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5. A study of hiring policies among large law firms found that "personal characteristics" ranked second among the criteria for selecting new lawyers (see Buller and Beck-Dudley 1990).
6. Many students are confronted with identity conflicts that stem from the separation of personal values from professional roles. This is felt most among those students who entered law school with social activist ideals (for further discussion of this, see Granfield 1986, 1989, 1992).

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In some cases, avoidance turned into open hostility. Another third-year student described how she now saw other students who remained committed to their ideals of helping the less fortunate: *They're so single-minded at times and I think a little naive. They've really pushed me away from wanting to do public interest work as a full-time occupation.* Condemning her condemners helped this student neutralize the guilt she felt over working for a corporate law firm.

Conclusion

Upwardly mobile working-class students in this study, as well as in others, interpret and experience their social class from the perspective of stigma. However, since the stigma of being a member of the lower classes is thought to be just, upwardly mobile working-class students frequently construct identities in which they seek to escape the taint associated with their affiliation. Overcoming this stigma is therefore considered an individual rather than a collective effort. As was demonstrated in this study, such efforts often involve managing one's identity in the ways that Goffman outlined. Research that explores identity struggles as they relate to class could offer further extensions of Goffman's comments on stigma. Such research also has potential value in contributing to our understanding of working-class movements in the United States. Indeed, exploring the experience of class from the perspective of stigma and its management could offer great insight into the social psychology of working-class disempowerment.

Endnotes

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1. The following are the percentage distributions of social class background on the random sample of questionnaire returnees I collected for the larger project: upper class (2.8), upper-middle (44.6), middle (30.0), lower-middle (8.0), working (13.1), and lower (0.5).
2. This is a first-year exercise in which students select a case to argue in front of a three-person panel consisting of a law professor, a third-year student, and an invited guest from the legal community. First-year students prepare their cases for several months in advance before formally presenting their oral argument.
3. Similar findings were reported by Domhoff and Zweigenhaft (1991) in which they described the experiences of black students who were enrolled in elite prep schools as a result of affirmative action.
4. Students are actively pursued. During the 1987 recruitment seasons at the law school, an average of 44 recruiters from commercial law firms conducted interviews with students each day. This represents nearly one law firm for each law student eligible to interview. In most cases, law firms are looking to hire more than one student.

For many students who experienced ambivalence, working in elite law firms was seen as the best way to help those they left behind. Other students redefined the value of large corporate law firms for the opportunities that such positions offered in contributing to social change. One third-year student suggested:

I used to think that social change would come about by being an activist. That's why I originally wanted to do public interest law. But you really can't accomplish much by doing this. The hiring partner at [a major New York law firm] convinced me that this is the only way to get things done. He served as the under secretary of state in the [former president's] administration. He made sense when he told me that if I wanted to contribute to social change I had to become an important person.

Students became less convinced that directly serving the less-privileged social classes would effectively resolve the problems that concerned them. A third-year student explained how disenchanted she had become with public interest law:

I used to think that you could do good things for people. . . . I don't think that any more. I'm no longer troubled by the idea of being a corporate lawyer as opposed to a public interest one. I'm still concerned about social problems like poverty or poor housing, but I'm not sure that being a public interest attorney is the way to resolve those things. The needs of the people that public interest lawyers serve are just beyond what I can do as an attorney. I think I can do more good for people if I commit myself to working with community groups or activities in the bar during my spare time.

The offering of such accounts helps students resolve the contradiction they experience by choosing a large law firm practice, as does the practical planning to use one's spare time (e.g., to do community activities). Unfortunately, given the structure of contemporary large law firms, spare time is a rarity (Nelson 1988; Spangler 1986). Adopting these new definitions regarding the pursuit of effective social change means that working-class students need not feel penitent over their upward mobility. Such strategies, of course, are attractive, as they suggest that the student is becoming elite not solely because he or she is striving for personal reward and success but as a means to best pursue the noble ideals of public service and social activism.

A more drastic accommodation involved avoidance of those who reminded working-class students of their social obligations toward helping the less fortunate. Just associating with individuals whose career path was geared toward helping the downtrodden caused considerable uneasiness in working-class students who had decided to enter large law firms. One third-year student said that he had begun to avoid law students who had retained their commitment to work with the poor:

It's taken for granted here that you can work for a large firm and still be a good person. The people who don't reinforce that message make me uncomfortable now. Frankly, that's why I'm not hanging out with the public interest people. They remind me of my own guilt.

My brother keeps asking me whether I'm a Republican yet. He thought that after I finished law school I would go to work to help people, not work for one of those firms that do business. In a way, he's my conscience. Maybe he's right. I've got a conflict with what I'm doing. I came from the working class and wanted to do public interest law. I have decided not to do that. It's been a difficult decision for me. I'm not completely comfortable about working at a large firm.

Another student, who grew up on welfare, expressed similar reservations about his impending career in law:

I'm not real happy about going to a large firm. I make lots of apologies. I'm still upset about the fact that my clients are real wealthy people, and it's not clear as to what the social utility of that will be.

Like the previous example, this student experienced a form of self-alienation as a result of his identity ambivalence. Students often experience a sense of guilt as they transcend their working-class backgrounds. Such guilt, however, needs to be abated if these students are to successfully adjust to their new reference group and reduce the status conflict they experience. For these working-class students, making the primary adjustment to upward mobility required strategies of accommodation in personal attitudes regarding their relationship to members of less privileged social classes. Secondary identity adjustments were therefore critical in helping students mitigate the ambivalence they experienced over their own success and subsequent separation from the working class.

Resolving Ambivalence

Although accommodation strategies were typical throughout the entire student body,⁶ working-class students at this law school were more likely to employ particular types of strategies to help manage their identity. Students sought to manage their ambivalence by remaining "ideologically" distanced from the very social class their elite law school credential had facilitated alignment with. Many of these students became deliberate role models, unreservedly immersing themselves in higher social classes for that specific purpose. Such adjustments might be thought of as political since they were intended to directly challenge the domination of social elites. A black working-class student described how his actions would benefit the less fortunate:

I get slammed for being a corporate tool. People feel that I have sold out. I'm irritated by that. For years, blacks have been treated as slaves, sharecroppers, or porters. So I think that whether I want to be a partner at Cravath or to be an NAACP defense attorney, either of these positions are politically correct. We need black people with money and power. I think that I can make significant contributions to black causes.

gain a whole new set of peers, then you begin to think about the possibilities. However, such success comes at a price, particularly for working-class students of color. Although having achieved success, many of these students continued to feel like outsiders. One such student, a third-year black male, reflected on what he considered the unfortunate aspects of affirmative action programs:

I have mixed feelings about the law review because of its affirmative action policies. On the one hand, I think it's good that minorities are represented on the law review. On the other hand, there's a real stigma attached to it. Before law school, I achieved by my own abilities. On law review, I don't feel I get respect. I find myself working very hard and getting no respect. Other students don't work as hard. I spend a lot of time at the review because I don't want to turn in a bad assignment. I don't want them [other law review members] to think that I don't have what it takes.

Students who perceived themselves as outsiders frequently overcompensated for their failings because they felt judged by the "master status" associated with their social identity. This reaction to class stigma is typical among working-class students in educational institutions. In addition to developing their educational skills, working-class students are confronted with learning social skills as well. This makes succeeding particularly difficult for these students and is a task fraught with the fear of being discovered as incompetent (Sennett and Cobb 1973).

Ambivalence

Despite their maneuvers, these working-class students had difficulty transcending their previous identity. The attempt by these students to manage their stigma resulted in what Goffman (1963:107) termed "identity ambivalence." Working-class students who sought to exit their class background could neither embrace their group nor let it go. This ambivalence is often felt by working-class individuals who attain upward mobility into the professional-managerial class (Steinitz and Solomon 1986). Many experience the "stranger in paradise" syndrome, in which working-class individuals feel like virtual outsiders in middle-class occupations (Ryan and Sackrey 1984). Such experiences frequently lead to considerable identity conflict among working-class individuals who attempt to align themselves with the middle class.

The working-class law students in my sample typically experienced identity conflicts on their upward climb. Not only did they feel deceptive in their adjustment strategies, but many felt the additional burden of believing they had "sold out" their own class and were letting their group down. Like other stigmatized individuals who gain acceptance among dominant groups (Goffman 1963), these students often felt they were letting down their own group by representing elite interests. One third-year female student ruefully explained:

These students were sometimes assisted in their performances by professional career counselors employed by the law school. These professionals gave students instructions on how to present themselves as full-fledged members of this elite community. Students were taught that unless they downplayed their social class background, the most lucrative opportunities would be denied them. A third-year woman from a working-class area in Boston recalled learning this new norm of presentation:

I'm sort of proud that I'm from South Boston and come from a working-class background. During my second year, however, I wasn't having much luck with my first interviews. I went to talk with my adviser about how to change my résumé a bit or how to present myself better. I told my adviser that on the interviews I was presenting myself as a slightly unusual person with a different background. We talked about that, and he told me that it probably wasn't a good idea to present myself as being a little unusual. I decided that he was right and began to play up that I was just like them. After that, the interviews and offers began rolling in. I began to realize that they [interviewers] really like people who are like themselves.

Recognizing that job recruiters seek homogeneity is an important lesson that upwardly mobile working-class students must learn if they are to gain admission into high status and financially rewarding occupations.⁴ Kanter (1977) demonstrated, for instance, that managers come to reward those who resemble themselves. More recently, Jackell (1988) documented how the failure of managers to "fit in" resulted in suspicion and subsequent exclusion from advancement. Fitting in is particularly important in prestigious law firms which tend to resemble the high-status clients they represent (Abel 1989). During interviews, however, working-class law students faced a distinct disadvantage, as the interviewers who actively pursued new recruits rarely posed questions about the student's knowledge of law.⁵ Most seemed intent on finding students who fit into the law firm's corporate structure. The entire recruitment process itself, from the initial interview to "fly out," represents ceremonial affirmation of these students' elite status in which they need only demonstrate their "social" competence. Working-class students typically found such interactions stressful. One third-year student explained her experiences:

They [the recruiters] didn't test my knowledge of law. They were interested in finding out what kind of person I was and what my background was. I tried to avoid talking about that and instead stressed the kind of work I was interested in. I think that most firms want a person who they can mold, that fits into their firm.

