ON THE BUS: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF
SCHOOL BUS CULTURE

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1997

Submitted to the Faculty of the
Graduate College of the
Oklahoma State University
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for
the Degree of
MASTER OF SCIENCE
July, 2000

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SCHOOL BUS CULTURE

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to express sincere appreciation to my major advisor, Dr. Natalie Adams for her conscientious guidance, thoughtful support, and pragmatic wisdom. I would also like to thank Dr. Pamela Bettis whose smart talks, generous sprit, and reading list were an enormous help. My thanks also go to Dr. Lisa Cary for her gracious good will and intelligent suggestions. And to my committee as a whole; I am privileged to have you as mentors and as friends.

I would like to express deep gratitude to my mother Conlee Jewett whose curiosity, creativity, and loving support have nourished me in countless ways. Finally, special thanks to Steve Clark whose patient ear, punctuation genius, and gentle encouragement made this thesis—both in process and product—a much smoother ride.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

"Putting the Excellence in education
starts on the steps of that big yellow school bus."
(DeBruyn, 1985)

On the Bus

"You're either on the bus or off the bus."
-Tom Wolfe (1968)

The ambiguity in the title of my study is deliberate. The phrase "on the bus" positions the research literally and figuratively. First, the title refers to the subject of study. My research has been on the bus, journeying towards an exploratory study of school bus culture. More significantly, the phrase refers to the methodological vehicle of participant observation through which this study was undertaken. For one school year I spent considerable time on the bus—literally: bumping along, singing Britney Spears songs, eating blow-pops, and trading Pokemon cards in the sometimes sweltering, nearly always noisy, big yellow "kid-hack" (Latta, 1969, p.30).

"We know almost nothing," write Adler & Adler (1998-b) in their investigation into preadolescent culture and identity, "about the inside of child institutions and child groups" (p. 4). My study never penetrates school bus culture into the mythical "inside" about which Adler & Adler (1998-b) write. Despite time in the field, in relation to bus culture I remain mostly an "outsider." Unlike its passengers, I was not reliant on the bus for transportation. After all, much to the chagrin of passengers not yet sixteen, I drove my

car to the "barn" where I caught the bus. Unlike bus drivers, I was not directly reliant on the bus for employment. Notebook in hand, I was, on a pragmatic level, just along for the ride. The fact that I once was a passenger reliant on the bus for transportation, however, offers some disruption to such neat delineations between outsider/insider. Chapter three discusses how this sort of "deja-vu," that Caputo (1995), Fine (1988), and Sutton-Smith (1979) name as a unique characteristic to research with children, challenges the insider/outsider dichotomy in interesting ways.

As chapter five indicates, however, participant observation on the bus—mornings and afternoons riding along with students on their daily commute— has enabled me to learn something about the multiplicity of children's lives as they converge in a culture free of institutionally imposed age-stratification, relatively unmediated by direct adult interference, and defined exclusively neither by school nor home. Caputo (1995), Jenks (1996), McRobbie (1991), Prout & James (1997), and Wulff (1995) all propose that ethnographic understandings of the everyday lives of children and youth offer important opportunities to re-configure social constructions of youth. According to Valentine (1998):

> Given that young people are invariably marginalised within the wider society and have little, if any, input in public policy debates which directly impact on their lives, empirical research with young people provides an opportunity to increase our understanding of their lives and in some situations to contribute to academic or public debates which play a part in social construction of youth. (p.23)

The school bus provides a mobile intersection in social space from which to constructively complicate common constructions of youth and childhood. Further,

understanding the multiple, overlapping curricula of students' everyday lives—like that implicit in the school bus ride, according to Schubert (1981)—has important implications for the formal curriculum: "The better we know children and youth, the more fully we can be in a position to provide good educational experiences for them" (p. 185).

Safety

School bus transportation is the largest mass transit system in our country, and is considered the safest method of transport to and from school (DeBruyn, 1985; Fowler, 1997, School Bus Safety, 2000). "Safety first" is the thematic emblem of discourse surrounding school transportation. As Stewart (1997) writes: "The most important aspect of pupil transportation is the safe passage of bused students" (p. 10). Issues as diverse as transportation funding, equipment maintenance, driver retention, and student behavior merge with safety to create the discussions that dominate literature concerning school transportation. When it comes to the school bus, all rhetorical roads lead to safety, but as one driver warns: "You need to know safety inside and out" (Thomas, 1984, p. 3).

