL has anything that would benefit the students in your regular school? (If yes what and how.)

yes _____ What and how? _____

no _____ Why do you feel this way? _____

Like Me: Not Like Me

Circle yes or no.

yes no 85. My parents hear what I have to say.

yes no 86. My parents want too much control.

yes no 87. My teachers at regular school show partiality (cheerleaders, football players).

yes no 88. My teachers at the Alternative Center for Learning show partiality (cheerleaders, football players).

yes no 89. I speak out when I see an injustice.

yes no 90. I must challenge all rules.

yes no 91. I can manipulate people to serve my needs.

yes no 92. I'm smarter than my teachers.

yes no 93. I do drugs.

yes no 94. Smoking looks cool (tough).

yes no 95. Competitive sports are fun.

yes no 96. Peers make fun of me.

- yes no 97. Spelling is easy.
- yes no 98. I want people to like me.
- yes no 99. I'm a wallflower at a party.
- yes no 100. I'm the life of the party.
- yes no 101. I aim to be different.
- yes no 102. Money (having it) is a major goal in life.
- yes no 103. Happiness is money.
- yes no 104. Being part of the "in group" is important.
- yes no 105. I wish to please myself, not others.
- yes no 106. I see things differently than most others.
- yes no 107. My intuitive abilities are stronger than most.
- yes no 108. Having a car is more important than having a friend.
- yes no 109. My peers know more than my parents.
- yes no 110. My mind makes playful stories out of people and situations.
- yes no 111. Math is boring.
- yes no 112. Sometimes I write my feelings on paper.
- yes no 113. I feel all alone in the world.
- yes no 114. My success in life depends on me.
- yes no 115. My success in life depends on luck.
- yes no 116. My parents' separation messed me up (if separated).
- yes no 117. Conflicts between my parents messed me up (if conflict).
118. What are some differences between ACL and regular school system?

119. Do your peers treat you differently at ACL than at regular school?
120. Do you feel more restricted by rules at ACL or at regular school?
121. What do you like about ACL better than a regular school?
(and vice versa)
122. How do the students at ACL differ and compare to those at a regular school?
123. Do the students at ACL have any advantages over the ones at regular school?
124. Can a student at ACL learn more than a student at a regular school? If so, what?
125. Do you have a better relationship with the teachers and staff at ACL or regular school?
126. Do you feel more motivated to do classwork at ACL or at regular school?
127. Please say anything you wish. What you have to say is important.

Thanks for Your Cooperation

APPENDIX E

LIST OF MEMBER CHECKS

LIST OF MEMBER CHECKS

P.W.

Pam Walker's story was told to me during the Pilot Study Phase I, from February, 1991 to June, 1991. I have not been in touch with her since the data was written up. During the process, however, I had access to her teacher, her counselor, her classroom aide and minimally with her mother. The only difference between what Pam said and the information from others was perspective, the distorted lens.

During the interviewing process, I wrote a narrative about how much Pam hated getting out of bed in the morning after he nights out. I tried to capture thoughts that Pam had. She did read that narrative and reported that she did not know that someone could occupy her head. In other words, she found no fault with it.

D.J.

1. D.J. approved the written narrative by telephone from South Carolina.

2. D.J.'s grandmother, called Meemaw in his story, was available during part of the interviewing process. She acknowledged that all of the information was truthful (maybe stretched a little by D.J.) including the severe alcoholism of her daughter (D.J.'s mother).

3. The Alternative Center for Learning staff was able to give yes and no answers to any questioning of the data which I had. The only discrepancy that I could find was about the father's level of caring. When I asked D.J. about this, his answer was that it depended on which timeframe we asked about his father's caring. His father gradually came around to believing in D.J.'s need for further education.

4. D.J.'s friend, John, represented in one interview, vouched for everything D.J. said as truth. This involved some of the more while visiting D.J.

IESHA

1. I read Iesha's narrative out loud with her and she made minor changes before saying it was correct.
2. I spoke with Iesha's mother on two occasions. She was open to all discussion where I questioned credibility.
3. When I asked for permission from the school principal to access Iesha's school file, especially looking for her expulsion records, the principal stated that she was a personal friend of the family, and that she would vouch for the absolute honesty of Iesha.

DELORES

1. Delores and I read her narrative aloud together and a few minor changes were made. For example, I had understood that she crawled up on the porch at her friend's house and took her beating there. She corrected that to say, after she crawled up on the porch, she entered the living room and was on a couch there when she took the beating. Delores found some humor in the inconsistency between her statements that she never wanted to hurt her daddy, and the descriptions of some of her behaviors. She did verify that both statements were the truth.

NOTE: Because Delores shared information with me that she had not discussed with her school counselor, I was reluctant to membercheck her story beyond what she had told me. In other words, she was still sneaking around and denying certain behavior with others. I believe it would have affected the level of trust had I pursued her story further.

VITA

Rosa Lea Kennedy was born in Grand Rapids, Michigan on October 21, 1938. She graduated in 1960 with a Bachelor of Science degree in Liberal Arts from the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan and in 1974 she graduated with a Master of Science degree in Related Arts from The University of Tennessee, Knoxville. Her work at the Alternative Center for Learning (A.C.L.), Knoxville, Tennessee as a professional artist teaching students at-risk of dropping out of school supported her desire to continue her education formally.

While teaching and directing a Visiting Artists Program for the Tennessee Arts Commission at A.C.L., she was given the opportunity to assist Dr. Robert F. Kronick in his research for the book later published by Kronick and Hargis (1990) entitled Who Drops Out and Why and the Recommended Action. It was not long, thereafter, that Rosa Lea Kennedy formally applied as a doctoral candidate in Special Services Education. This dissertation is a result of the association with professional educators at The University of Tennessee, Knoxville, but also the learning experience of association with both students and staff at A.C.L.

Dr. Jerome H. Morton was Director of the A.C.L. during most of Rosa Lea Kennedy's professional work at the school. He and the A.C.L. Board of Directors guided and supported the Visiting Artists Program as well as this ongoing study. I am grateful for the opportunity to represent the student perspective in an educational process that oft times alienates rather than supports individuality.

In the future, Rosa Lea Kennedy intends to continue working with students who are highly creative, high visual learners and to become an advocate for the teaching of art and creativity in the public education classroom.