Some of the most successful working-class students enjoyed the accolades bestowed on them because of their hard work and natural abilities. In speaking of her success, a third-year student on law review said that when she entered law school, it never occurred to her that she would clerk for the Supreme Court and then work for a major Wall Street law firm, adding that *once you begin doing well and move up the ladder and*

Working-class students disengaged from their previous identity by concealing their class backgrounds. Just as deviants seek to manage their identity by “passing” as nondeviants (Goffman 1963), these working-class law students often adopted identities that were associated with the more elite social classes.³ Concealment allowed students to better participate in the culture of eminence that exists within the law school and reap available rewards.

This concealment meant, for instance, that students needed to acquire new dress codes. As Stone (1970) illustrated, appearance signifies identity and exercises a regulatory function over the responses of others. Such cultural codes pertaining to appearance often are used to exclude individuals from elite social positions (Bourdieu 1984; Jackell 1988; Lamont and Lareau 1988). Although working-class students lacked the cultural capital of higher social classes, they began to realize that they could successfully mimic their more privileged counterparts. Like undistinguished prep school students (Cookson and Persell 1985), working-class law students learned how to behave in an upper-class world, including how to dress for a new audience whose favorable appraisal they must cultivate. One second-year male discussed this process:

I remember going to buy suits here. I went to Brooks Brothers for two reasons. One, I don't own a suit. My father owns one suit, and it's not that good. Second, I think it's important to look good. A lot of my friends went to Brooks Brothers, and I feel it's worth it to do it right and not to have another hurdle to walk in and have the wrong thing on. It's all a big play act. . . . During my first year, I had no luck with interviews. I was in my own little world when I came here. I wished I had paid more attention to the dressing habits of second- and third-year students.

Being in their own “working-class world” forced these students to begin recognizing the importance of different interpersonal skills. A second-year woman commented that:

I have really begun to see the value of having good social skills. I think that is one of the ways that law firms weed out people. In order to get jobs you have to have those social skills. I'm real conscious of that when I go out on interviews now.

The recognition among working-class students that they were able to imitate upper-class students increasingly encouraged them to conceal their backgrounds. One second-year student, whose father worked as a house painter, boasted of his mastery of “passing”:

I generally don't tell people what my father does or what my mother does. I notice that I'm different, but it's not something other people here notice because I can fake it. They don't notice that I come from a blue-collar background.

Paying attention to the impression that one presents becomes extremely important for the upwardly mobile working-class student.

Faking It

The management of identity has critical strategic importance not only for group affiliation and acceptance but for life chances. Stigma limits one's opportunities to participate in social life as a complete citizen, particularly so for those possessing gender or racial stigmas. However, because of the visibility of these stigmas, a person's adjustment to second-class citizenship is accomplished typically through either role engulfment in which a person accepts a spoiled identity (Schur 1971) or through direct confrontation where assignment of secondary status is itself challenged (Schur 1980). Rarely are these groups able to employ the concealment tactics typical among those groups whose stigma is not overtly visible.

Unlike gender or racial stigma, however, individuals often adjust to class stigma by learning to conceal their uniqueness. The practice of concealing one's class background, for instance, is not unusual. Certainly, members of the elite frequently learn that it is in "bad taste" to flaunt their privileged background and that it is more gracious to conceal their eminent social status (Baltzell 1958). Similarly, individuals who experience downward mobility often attempt to maintain their predecline image by concealing loss of status. Camouflaging unemployment in the world of management by using such terms as "consultant" and by doctoring résumés are ways that downwardly mobile executives "cover" their spoiled status (Newman 1988). Concealing one's social class circumstances and the stigma that may be associated with it assist individuals in dealing with any rejection and ostracism that may be forthcoming were the person's actual status known.

Initially, students who took pride in having accomplished upward mobility openly displayed a working-class presentation of self. Many went out of their way to maintain this presentation. One first-year student who grew up in a labor union family in New York explained that: *I have consciously maintained my working-class image. I wear work shirts or old flannel shirts and blue jeans every day.* During his first year, this student flaunted his working-class background, frequently also donning an old army jacket, hiking boots, and a wool hat. Identifying himself as part of the "proletarian left," he tried to remain isolated from what he referred to as the "elitist" law school community.

This attempt to remain situated in the working class, however, not only separated these students from the entire law school community but alienated them from groups that shared their ideological convictions. While much of the clothing worn by non-working-class students suggests resistance to being identified as a member of the elite, working-class students become increasingly aware of their differentness. Although these students identify with the working class, others, despite their appearance, possess traits and lifestyles that are often associated with more privileged groups (see Lurie 1983; Stone 1970). One first-year woman who described herself as "radical" complained that the other law school radicals were really "a bunch of upper-class white men." Subsequently, working-class students must disengage from their backgrounds if they desire to escape feeling discredited.

I had a real problem my first year because law and legal education are based on upper-middle-class values. The class debates had to do with profit maximization, law and economics, atomistic individualism. I remember in class we were talking about landlords' responsibility to maintain decent housing in rental apartments. Some people were saying that there were good reasons not to do this. Well, I think that's bullshit because I grew up with people who lived in apartments with rats, leaks, and roaches. I feel really different because I didn't grow up in suburbia.

Another student, a third-year working-class woman, felt marginalized because even her teachers assumed class homogeneity:

I get sensitive about what professors have to say in class. I remember in a business class the professor seemed to assume that we all had fathers that worked in business and that we all understood about family investments. He said, "You're all pretty much familiar with this because of your family background." I remember thinking, doesn't he think there's any people in this law school who come from a working-class background?

Such experiences contributed to a student's sense of living in an alien world. The social distance these students experienced early in their law school career produced considerable discomfort.

This discomfort grew more intense as they became increasingly immersed into this new elite world. Within a short span of time, these students began to experience a credential gap vis-à-vis other students who possessed more prestigious academic credentials. A first-year male student who attended a state school in the Midwest explained:

I'm not like most people here. I didn't go to prestigious schools. I'm a bit of a minority here because of that. When I got here I was really intimidated by the fact of how many Yale and Harvard people there were here.

At times, working-class law students were even embarrassed by their spouse's lower status. One first-year student described how her husband's credential gap caused her some anxiety:

People would ask me what my husband did and I would say he works for Radio Shack. People would be surprised. That was hard. Lately, we haven't done as much with [law school] people.

Thus, students sometimes pruned contacts that would potentially result in stigma disclosure. In general, then, as working-class students progressed through law school, they began to adopt a view of themselves as different. The recognition of this difference subsequently led them to develop techniques of adjusting to their perceived secondary status.

I wanted a career in social justice. It seemed to me to be a good value for someone who wanted to leave this world a little better than they found it. My parents raised me with a sense that there are right things and wrong things and that maybe you ought to try to do some right things with your life.

A second-year student said that he was influenced by the oppressive experiences that his father endured as a factory laborer. Coming to law school to pursue a career in a labor union, this student explained, *I was affected by my father, who had a job as a machinist. My father believes that corporations have no decency. I would term it differently, but we're talking about the same thing.* Identifying with their working-class heritage produced not only a sense of pride but a system of values and ideals that greatly influenced their initial career objectives.

However, identification with the working class began to diminish soon after these students entered law school. Not long after arriving, most working-class students encountered an entirely new moral career. Although initially proud of their accomplishments, they soon came to define themselves as different and their backgrounds a burden. Lacking the appropriate cultural capital (Bourdieu 1984) associated with their more privileged counterparts, working-class students began to experience a crisis in competency. Phrases such as "the first semester makes you feel extremely incompetent," "the first year is like eating humble pie," and "I felt very small, powerless, and dumb" were almost universal among these working-class students. Some students felt embarrassed by their difficulty in using the elaborated speech codes (Bernstein 1977) associated with the middle class. One working-class woman said that she was very aware of using "proper" English, *adding that it makes me self-conscious when I use the wrong word or tense. I feel that if I had grown up in the middle class, I wouldn't have lapses. I have difficulty expressing thoughts while most other people here don't.*

The recognition of their apparent differentness is perhaps best noted by examining the students' perception of stress associated with the first year of studies. Incoming working-class students reported significantly higher levels of personal stress than did their counterparts with more elite backgrounds. Much of this anxiety came from fears of academic inadequacy. Despite generally excellent college grades and their success in gaining admission to a nationally ranked law school, these students often worried that they did not measure up to the school's high standards. Nearly 62 percent of the first-year working-class students reported experiencing excessive grade pressure, compared to only 35 percent of those students from higher social class backgrounds.

In the words of Sennett and Cobb (1973), this lack of confidence is a "hidden injury of class," a psychological burden that working-class students experienced as they came to acquire the "identity beliefs" associated with middle-class society. While most students experience some degree of uncertainty and competency crisis during their first year, working-class students face the additional pressure of being cultural outsiders. Lacking manners of speech, attire, values, and experiences associated with their more privileged counterparts, even the most capable working-class student felt out of place:

A triangulated research design (Fielding and Fielding 1986) was used to collect the data. The first phase consisted of extensive fieldwork at the law school from 1985 to 1988, during which time I became a "peripheral member" (Adler and Adler 1987) in selected student groups. My activities while in the field consisted of attending classes with students, participating in their Moot Court² preparations, studying with students on campus, and at times, in their apartments, lunching with them, becoming involved in student demonstrations over job recruiting and faculty hiring, attending extracurricular lectures presented on campus, and participating in orientation exercises for first-year students. Throughout the entire fieldwork phase, I assumed both overt and covert roles. During the observation periods in classrooms, I recorded teacher–student interactions that occurred.

To supplement these observations, I conducted in-depth interviews with 103 law students at various stages in their training. Both personal interviews and small-group interviews with three or four students were recorded. The interviews lasted approximately two hours each and sought to identify the lived process through which law students experience legal training.

Finally, I administered a survey to 50 percent of the 1,540 students attending the law school. The survey examined their backgrounds, motives for attending law school, subjective perceptions of personal change, expectations about future practice, and evaluations of various substantive areas of practice. Over half (391) of the questionnaires were returned—a high rate of response for a survey of six pages requiring approximately 30 minutes of the respondent's time.

For this article, a subset of working-class students was selected for extensive analysis. Of the 103 students interviewed for the larger study, 23 came from working-class backgrounds, none of these from either the labor aristocracy or the unstable sectors of the working class. Typical parental occupations include postal worker, house painter, factory worker, fireman, dock worker, and carpenter. Many of these students were interviewed several times during their law school career. Many of the students selected for interviews were identified through questionnaires, while others were selected through the process of snowball sampling (Chadwick, Bahr, and Albrecht 1984).

Feeling Out of Place

Working-class students entered this elite educational institution with a great deal of class pride. This sense of class pride is reflected in the fact that a significantly larger proportion of working-class students reported entering law school for the purposes of contributing to social change than their non-working-class counterparts (see Granfield and Koenig 1990). That these students entered law school with the desire to help the downtrodden suggests that they identified with their working-class kin. In fact, students often credited their class background as being a motivating factor in their decision to pursue a career in social justice. One third-year student, whose father worked as a postal worker, recalled her parental influence:

One of the most vibrant research programs that emerged from Goffman's classic work has been in the area of stigma management. A host of conceptual terms have been employed to describe the process through which discreditable individuals control information about themselves so as to manage their social identity. Concepts such as passing, deviance disavowal, accounts, disclaimers, and covering have often been used in analyzing accommodations and adjustments to deviance, as Pfuhl's (1986) review shows. These tactics, while offering rewards associated with being seen as normal, frequently contribute to psychological stress. Possessing what Goffman (1963:5) referred to as "undesired differentness" often has significant consequences for one's personal identity as well as for available life chances. . . .

In this article, I focus on class stigma by examining a group of highly successful, upwardly mobile, working-class students who gained admission to a prestigious Ivy League law school in the East. While upward mobility from the working class occurs far less often within elite branches of the legal profession (Heinz and Laumann 1982; Smigel 1969) or corporate management (Useem and Karabel 1986), a certain amount of this type of mobility does take place. Working-class aspirants to the social elite, however, must accumulate cultural capital (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990; Cookson and Persell 1985) before they are able to transcend their status boundaries.

First, this article examines the ways in which working-class students experience a sense of differentness and marginality within the law school's elite environment. Next, I explore how these students react to their emerging class stigma by managing information about their backgrounds. I then demonstrate that the management strategies contribute to identity ambivalence and consider the secondary forms of adjustment students use to resolve this tension. Finally, I discuss why an analysis of social class can benefit from the insights forged by Goffman's work on stigma.

Setting and Methodology

The data analyzed for this article were collected as part of a much larger project associated with law school socialization (Granfield 1989). The subjects consist of students attending a prestigious, national law school in the eastern part of the United States. The school has had a long reputation of training lawyers who have become partners in major Wall Street law firms, Supreme Court judges, United States presidents and other politicians, heads of foundations, and . . . [have assumed many] other eminent leadership positions. Throughout the school's history, it has drawn mostly on the talents of high-status males. It was not until the second half of the twentieth century that women, minorities, and members of the lower classes were allowed admission into this esteemed institution (Abel 1989).

Most of the students attending the university at the time the study was being conducted were white and middle class.¹ The overwhelming majority are the sons and daughters of the professional-managerial class. Over 70 percent of those returning questionnaires had Ivy League or other highly prestigious educational credentials. As one would expect, fewer working-class students possessed such credentials.

Making It by Faking It

Working-Class Students in an Elite Academic Environment

Robert Granfield

An important point about socialization is that societal values, identities, and social roles are learned, not instinctual. We have to learn the social norms and behaviors our society expects from us. We also learn or are socialized into different identities—our gender identity, our racial-ethnic identity, and our social class identity—among several others. In this reading, published in 1991, Robert Granfield examines how the working-class identities of some law students are challenged during their years at elite law schools. Law students experience an intense period of professional socialization during their graduate-school years that not only teaches them their occupation but also changes their values, identities, and social roles. Granfield, a professor of sociology and vice provost for faculty affairs at the University of Buffalo, argues that this intense socialization has consequences not only for the individual students but also for the legal profession.

Research on stigma has generated significant insights into the complex relationship between self and society. The legacy of Goffman's (1963) seminal work on the subject can be found in studies on alcoholism, mental illness, homosexuality, physical deformities, and juvenile delinquency. Even the literature on gender and racial inequality has benefited from an emphasis on stigma. Goffman's attention to the social processes of devaluation and the emerging self-concepts of discredited individuals not only created research opportunities for generations of sociologists but contributed to a humanistic ideology that viewed stigma assignment and its effects as unjust.

Robert Granfield, "Making It by Faking It: Working-Class Students in an Elite Academic Environment," from *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* (formerly *Urban Life*) 20, no. 3 (October 1991): 331–51. Copyright © 1991 by SAGE Publications, Inc. Reprinted with the permission of SAGE Publications, Inc.

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others, racial and/or ethnic matters arose intermittently, but these matters did not seem to be central to the children's explorations. Children varied in how often they expressed or indicated racial or ethnic understandings, but we were unable to observe each child constantly and cannot make a more detailed judgment on this issue.

To fully understand the importance of children's racial and/or ethnic understandings, the nuanced complexity and interconnected nature of their thinking and behavior must be accepted and recognized. Measures of racial and ethnic awareness should consider not only children's cognitive abilities but also the relationships that children develop in social situations. . . .

Regarding the racial and ethnic hierarchy, young children understand that in U.S. society higher status is awarded to White people. Many understand that simply by virtue of their skin color, Whites are accorded more power, control, and prestige. Very young children carry out interactions in which race is salient. Racial knowledge is situational, and children can interact in a race-based or race-neutral manner, according to their evaluations of appropriateness. In children's worlds race emerges early as a tool for social interaction and quickly becomes a complex and fluid component of everyday interaction.

The behaviors of the children in this preschool setting are likely to be repeated in other diverse settings. The traditional literature accepts that children display prejudice by the time they arrive at school, but offers no explanation about the acquisition of this prejudice beyond it being an imitation of parental behavior. We expect continuity of children's racial and ethnic categories across settings, for children reveal a readiness to use their knowledge of race and ethnicity.

The observed episodes underscore problems in traditional theories of child development. When children fail cognitive tasks framed in terms of principles such as conservation and reciprocity, researchers often conclude that children lack the cognitive capability to understand race. However, surveys and observations of children in natural settings demonstrate that three-year-old children have constant, well-defined, and negative biases toward racial and ethnic others (Ramsey 1987). Rather than insisting that young children do not understand racial or ethnic ideas because they do not reproduce these concepts on adult-centered cognitive tests, researchers should determine the extent to which racial and ethnic concepts—as used in daily interaction—are salient definers of children's social reality. Research on young children's use of racial and gender concepts demonstrates that the more carefully a research design explores the real life of children, the more likely that research can answer questions about the nature of race and ethnicity in children's everyday lives.

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changes in the nature of the children's relations (Danielewicz, Rogers, and Noblit 1996). Rita realized that she must avoid sanctions when Joanne introduced her own racial identity into the game, attempting to distract the children from what Joanne perceived as an argument based on racial differences. However, the children were engaged in an appropriate discussion about their origins. Rita is indeed a "mixed" Latina, for her mother is from one Latin American country and her father is from another Latin American country. Rita understood this and had on other occasions described trips to visit her father's home. Louis is indeed Black and views Rita as White. Rita seemed to be trying to extend the concept beyond skin color and thus to educate Louis, until the teacher interrupted. Joanne's assumption seemed to be twofold: that Rita was confused and that as a teacher Joanne must act preventively. Here the teacher focused on quashing prejudice rather than seizing an opportunity to listen to the children and discuss their racial and ethnic perspectives. Adults tend to control children's use of racial and ethnic concepts and interpret children's use of these concepts along prejudice-defined lines. Clearly, the social context of children's learning, emphasized in the interpretive approach, includes other children and adults, but our accounts also demonstrate the way in which children's sophisticated understandings are developed without adult collaboration and supervision. . . .

Conclusion

Through extensive observation, this study has captured the richness of children's racial and ethnic experiences. The racial nature of children's interactions becomes fully apparent only when their interactions are viewed over time and in context. Close scrutiny of children's lives reveals that they are as intricate and convoluted as those of adults.

Blumer (1969:138) suggests that any sociological variable is, on examination, "an intricate and inner-moving complex." Dunn (1993) notes that children's relationships are complex and multidimensional, even within their own families. . . . By exploring the use of racial concepts in the child's natural world, instead of trying to remove the child or the concepts from that world, we glean a more complete picture of how children view and manipulate racial and ethnic concepts and understandings.

For most children, racial and ethnic issues arise forcefully within the context of their interaction with others. Most of the children that we observed had little or no experience with people from other racial or ethnic groups outside of the center. For these very young children, who are having their first extensive social experiences outside the family, racial and ethnic differences became powerful identifiers of self and other. Whether this is also true for children who do not experience such a diverse range of exposure to racial and ethnic concepts is beyond the scope of this project. However, over the 11 months we observed dozens of slowly evolving transformations in these children's racial and ethnic explorations and understandings. For many children, racial and ethnic awareness increased. Some, like Taleshia, regularly explored racial identities by comparing their skin color with that of others. Others, like Renee, faced crises over identity. For still

feelings. Both children seem knowledgeable about the structure of the U.S. and global racial hierarchy and accept the superior position accorded to Whites. The four-year-old child exercised authority as a White American and controlled the play with comments and with her stance and facial expressions. Our findings extend previous research on young children's knowledge of status and power (Corsaro 1979; Damon 1977) by showing that children are aware of the power and authority granted to Whites. The children were not confused about the meanings of these harsh racial words and actions.

Adult Misperceptions

Children's use of racial and ethnic concepts often goes unnoticed, even by adults in daily contact with them. This is illustrated by the responses of classroom teachers and the center director to preliminary reports on our research. Debi wrote two research reports, one for the classroom teachers and one for the director. After reading the reports, the teachers insisted to Debi that she must have been observing *some other children* and that *these are not our kids*. The director seemed determined to "guess" the identity of children whose incidents Debi described at a meeting. Throughout the episodes Debi described, he interrupted with remarks like *I'll bet that's Sarah you're talking about, isn't it?* His determination to attach names to the children revealed his investment in "curing" racism. He seemed determined to discover the culprits so unlearning might begin.

Adults' strong need to deny that children can use racial and ethnic concepts is also revealed in the next account. Here two children are engaged in a discussion of "what" they are. Debi is sitting with all the children on the steps to the deck playing "Simon Says." "Simon," a child selected by teachers to lead the game, directs the main action, while Debi observes that Rita (3.5: White/Latina) and Louis (4: Black) are engaged in their own private side activity. While the game continues, Rita and Louis discuss what they are. *What are you?* Louis asks Rita, and without waiting for her reply announces, *I'm Black and you're White*. No, she retorts, correcting him, *I'm not White, I'm mixed*. Louis regards her curiously, but at this moment Joanne, the lone Black teacher in the classroom, intervenes. *You're not mixed, Rita, you're Spanish*, she informs the child. *What race am I?* Joanne continues, trying to get the children to change the subject and glancing over at me anxiously. Rita replies, *Mixed. Mixed!?* Joanne, laughing, responds, *Mixed with what? Blue*, Rita says, looking only at her hands. Joanne is wearing a solid blue outfit. *Oh no, honey*, Joanne says, *I'm Black too, like Louis, not mixed*. *What an interesting conversation you guys are having*. Rita says nothing in response, and Louis remains silent throughout Joanne's attempt at dialogue. Suddenly, "Simon Says" ends and the kids run to the playground, escaping Joanne's questions. Joanne smiles and remarks to Debi, *Boy, it's really amazing what they pick up, isn't it?*

When Joanne intervened, Rita and Louis had to refocus their attention from a discussion between themselves about what they "are" to responding to Joanne's questioning. The adult interruption silenced Louis completely and made Rita defensive and wary. As other research has demonstrated, adult involvement in children's discourse can result in

are *pink* while most of her skin is very dark. Perhaps she was choosing a color to match the color of her palms, a reasonable choice because the task was to paint the palms for handprints. The validity of this interpretation is reinforced by another episode at the center. One day Taleshia sat down and held Debi's hands in hers, turning them from top to bottom. Without uttering a word, she repeated this activity with her own hands, drawing Debi's attention to this act. The three-year-old was contrasting the pink-brown variations in her skin color with Debi's pinkish hand color. This explanation for the child's paint choice might not occur to a researcher who did not pay careful attention to the context and the child's personal perspective. Taleshia's ideas, centered in observations of herself and others, were more important to her than another child's notions of appropriate color. Far from being confused about skin color, she was creating meaning for color based on her own evaluations.

Using Racial Concepts to Control

The complex nature of children's group interactions and their solo behaviors demonstrates that race and ethnicity are salient, substantial aspects of their lives. They understand racial nuances that seem surprisingly sophisticated, including the power of race. How children use this power in their relationships is demonstrated in further episodes. . . .

In another encounter, this time among three children, a White child demonstrates her knowledge of broader race relations, demonstrating her grasp of race-based power inequalities. During play time Debi watches Renee (4: White) pull Ling-mai (3: Asian) and Jocelyn (4.5: White) across the playground in a wagon. Renee tugs away enthusiastically. Suddenly, Renee drops the handle, which falls to the ground, and she stands still, breathing heavily. Ling-mai, eager to continue this game, jumps from the wagon and picks up the handle. As Ling-mai begins to pull, Renee admonishes her, *No, no. You can't pull this wagon. Only White Americans can pull this wagon.* Renee has her hands on her hips and frowns at Ling-mai. Ling-mai tries again, and Renee again insists that only "White Americans" are permitted to do this task.

Ling-mai sobs loudly and runs to a teacher, complaining that *Renee hurt my feelings.* *Did you hurt Ling-mai's feelings?* the teacher asks Renee, who nods, not saying a word. *I think you should apologize,* the teacher continues, *because we are all friends here and friends don't hurt each other's feelings.* *Sorry,* mutters Renee, looking at Ling-mai, *I didn't do it on purpose.* OK, the teacher finishes, *can you guys be good friends now?* Both girls nod without looking at each other and quickly move away.

This interaction reveals several layers of meaning. Both children recognized the implications of Renee's harsh words and demands. Renee accurately underscored the point that Ling-mai, the child of Asian international students, was neither White nor American. Her failure to be included in these two groups, according to Renee's pronouncement, precluded her from being in charge of the wagon. Ling-mai responded, not by openly denying Renee's statements, but by complaining to the teacher that Renee had hurt her

These statements show not only awareness of the visible characteristics of race and ethnicity but also insight into how visible markers are passed from generation to generation. They demonstrate a child's ability to grasp salient characteristics of a racial and/or ethnic category not her own and apply them to others in a collaborative and evolving way.

In another episode, Taleshia (3: Black) approaches the handpainting table. Asked if she wants to make a handprint, she nods shyly. A child with dark brown skin, Taleshia scans the paint bottles and points to pale pink. Curious about her preference, Debi asks, *Taleshia, is this the color that looks like you?* Taleshia nods and holds out her hand. Behind her, Cathie (3.5: White) objects to Taleshia's decision. *No, no, Cathie interjects. She's not that color. She's brown.* Cathie moves to the table. *You're this color,* Cathie says and picks out the bottle of dark brown paint. Cathie is interested in helping Taleshia correct her apparent mistake about skin color. *Do you want this color?* Debi asks Taleshia. *No,* she replies, *I want this one,* touching the pink bottle. Regarding Taleshia with amazement, Cathie exclaims, *For goodness sake, can't you see that you aren't pink?* Debi, Cathie continues to insist, *you have to make her see that she's brown.* Cathie is exasperated and takes Taleshia by the arm. *Look,* she instructs, *you are brown! See?* Cathie holds Taleshia's arm next to her own. *I am pink, right?* Cathie looks to Debi for confirmation. *Sure enough,* Debi answers, *you are pink.* Now, Cathie continues, looking relieved, *Taleshia needs to be brown.* Debi looks at Taleshia, who is now frowning, and asks her, *Do you want to be brown?* She shakes her head vigorously and points to pale pink. *I want that color.*

Cathie is frustrated, and trying to be supportive, Debi explains that *Taleshia can choose any color she thinks is right.* Cathie again objects, but Taleshia smiles, and Debi paints her palm pink. Then Taleshia makes her handprint. Cathie stares, apparently convinced that Taleshia and Debi have lost touch with reality. As Taleshia leaves, Cathie takes her place, remarking to Debi, *I just don't know what's the matter with you. Couldn't you see that she is brown!* Cathie gives up and chooses pale pink for herself, a close match. Cathie makes her handprint and says to Debi. *See, I am not brown.*

Taleshia stuck to her choice despite Cathie's insistence. Both three-year-olds demonstrate a strong awareness of the importance of skin color, and their views are strongly held. This example underscores the importance of child-centered research. A traditional conceptualization of this Black child's choice of skin color paint might suggest that the child is confused about racial identity. If she chose pink in the usual experimental setting (Clark and Clark 1940; Porter 1971), she would probably be evaluated as rejecting herself for a preferred whiteness. Debi had several other interactions with Taleshia. The three-year-old had, on other occasions, pointed out how pale Debi was and how dark her own skin was. She had explained to Debi that she was Black, that she thought she was pretty, and that pink was her favorite color. One possible explanation for her choice of pink for her skin color in the handpainting activity relies on Debi's knowledge of Taleshia's personality, family background, and previous interactions with others. Taleshia may have chosen pink because it is her favorite color, but this does not mean that she is unaware that most of her skin is dark. Another explanation for Taleshia's choice of skin color representation is that, like other African Americans, Taleshia's palms

In another setting, Corinne (4: African/White) provides an example of the complexity of young children's racial understandings: She refines the nature of racial identity during a handpainting activity. The children have taken a field trip and are asked to make a thank-you poster for their host, a poster constructed of a large sheet of paper featuring handprints of the children. Children are asked by the teacher to choose a color that "looks just like you do." The paints are known as "People Colors," and are common at daycare centers concerned with diversity issues. The activity was designed to increase appreciation of differences in color among the children (Derman-Sparks 1989).

The six paints ranged from dark brown to pale pink. The handprint poster activity is familiar to the children, and the teacher asks Debi to help. Debi accepts but keeps her involvement to a minimum. Several children wait in line to participate in this desirable activity. Each chooses paint according to the teacher's criterion, has Debi apply the paint to the palm of one hand, and then presses the painted hand onto the poster. Debi then writes the child's name next to the handprint. Some children point out how closely the paint matches their skin color or ask Debi if she thought the choice was "right."

Corinne approaches the table, and Debi says, *OK, which color is the most like you? Which color matches your skin?* Corinne looks over the bottles carefully and chooses pale brown. *This one for one hand*, she replies, continuing to scan the bottles, *and this one for the other hand*, she concludes, choosing a second, dark brown color. When Debi asks if that color matches her skin, Corinne calmly replies, *I have two colors in my skin*. Debi smiles and paints one of her palms pale brown and the other dark brown. Corinne places both hands on the poster, making two prints. Debi then writes Corinne's name between the two handprints. *Perfect!* Corinne says.

This four-year-old chose appropriately for her understanding of the situation. That the paints she picked did not exactly match her skin color was not important to her because she was thinking in terms of her parents' different racial identities. Corinne insisted that she be allowed to choose two colors to reflect her biracial origin. For her, choosing two colors is not an example of cognitive confusion or inconsistency (as a mainstream analysis might see it), but rather her innovative way of recognizing that her mother is dark brown ("Black") and her father is pale brown ("White"). These examples show that children's abilities exceed what would be predicted from the mainstream research perspective.

Using Racial and Ethnic Concepts to Define Others

We observed many examples of children exploring the complex notions of skin color, hair differences, and facial characteristics. They often explore what these things mean and make racial and/or ethnic interpretations of these perceived differences. Mindy (4: White) insists that Debi is Indian. When queried, Mindy replies that it is because Debi is wearing her long dark hair in a braid. When Debi explains that she is not Indian, the child remarks that maybe Debi's mother is Indian.

Renee (4.5: White), a very pale little girl, has been to the beach over the weekend and comes to school noticeably tanned. Linda (4: White) and Erinne (5: biracial) engage her in an intense conversation. They discuss whether her skin would stay that color or get darker until she became, as Linda says, *an African American, like Charles* (another child). Renee denies she could become Black, but this new idea, planted in her head by interaction with the other children, distresses her. On her own initiative, she discusses the possibility with Debi and her mother, both of whom tell her the darker color is temporary.

Renee was unconvinced and commented on her racial identity for weeks. She brought up the issue with other children in many contexts. This linking of skin color with racial identity is found in much traditional literature on children's racial understandings (Clark and Clark 1940). But this racial marking was more than a fleeting interest, unlike the interest mainstream cognitive theorists might predict for such a young child. Renee reframed the meaning of skin color by questioning others on their thoughts and comparing her skin to others'.

Corinne (4: African/White) displays an ability to create meaning by drawing from her personal world. Corinne's mother is Black and is from an African country; her father is a White American. Corinne speaks French and English and is curious about everything at the center. She is a leader and often initiates activities with other children. Most children defer to her. One day Corinne is examining a rabbit cage on the playground. A teacher is cleaning out the cage and six baby bunnies are temporarily housed in an aluminum bucket that Corinne is holding. Three bunnies are white, two are black, and one is spotted black and white.

As Corinne is sitting at a table, Sarah (4: White) stuck her head into the bucket. *Stop that!* Corinne orders. Sarah complies and asks, *Why do you have the babies? I'm helping Marie [teacher],* says Corinne. *How many babies are there?* Sarah asks Corinne. *Six!* Corinne announces. *Three boys and three girls. How can you tell if they're boys or girls?* Sarah questions. *Well,* Corinne begins, *my daddy is white, so the white ones are boys. My mommy is Black, so the black ones are girls.* Sarah counts: *That's only five.* The remaining bunny is black and white. *Well, that one is like me, so it's a girl,* Corinne explains gently. She picks up the bunny and says, *See, this one is both, like me!* Sarah then loses interest, and Corinne returns to cooing over the bunnies.

This four-year-old's explanation incorporates an interesting combination of color, race, and gender. While her causal reasoning was faulty, she constructed what for her was a sophisticated and reasonable view of the bunnies' sexes. She displayed an understanding of the idea that an offspring's color reflects the colors of its parents, a knowledge grounded in her experience as a biracial child. Strayer (1986) underscores how children develop appropriate attributions regarding situational determinants. Corinne's use of parental gender to explain the unknown gender of the bunnies was an appropriate explanation of how bunnies got certain colors. Skin color was a salient part of her identity, and it was reasonable in her social world to assume that it would be salient for the identity of others, even animals. . . .

the conversation. Elizabeth nods vigorously. However, Rita turns away and says to Sarah, *Let's go to the store and get more stuff.*

Language was the ethnic marker here. Rita defined rules for entering play on the basis of language—she was aware that each child not only did not look like the others but also spoke a different language. From a traditional Piagetian perspective, Rita might be seen as egocentric and strongly resistant to alternative views. However, here we see the crucial importance of the social-cultural context, in particular the development of racial and ethnic concepts in a collaborative and interpersonal context. Defending her rules, Rita realized her attempts to exclude Elizabeth by requiring two languages had failed. This three-year-old child had created a social rule based on a significant understanding of ethnic markers. The final “two languages” rule did not acknowledge the fact that Sarah only spoke English. Rita's choice of language as an exclusionary device was directed at preventing Elizabeth from entering, not at maintaining a bilingual play space. . . .

Using Racial and Ethnic Concepts to Include

The children also used racial and ethnic understandings and concepts to include others—to engage them in play or teach them about racial and ethnic identities.

Ling (5: Asian/Chinese) has a book that teaches the Chinese language. She announces to Debi that her grandmother has given her the book and that she is learning Chinese. Debi asks if she is making progress. *Oh yes, Ling says happily, I have already learned many characters. They're called characters, you know.* She points out several. *What does that say?* Debi asks, pointing to one. *Cat!* Ling beams. Debi and Ling spend some time reading from Ling's book, then Ling leaves to show off her reading prowess to another child.

Over several weeks, Ling's behavior underscores for the observer how racial and ethnic understandings develop in social contexts. Ling engages numerous others in reading Chinese with her. Carrying the book everywhere, she earnestly tries to teach others to read and write Chinese characters. Chinese characters appear on other children's drawings and on the playground. Other children actively embrace these new characters and concepts and incorporate them into their activities, a clear indication of how children learn ethnic ideas from each other. Ling's efforts demonstrate that she is aware that non-Chinese, including adults, do not know how to read Chinese. Clearly she is aware that Chinese is distinct from the experience of most people around her, and she recognizes this even though she herself is just learning to read Chinese. . . .

Using Racial and Ethnic Concepts to Define Oneself

The use of racial and ethnic concepts to include or exclude others is often coupled with the use of these concepts to describe and define oneself. For most children, racial and/or ethnic identity is an important aspect of themselves, and they demonstrate this in insightful ways in important social contexts.

observations of 58 three-, four-, and five-year-old children in a large preschool in a southern city. The school employed a popular antibias curriculum (Derman-Sparks 1989). Over an 11-month period in 1993, we systematically observed everyday interactions in one large classroom containing a very diverse group of children. The center's official data on the racial and ethnic backgrounds of children in the classroom are: White = 24, Asian = 19, Black = 4, biracial = 3, Middle Eastern = 3, Latino = 2, and other = 3. . . .

Like the children and teachers, the senior author (hereafter Debi), a White woman, was usually in the classroom all day for five days a week. As observer and playmate, Debi watched the children and listened to them in their free play and teacher-directed activities. Over 11 months Debi observed 370 significant episodes involving a racial or ethnic dimension, about 1 to 3 episodes per day. When children mentioned racial or ethnic matters, Debi noted what they said, to whom they spoke, and the context of the incident. Extensive field notes were entered immediately on a computer in another room when the children were otherwise occupied. This was done to preserve the details of any conversations and the accuracy of the data. . . .

We began with the assumption that very young children would display no knowledge of racial or ethnic concepts and that any use of these concepts would be superficial or naive. Our data contradicted these expectations.

Using Racial and Ethnic Concepts to Exclude

Using the playhouse to bake pretend muffins, Rita (3.5: White/Latina) and Sarah (4: White) have all the muffin tins. Elizabeth (3.5: Asian/Chinese), attempting to join them, stands at the playhouse door and asks if she can play. Rita *shakes* her head vigorously, saying, *No, only people who can speak Spanish can come in.* Elizabeth frowns and says, *I can come in.* Rita counters, *Can you speak Spanish?* Elizabeth *shakes* her head no, and Rita repeats, *Well, then you aren't allowed in.*

Elizabeth frowns deeply and asks Debi to intercede by telling her: *Rita is being mean to me.* Acting within the child-initiated framework, Debi asks Rita, *If only people who speak Spanish are allowed, then how come Sarah can play? Can you speak Spanish, Sarah?* Sarah shakes her head no. *Sarah can't speak Spanish and she is playing,* Debi says to Rita, without suggesting she allow Elizabeth in. Rita frowns, amending her statement: *OK, only people who speak either Spanish or English. That's great!* Debi responds, *because Elizabeth speaks English and she wants to play with you guys.* Rita's frown deepens. *No, she says. Debi queries, But you just said people who speak English can play. Can't you decide?* Rita gazes at Debi, thinking hard. *Well, Rita says triumphantly, only people who speak two languages.*

Elizabeth is waiting patiently for Debi to make Rita let her play, which Debi has no intention of doing. Debi then asks Rita: *Well, Elizabeth speaks two languages, don't you, Elizabeth?* Debi looks at Elizabeth, who now is smiling for the first time. Rita is stumped for a moment, then retorts, *She does not. She speaks only English.* Debi smiles at Rita: *She does speak two languages—English and Chinese. Don't you?* Debi invites Elizabeth into

observe preschool children and their conceptualizations of race and ethnicity. Contrary to what most people think, Van Ausdale and Feagin find that children as young as three to five years old already are using racial and ethnic concepts to define others and shape their social interactions with other children.

Since the 1930s social science has examined children's attitudes toward race. Research has focused on situations in which race has meaning for children and on how children form racial identities (Clark and Clark 1939; Spencer, Brookins, and Allen 1985), create in-group racial and ethnic orientations (Aboud 1977; Cross 1987; Spencer 1987), form attitudes toward others (Williams and Morland 1976), and use race in friend selection (Schofield and Francis 1982). The literature clearly demonstrates that racial identification and group orientation are salient issues for children (Ramsey 1987).

Cognitive development theories propose stage models to explain children's acquisition of racial and ethnic knowledge (Aboud 1977; Porter 1971). These models assume an age-related progression in children's ability to interpret racial and ethnic information, usually depicting children as proceeding in linear fashion toward cognitively mature adulthood. Most research focuses on children over five years of age; very young children are rarely studied. . . .

Researchers have rarely sought children's views directly, beyond recording brief responses to tests. Few have interviewed children or made in-depth, long-term observations to assess social attitudes, limiting the ability to investigate more fully the nature of children's lives. Children's abilities have been seriously underestimated by reliance on techniques that do not make real-life sense to children (Donaldson 1978). Investigations often have assumed that young children are incapable of using abstract concepts (Holmes 1995). An emphasis on psychological testing is often coupled with the notion that children have limited understandings of race and ethnicity (Goodman 1964; Katz 1976; Porter 1971). Children are typically assumed to have temporary or naive views about social concepts until at least age seven. Prior to that age, children's use of concepts differs from that of adults in form and content.

Little attention has been devoted to how children create and assign meaning for racial and ethnic concepts. . . .

We provide data indicating that racial concepts are employed with ease by children as young as age three. Research based on the conception of children as incapable of understanding race (Menter 1989) presents an incorrect image of children's use of abstractions. Drawing on Willis (1990) and Thorne (1993), we suggest that notions of race and ethnicity are employed by young children as integrative and symbolically creative tools in the daily construction of social life.

The Research Approach

We gathered experiential data on how children use racial and ethnic understandings in everyday relationships. Influenced by Dunn's (1991) approach, we made unstructured field observations and recorded everyday behaviors. Our data come from extensive

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READING 14

Using Racial and Ethnic Concepts

The Critical Case of Very Young Children

Debra Van Ausdale and Joe R. Feagin

Many of the readings in this volume use ethnographic fieldwork, which involves scholars spending time observing or interviewing the research population, as Mary Romero did in her study of Chicana domestics (Reading 3) or Meika Loe did in her study of waitresses (Reading 9). Whereas the first reading in this section on socialization did ethnographic research on parents and the gender identity of their children, this selection uses ethnographic research to observe young children and their understandings of race and ethnicity. The reading excerpted here, from a 1996 article in the *American Sociological Review*, is by Debra Van Ausdale and Joe R. Feagin. Van Ausdale and Feagin, both sociologists,

Debra Van Ausdale and Joe R. Feagin, "Using Racial and Ethnic Concepts: The Critical Case of Very Young Children," from *American Sociological Review* 61 (October 1996): 779-93. Copyright © 1996 by the American Sociological Association. Reprinted with the permission of the authors and the American Sociological Association.

oriented. The version of hegemonic masculinity I have argued underlies parents' responses is one that includes both change and stability. Parental openness to domestic skills, nurturance, and empathy as desirable qualities in their sons likely represents social change, and the kind of agency in the accomplishment of gender to which Fenstermaker and West (2002) refer. As Connell (1995) notes, hegemonic masculinity is historically variable in its specific content, and the evidence presented in this article suggests that some broadening of that content is occurring. But the clear limits evident within that broadening suggest the stability and power of hegemonic conceptions of masculinity. The parental boundary maintenance work evident for sons represents a crucial obstacle limiting boys' options, separating boys from girls, devaluing activities marked as feminine for both boys and girls, and thus bolstering gender inequality and heteronormativity.

Finally, along with documenting conscious awareness by parents and the content toward which their accomplishment work is oriented, my analysis also contributes to the literature by illuminating the process motivating parental gender accomplishment. The heterosexual world in general, and heterosexual fathers in particular, play a central role in that process. This is evident in the direct endorsement of hegemonic masculinity many heterosexual fathers expressed and in the accountability to others (presumably heterosexual others) many heterosexual mothers, lesbian mothers, and gay fathers expressed. Scholarly investigations of the routine production of gender in childhood, therefore, need to pay careful attention to the role of heterosexual fathers as enforcers of gender boundaries and to the role of accountability in the process of accomplishing gender. At the same time, practical efforts to loosen gendered constraints on young children by expanding their parents' normative conceptions of gender need to be aimed at parents in general and especially need to reach heterosexual fathers in particular. The concern and even fear many parents—especially heterosexual mothers, lesbian mothers, and gay fathers—expressed about how their young sons might be treated if they fail to live up to hegemonic conceptions of masculinity represent a motivation for the traditional accomplishment of gender. But those reactions could also serve as a motivation to broaden normative conceptions of masculinity and challenge the devaluation of femininity, an effort that will require participation by heterosexual fathers to succeed.

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Conclusion

The interviews analyzed here, with New England parents of preschool-aged children from a diverse array of backgrounds, indicate a considerable endorsement by parents of what they perceive as gender nonconformity among both their sons and their daughters. This pattern at first appears encouraging in terms of the prospects for a world less constrained by gendered expectations for children. Many parents respond positively to the idea of their children's experiencing a greater range of opportunities, emotions, and interests than those narrowly defined by gendered stereotypes, with mothers especially likely to do so. However, for sons, this positive response is primarily limited to a few attributes and abilities, namely, domestic skills, nurturance, and empathy. And it is constrained by a clear recognition of normative conceptions of masculinity (Connell 1987, 1995). Most parents made efforts to accomplish, and either endorsed or felt accountable to, an ideal of masculinity that was defined by limited emotionality, activity rather than passivity, and rejection of material markers of femininity. Work to accomplish this type of masculinity was reported especially often by heterosexual fathers; accountability to approximate hegemonic masculinity was reported especially often by heterosexual mothers, lesbian mothers, and gay fathers. Some heterosexual parents also invoked sexual orientation as part of this conception of masculinity, commenting with concern on the possibility that their son might be gay or might be perceived as such. No similar pattern of well-defined normative expectations or accountability animated responses regarding daughters, although positive responses to pursuits parents viewed as more typically masculine may well reflect the same underlying devaluation of femininity evident in negative responses to gender nonconformity among sons.

In the broader study from which this particular analysis was drawn, many parents invoked biology in explaining their children's gendered tendencies. Clearly, the role of biological explanations in parents' thinking about gender merits additional investigation. But one of the things that was most striking to me in the analyses presented here is how frequently parents indicated that they took action to craft an appropriate gender performance with and for their preschool-aged sons, viewing masculinity as something they needed to work on to accomplish. . . . I began this project expecting that parents accept with little question ideologies that naturalize gender difference. Instead, the results I have presented here demonstrate that parents are often consciously aware of gender as something that they must shape and construct, at least for their sons. This argument extends the literature on the routine accomplishment of gender in childhood by introducing evidence of conscious effort and awareness by parents as part of that accomplishment. This awareness also has implications for efforts to reduce gendered constraints on children. Recognition that parents are sometimes consciously crafting their children's gender suggests the possibility that they could be encouraged to shift that conscious effort in less gendered directions.

In addition to documenting this parental awareness, I am also able to extend the literature by documenting the content toward which parents' accomplishment work is

Another indication of more careful policing of icons of femininity by fathers is evident in comments that placed age limitations on the acceptability of such icons. Four fathers (but no mothers) commented with acceptance on activities or interests that they consider atypical for boys but went on to note that these would bother them if they continued well past the preschool age range. The following quote from a father is typical of these responses. After noting that his four-year-old son sometimes asks for toys he thinks of as "girl toys," he went on to say, *I don't think it will ruin his life at this age but . . . if he was 12 and asking for it, you know, My Little Pony or Barbies, then I think I'd really worry* (white, middle-class, heterosexual father). While comments like this one were not coded as negative responses, since they involved acceptance, I mention them here as they are consistent with the tendency for fathers to express particular concern about their sons' involvement with icons of femininity.

Three of 15 heterosexual mothers and 4 of 12 heterosexual fathers of sons responded negatively to the possibility of their son's being, or being perceived as, gay. These numbers are too small to make conclusive claims comparing mothers and fathers. But this pattern is suggestive of another arena in which fathers—especially heterosexual fathers—may stand out, especially taken together with another pattern. Implicit in the quotes offered above related to homosexuality is a suggestion that heterosexual fathers may feel particularly responsible for crafting their sons' heterosexual orientation. In addition, in comparison to mothers, their comments are less likely to refer to fears for how their son might be treated by others if he were gay and more likely to refer to the personal disappointment they anticipate in this hypothetical scenario. . . .

Parental Motivations for the Accomplishment of Masculinity

The analysis I have offered thus far documents that parents are aware of their role in accomplishing gender with and for their sons. Although some parents did speak of their sons as entirely "boyish" and "born that way," many reported efforts to craft a hegemonic masculinity. Most parents expressed a very conscious awareness of normative conceptions of masculinity (whether explicitly or implicitly). Many, especially heterosexual mothers and gay parents, expressed a sense that they felt accountable to others in terms of whether their sons live up to those conceptions. In numerous ways, these parents indicated their awareness that their sons' behavior was at risk of gender assessment, an awareness rarely noted with regard to daughters. Parents varied in terms of their expressed motivations for crafting their sons' masculinity, ranging from a sense of measuring their sons against their own preferences for normative masculinity (more common among heterosexual fathers) to concerns about accountability to gender assessment by peers, other adults, and society in general (more common among heterosexual mothers and gay parents, whether mothers or fathers).

feminine. At one point, he mentioned that he sometimes wondered if his son might be gay, and he explained his reaction to that possibility in the following terms: *If [he] were to be gay, it would not make me happy at all. I would probably see that as a failure as a dad . . . , as a failure because I'm raising him to be a boy, a man* (white, upper-middle-class, heterosexual father). This comment suggests that the parent does not view masculinity as something that naturally unfolds but rather as something he feels responsible for crafting, and he explicitly links heterosexual orientation to the successful accomplishment of masculinity.

The fact that the connection between gender performance and sexual orientation was not raised for daughters, and that fear of homosexuality was not spontaneously mentioned by parents of daughters whether in connection to gender performance or not, suggests how closely gender conformity and heterosexuality are linked within hegemonic constructions of masculinity. Such connections might arise more by adolescence in relation to daughters, as I noted previously regarding other aspects of parental responses to gender nonconformity. But for sons, even among parents of very young children, heteronormativity appears to play a role in shaping parental responses to gender nonconformity. . . .

This implicit assumption appears to motivate at least some parental gender performance management among heterosexual parents, even for children as young as preschool age. Given the connections between male heterosexuality and the rejection of femininity noted previously as evident in theories of hegemonic masculinity, the tendency for parents to associate gender performance and sexual orientation for sons more than daughters may also reflect a more general devaluation of femininity.

Mothers Versus Fathers in the Accomplishment of Masculinity

In documenting parental work to accomplish masculinity with and for young sons, I have focused on the encouragement of domestic skills, nurturance, and empathy; discouragement of icons of femininity; and heterosexual parents' concerns about homosexuality. Within all three of these arenas, variation by parental gender was evident. Although both mothers and fathers were equally likely to express a combination of positive and negative responses to their sons' perceived gender nonconformity, with domestic skills and empathy accepted and icons of femininity rejected, the acceptance was more pointed for mothers, and the rejection was more pointed for fathers. More fathers (11 of 14) than mothers (12 of 17) of sons indicated negative reactions to at least one of the icons discussed. Fathers also indicated more categorically negative responses: 7 of the 14 fathers but only 2 of the 17 mothers reported simply saying "no" to requests for things such as Barbie dolls, tea sets, nail polish, or ballet lessons, whether actual requests or hypothetical ones. Although fewer parents referred to excessive emotionality and passivity as concerns, the 6 parents of sons who did so included 4 fathers and 2 mothers, and here too, the quotes indicate a more categorical rejection by fathers.

just go in the corner and cry like a baby, I don't want that. If you decide you want [some] thing, you are going to fight for it, not crying and acting like a baby and hoping that they're going to feel guilty and give it to you.

A mother who commented negatively about passivity even more directly connected her concern to how her son might be treated: *I do have concerns. . . . He's passive, not aggressive. . . . He's not the rough and tumble kid, and I do worry about him being an easy target* (white, working-class, heterosexual mother).

Taken together, these various examples indicate clearly the work many parents are doing to accomplish gender with and for their sons in a manner that distances those sons from any association with femininity. This work was not evident among all parents of sons. But for most parents, across racial, class, and sexual orientation categories, it was indeed evident.

Homosexuality

Along with these icons of feminine gender performance, and arguably directly linked to them, is the other clear theme evident among some parents' negative responses to perceived gender nonconformity on the part of their sons: fear that a son either would be or would be perceived as gay. Spontaneous connections of gender nonconformity and sexual orientation were not evident in parents' comments about daughters, nor among gay and lesbian parents, but arose for 7 of the 27 heterosexual parents who were discussing sons. The following two examples are typical of responses that invoked the possibility of a son's being gay, with explicit links to performance of femininity and to the parents' own role in accomplishing heterosexuality:

If he was acting feminine, I would ask and get concerned on whether or not, you know. I would try to get involved and make sure he's not gay. (white, low-income, heterosexual mother)

There are things that are meant for girls, but why would it be bad for him to have one of them? I don't know, maybe I have some deep, deep, deep buried fear that he would turn out, well, that his sexual orientation may get screwed up. (white, middle-class, heterosexual father)

The first comment explicitly indicates that feminine behavior, even in a three-year-old boy, might be an indicator of an eventual nonheterosexual orientation. The second comment raises another possibility: that playing with toys "that are meant for girls" might not indicate but rather shape the son's eventual sexual orientation. In both cases, though, the parent is reporting on actions, either actual or hypothetical, taken to discourage homosexuality and accomplish heterosexuality. Another quote from a father raises a similar concern and further exemplifies parental responsibility for the accomplishment of masculinity as linked to heterosexuality. This father had noted throughout the interview that his five-year-old son tends to show some attributes he considers

not many toys I wouldn't get him, except Barbie, I would try not to encourage that.
(white, low-income, heterosexual mother)

If we go into a clothing store . . . I try to shy my son away from the Powerpuff Girls shirt or anything like that. . . . I would steer him away from a pink shirt as opposed to having him wear a blue shirt. (Asian American, middle-class, heterosexual father)

These quotes are typical of many instances in which parents not only specify the items that strike them as problematic but clearly indicate the actions they take in accomplishing gender. In the first quote, the mother indicates her actions in encouraging and discouraging various outcomes, while in the second, the father reports "shying away" and "steering" his young son.

Playing with nail polish and makeup, although tolerated by some parents, more often evoked negative responses like this one, from a white, upper-middle-class, gay father, speaking about his four-year-old son's use of nail polish: *He put nail polish on himself one time, and I said "No, you can't do that, little girls put nail polish on, little boys don't."*

Barbie dolls are an especially interesting example in that many parents reported positive responses to baby dolls, viewing these as encouraging nurturance and helping to prepare sons for fatherhood. Barbie, on the other hand, an icon of femininity, struck many parents of sons as more problematic. Barbie was often mentioned when parents were asked whether their child had ever requested an item or activity more commonly associated with the other gender. Four parents—three mothers and one father—indicated that they had purchased a Barbie at their son's request, but more often parents of sons noted that they would avoid letting their son have or play with Barbie dolls. Sometimes this negative response was categorical, as in the quote above in which a mother of a three-year-old son noted that *there's not many toys I wouldn't get him, except Barbie*. A father offers a similar negative reaction to Barbie in relation to his two young sons: *If they asked for a Barbie doll, I would probably say no, you don't want [that], girls play with [that], boys play with trucks* (white, middle-class, heterosexual father). . . .

Along with material markers of femininity, many parents expressed concern about excessive emotionality (especially frequent crying) and passivity in their sons. For example, a white, upper-middle-class, heterosexual father, concerned about public crying, said about his five-year-old son, *I don't want him to be a sissy. . . . I want to see him strong, proud, not crying like a sissy*. Another father expressed his frustration with his four-year-old son's crying over what the father views as minor injuries and indicated action to discourage those tears: *Sometimes I get so annoyed, you know, he comes [crying], and I say, "you're not hurt, you don't even know what hurt is yet," and I'm like "geez, sometimes you are such a little wean," you know?* (white, middle-class, heterosexual father).

Passivity was also raised as a concern, primarily by fathers. For example, one white, middle-class, heterosexual father of a five-year-old noted that he has told his son to *stop crying like a girl*, and also reported encouraging that son to fight for what he wants: *You*

with greater certainty, while fathers were less enthusiastic and more likely to include caveats. For example, this mother described her purchase of a variety of domestic toys for her three-year-old son without ambivalence: *One of the first big toys [I got him] was the kitchen center. . . . We cook, he has an apron he wears. . . . He's got his Dirt Devil vacuum and he's got his baby [doll]. And he's got all the stuff to feed her and a highchair* (white, low-income, heterosexual mother).

Some mothers reported allowing domestic toys but with less enthusiasm, such as a white, low-income, heterosexual mother who said, regarding her three-year-old son, *He had been curious about dolls and I just said, you know, usually girls play with dolls, but it's okay for you to do it too*. But this kind of caution or lack of enthusiasm, even in a response coded as positive or neutral due to its allowance of gender-atypical behavior, was more evident among fathers, as the following quote illustrates: *Occasionally, if he's not doing something, I'll encourage him to maybe play with his tea cups, you know, occasionally. But I like playing with his blocks better anyway* (white, middle-class, heterosexual father).

Thus, evident among both mothers and fathers, but with greater conviction for mothers, was widespread support among parents for working to "undo" gender at the level of some of their sons' skills and values. However, this acceptance was tempered for many parents by negative responses to any interest in what I will refer to as iconic feminine items, attributes, or activities, as well as parental concern about homosexuality.

Icons of Femininity

A range of activities and attributes considered atypical for boys were met with negative responses, and for a few parents (3 of 31 parents of sons) this even included the kind of domestic toys and nurturance noted above. But more common were negative responses to items, activities, or attributes that could be considered icons of femininity. This was strikingly consistent with Kimmel's (1994:119) previously noted claim that the "notion of anti-femininity lies at the heart of contemporary and historical constructions of manhood," and it bears highlighting that this was evident among parents of very young children. Parents of sons reported negative responses to their sons' wearing pink or frilly clothing; wearing skirts, dresses, or tights; and playing dress up in any kind of feminine attire. Nail polish elicited concern from a number of parents too, as they reported young sons wanting to have their fingernails or toenails polished. Dance, especially ballet, and Barbie dolls were also among the traditionally female activities often noted negatively by parents of sons. Of the 31 parents of sons, 23 mentioned negative reactions to at least one of these icons.

In relation to objects such as clothing and toys, the following responses are typical of the many concerns raised and the many indications of actions parents had taken to accomplish gender with and for their sons:

He's asked about wearing girl clothes before, and I said no. . . . He likes pink, and I try not to encourage him to like pink just because, you know, he's not a girl. . . . There's

positive/neutral and negative responses summarizes this pattern clearly: Among parents commenting about daughter(s), the typical combination was to express only positive responses. For example, a white, middle-class, heterosexual mother noted approvingly that her five-year-old daughter *does a lot of things that a boy would do, and we encourage that*, while a white, upper-middle-class, lesbian mother reported that she and her partner intentionally *do [a lot] of stuff that's not stereotypically female* with their daughter. Similarly, a white, upper-middle-class, heterosexual father indicated with relief that his daughter is turning out to be somewhat "boyish": *I never wanted a girl who was a little princess, who was so fragile. . . . I want her to take on more masculine characteristics*. An African American, working-class, heterosexual father also noted this kind of preference: *I don't want her just to color and play with dolls, I want her to be athletic. . . .*

In stark contrast to the lack of negative response for daughters, 23 of 31 parents of sons expressed at least some negative responses, and 6 of these offered only negative responses regarding what they perceived as gender nonconformity. Of 31 parents, 25 did indicate positive responses as well, but unlike references to their daughters, they tended to balance those positive feelings and actions about sons with negative ones as well. The most common combination was to indicate both positive and negative responses.

Domestic Skills, Nurturance, and Empathy

Parents accepted, and often even celebrated, their sons' acquisition of domestic abilities and an orientation toward nurturance and empathy. Of the 25 parents of sons who offered positive/neutral responses, 21 did so in reference to domestic skills, nurturance, and/or empathy. For example, they reported allowing or encouraging traditionally girl toys such as dolls, doll houses, kitchen centers, and tea sets, with that response often revolving around a desire to encourage domestic competence, nurturance, emotional openness, empathy, and nonviolence as attributes they considered nontraditional but positive for boys. These parents were reporting actions and sentiments oriented toward accomplishing gender in what they considered a less conventional manner. One white, low-income, heterosexual mother taught her son to cook, asserting that *I want my son to know how to do more than boil water; I want him to know how to take care of himself*. Another mother, this one a white, working-class, heterosexual parent, noted that she makes a point of talking to her sons about emotions: *I try to instill a sense of empathy in my sons and try to get them to see how other people would feel*. And a white, middle-class, heterosexual father emphasized domestic competence when he noted that it does not bother him for his son to play with dolls at his cousin's house: *How then are they going to learn to take care of their children if they don't?* This positive response to domestic activities is consistent with recent literature on parental coding of toys as masculine, feminine, or neutral, which indicates that parents are increasingly coding kitchens and in some cases dolls as neutral rather than exclusively feminine (Wood, Desmarais, and Gugula 2002).

In my study, mothers and fathers expressed these kinds of efforts to accomplish gender differently for their sons with similar frequency, but mothers tended to express them

Interviews were conducted primarily in southern and central Maine (with a small number conducted elsewhere in New England), over a period ranging from the summer of 1999 to the fall of 2002. Participants were recruited through postings in local child care centers, parents' resource organizations, community colleges, local businesses, and public housing projects and through personal networks (though none of the participants were people I knew prior to the interviews). Recruiting materials included general reference to "parents' experiences raising sons and daughters" and did not emphasize gender conformity or nonconformity. . . .

The 42 interviewees include 24 mothers and 18 fathers. Four of the fathers are married to women interviewed for the study as mothers. Although geographically specific primarily to northern New England, interviewees come from a relatively diverse range of family types (single-parent and two-parent families, with some of the latter being blended families), class locations (ranging from those self-identifying as poor/low income to upper middle class), racial/ethnic groups (including white, Asian American, and African American interviewees), and sexual orientations (including heterosexual and gay parents). These parents' children include biological children, adopted children, step-children, and foster children. Interviewees' educational backgrounds range from having completed less than a high school education to holding a doctorate, with the average years of formal schooling falling between high school graduate and college graduate. Ages range from 23 to 49 years, with the average age at 35 years. All of the men interviewed work outside the home for pay; among those in heterosexual partnerships, their female partners were roughly equally split among full-time homemakers, those employed part-time in the paid labor force, and those employed full-time. Among the mothers interviewed, about one in three are full-time homemakers, with the remainder employed part-time or full-time in the paid labor force. Interviewees average 2.5 children (with the mode being 2) and are split among those having only daughters (11), only sons (12), or at least one of each (23). The focal children on whom interviews focused include 22 sons and 20 daughters. . . .

Responses to Gender Nonconformity

Mothers and fathers, across a variety of social locations, often celebrated what they perceived as gender nonconformity on the part of their young daughters. They reported enjoying dressing their daughters in sports-themed clothing, as well as buying them toy cars, trucks, trains, and building toys. Some described their efforts to encourage, and pleased reactions to, what they considered traditionally male activities such as t-ball, football, fishing, and learning to use tools. Several noted that they make an effort to encourage their young daughters to aspire to traditionally male occupations and commented favorably on their daughters as "tomboyish," "rough and tumble," and "competitive athletically." These positive responses were combined with very little in the way of any negative response. The coding of each interviewee for the combination of

Normative Conceptions of Masculinity: Hegemonic Masculinity

Connell (1995:77) has argued persuasively that "at any given time, one form of masculinity rather than others is culturally exalted." This hegemonic masculinity is cross-culturally and historically variable and offers a clear example of a locally specific normative conception of gender. It stands as a normative conception to which men are accountable, a form of masculinity in relation to which subordinated masculinities, as well as femininities, are defined. Connell (1987:187) argues that there is no need for a concept of hegemonic femininity, because the fundamental purpose of hegemonic masculinity is to legitimate male domination. The subordination of non-hegemonic masculinities is crucial as well, as it allows hegemonic masculinity to legitimate not only male privilege but also race, class, and sexual orientation-based privileges as well.

Several elements of Connell's theory are especially relevant to my analysis of how parents think about their preschool sons' gender nonconformity. He argues that among the features of hegemonic masculinity in this particular time and place are aggression, limited emotionality, and heterosexuality. In addition, he and other scholars interested in the social construction of masculinity emphasize its relational meaning: "Masculinity' does not exist except in contrast with 'femininity'" (Connell 1995:68). As Kimmel notes, the "notion of anti-femininity lies at the heart of contemporary and historical constructions of manhood, so that masculinity is defined more by what one is not rather than who one is" (1994:119). Passivity and excessive emotionality, as well as more material adornments of femininity, are precisely what must be avoided in this hegemonic version of masculinity. Both Connell and Kimmel view homophobia as central to this rejection of femininity. Connell (1987:186) states this bluntly when he notes that "the most important feature of contemporary hegemonic masculinity is that it is heterosexual. . . . Contempt for homosexuality and homosexual men . . . is part of the ideological package of hegemonic masculinity."

Data and Method

Participants and Interviewing

The analyses presented here are based on data from 42 interviews with a diverse sample of parents, each of whom has at least one preschool-aged child (three to five years old). Interviews focused on parents' perceptions of their children's gendered attributes and behaviors. The preschool age range is emphasized because this is the period when most children begin to develop a clear understanding of the gender expectations around them, as evidenced in the development of gender identity and the tendency to engage in more gender-typed patterns of behavior (Maccoby 1998; Weinraub et al. 1984).

example, the literature indicates differential treatment of sons and daughters in terms of parental selection of toys . . . clothing . . . and décor for children's rooms . . . as well as parental emphasis on emotions versus autonomy in family stories. Across this literature, gender typing by parents is well documented, as are two patterns within that gender typing. First, fathers appear to engage in more differential treatment of sons and daughters and more enforcement of gender boundaries than do mothers; second, for both mothers and fathers, such boundary maintenance appears to be more evident in the treatment of sons than daughters (. . . Coltrane and Adams 1997; Maccoby 1998).

The large literature on gender typing by parents is predominantly quantitative and often based on experiments, closed-ended surveys, and/or counting the frequency of various parental behaviors. This literature is valuable in documenting the role that parents play in gendering their children. However, it does less to explore the nuances of how parents make meaning around gender, to document in detail what kinds of attributes and behaviors are accepted and sanctioned by parents of young children, to reveal what motivates parents as they participate in the social construction of their children's gender, or to illuminate how aware parents are of their role in these processes. Parents are clearly gendering their children, but what are the subtleties of the gendered outcomes they seek to construct, why do they seek to construct those, and how aware are they of that construction process?

Doing Gender: Accomplishment and Accountability

The interactionist approach to gender as accomplishment (West and Fenstermaker 1993, 1995; West and Zimmerman 1987) provides a powerful framework for understanding what I heard about gender nonconformity in my interviews with parents of young children. This approach allows us to view parents not simply as agents of gender socialization but rather as actors involved in a more complex process of accomplishing gender with and for their children. Along with the notion of gender as accomplished, equally central is the concept of accountability. Accountability is relevant not only when people are doing gender in accordance with the expectations of others but also when they resist or stray from such expectations. . . . Fenstermaker and West (2002) . . . note that their focus on the process by which gender is accomplished places activity, agency, and the possibility of resistance in the foreground. But the accomplishment of such change takes place within the context of, and is constrained by, accountability to gendered assessment. . . .

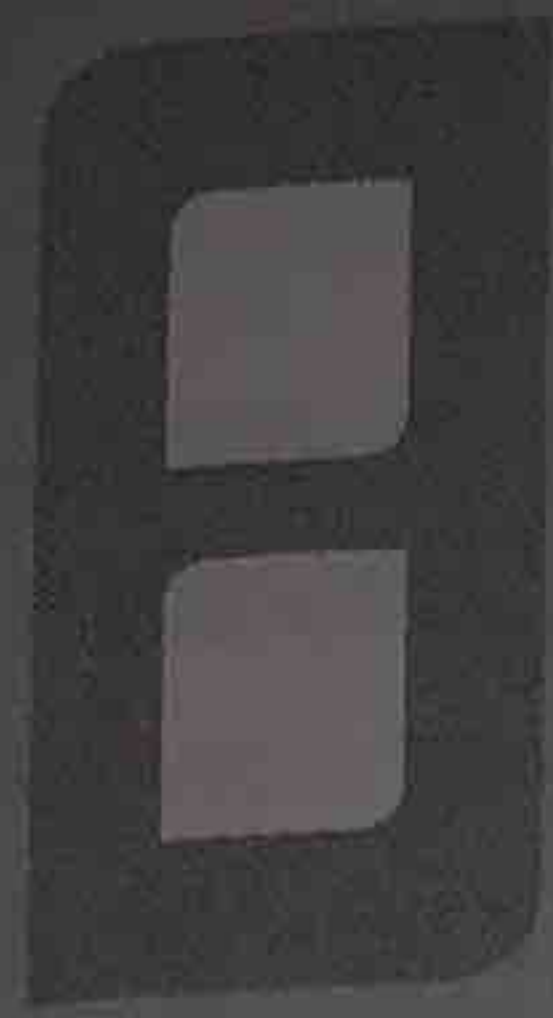
While accomplishment and accountability are key concepts framing my analysis of parents' responses to their children's gender nonconformity, it is also crucial to note the importance of normative conceptions. . . . Normative conceptions of appropriate masculine conduct are particularly relevant to my analysis, and to explore that domain, I turn briefly to scholarship on the history of masculinity as a social construct.

Parents begin gendering their children from their very first awareness of those children, whether in pregnancy or while awaiting adoption. Children themselves become active participants in this gendering process by the time they are conscious of the social relevance of gender, typically before the age of two. I address one aspect of this process of parents doing gender, both for and with their children, by exploring how parents respond to gender nonconformity among preschool-aged children. As West and Zimmerman (1987:136) note, "to 'do' gender is not always to live up to normative conceptions of femininity or masculinity; it is to engage in behavior *at the risk of gender assessment*." I argue that many parents make efforts to stray from and thus expand normative conceptions of gender. But for their sons in particular, they balance this effort with conscious attention to producing a masculinity approximating hegemonic ideals. This balancing act is evident across many parents I interviewed regardless of gender, race/ethnicity, social class, sexual orientation, and partnership status. But I also argue that within that broader pattern are notable variations. Heterosexual fathers play a particularly central role in accomplishing their sons' masculinity and, in the process, reinforce their own as well. Their expressed motivations for that accomplishment work often involve personal endorsement of hegemonic masculinity. Heterosexual mothers and gay parents, on the other hand, are more likely to report motivations that invoke accountability to others for crafting their sons' masculinity in accordance with hegemonic ideals.

Three bodies of literature provide foundations for this argument. Along with the body of work documenting parental behaviors in relation to gendering children, I draw on interactionist approaches that view gender as a situated accomplishment and scholarship outlining the contours of normative conceptions of masculinity. These latter two literatures offer a framework for understanding the significance of the patterns evident in my analysis of interview data.

Parents and the Social Construction of Gender

Scholars of gender and childhood are increasingly interested in the role of peers in the process of gendering children, viewing children themselves as active agents rather than passive recipients of adult influence. However, they also continue to recognize parents as important in the gendering of children (Coltrane and Adams 1997; Maccoby 1998). Lytton and Romney's (1991) meta-analysis of the substantial quantitative and experimental literature on gender and parents' behavior toward their sons and daughters documents that parents do not always enforce gendered expectations for their children, nor do they consistently treat sons and daughters differently. Some researchers have highlighted subgroups of parents who actively seek to disrupt traditional gendered expectations for their children. . . . But as a whole, the literature documents definite parental tendencies toward gendered treatment of children. These tendencies are evident beginning at birth and in the early childhood years. For



PART III

Socialization

READING 13

"No Way My Boys Are Going to Be Like That!"

Parents' Responses to Children's Gender Nonconformity

Emily W. Kane

In this and the following three selections, we examine socialization, the process of learning cultural values and norms. Socialization refers to these social processes through which an individual becomes integrated into a social group by learning the group's culture and his or her roles in that group. It is largely through this process that an individual's concept of self is formed. Thus, socialization teaches us the cultural norms, values, and skills necessary to survive in society. Socialization also enables us to form social identities and to develop an awareness about ourselves as individuals. We construct our social identities through social interaction with others, including members of our families, our peers, teachers, and employers. The following reading by Emily Kane, a professor of sociology at Bates College, is taken from a 2002 article of the same name in Gender & Society. Here, Kane examines socialization and how we learn our gender identities following birth.

Emily W. Kane, "No Way My Boys Are Going to Be Like That!": Parents' Responses to Children's Gender Nonconformity," from *Gender & Society* 20, no. 2 (April 2006): 149–76. Copyright © 2006 Sociologists for Women in Society. Reprinted by permission of SAGE Publications, Inc.