On the front of every bus adjacent to the door hangs a uniform sheet of paper enumerating the eleven official bus rules. This list, which I discuss in more detail in chapter four, skillfully blends the themes of order, safety, and authority. When one driver noticed I was copying down the list, he read the rules aloud to me rather proudly. He then summed up the list up by adding, "The rules, it's all about safety." But how safe is the school bus? What constitutes safety in this mostly "child-mediated" space. For whom and at what price? (Grugeon, 1993). The omnipresent pursuit of safety explicit and implicit in discourse pertaining to children and youth—specifically bus passengers in the case of this

study—is itself not without risk. As Adler & Adler (1998-b) write: "Our society's double regime of protection and control yields the unintended consequences of greater dependence, increased passivity, and the alienation of childhood" (p.11). Chapter two explores this paradoxical peril and other risks associated with children's status as a protected group. Such discussions encourage a more critical look at safety-talk, both on the bus and off. By learning more about the lived experience of its riders, this study seeks to "penetrate to the deeper levels of meaning that lie beneath the superficial surface appearances" of safety, and uncover the dangers inherent to the risky, liminal space of the school bus, where the private and public worlds of children intersect and sometimes crash (Thomas, 1993, p. 3).

Betwixt and Between

"The landscape of childhood," asserts Thorne (1994) in her extensive study of playground culture, "includes three major sites—families, neighborhoods, and schools. Each of these worlds contains different people, patterns of time and space and arrangements of gender" (p. 29). I would add race/ethnicity and social class to these arrangements as well. The school bus is a space in which various trajectories of this landscape converge, not always harmoniously. On the bus, secret alcoves of private geographies run the risk of becoming discovered. Bus mates, unlike classmates, know where you live and in many cases with whom. Throughout my fieldwork the homes, cars, laundry, parents, siblings, and even the dogs of various riders came under public scrutiny. I watched a middle-school girl flinch as her disabled eight-year-old brother tried unsuccessfully to win favor with his peers through incessant boasting. Along with

everyone else on the bus, I watched a grandmother mouth "I love you" and blow a kiss to her teenaged grandson as he boarded. The humiliation of a junior-high girl was palpable as passengers received a panoramic view of her obese mother hanging clothes on a line strung across the front porch of their trailer. Matters like pariah siblings or social class—which can be to some extent successfully re-routed in classrooms—emerge "enroute" in ways less easily detoured.

Bus-mates share a risky temporal/spatial relationship that differs from that of classmates. The bus provides what Fox (1996) rather dramatically terms in his study on the time/distance constraints of school transportation an "unnatural social group situation" (p. 27). A lanky high-school girl named Randy split her bus time between backseat peers and a group of elementary boys near the front. When he wasn't flashing Pokemon cards with other fourth-graders, one boy with whom I sometimes sat could be found painting his nails with middle-school girls. T.J., a charismatic African-American kindergartner on bus No. 21, was wildly popular amongst the "backseat girls," a group of mostly African-American junior high and high-schoolers. They gave him treats and often yelled good-bye to him as he disembarked. Contrary to the rigid age-stratification of schools, bus time offers students the opportunity to play "up" and "down" across age.

I also witnessed episodes of bullying both up and down. I listened as a tiny, freckled, first grade-grade girl asked (with extreme scrappiness) the fifth-grade boy behind her: "Do you really want me to beat the crap out of you?" Dismissed in my field notes as pig-tailed bravado, the incident took on more importance one day later when the little girl did indeed punch the fifth-grader in the face and made him cry. Unlike school, the bus presents children with opportunities to build relationships—albeit not always

positive—across age differences in ways that remain relatively unmediated by direct adult interference.

Fox's (1996) use of the term "unnatural" to describe bus culture is an interesting one (p.27). I prefer "uneasy" in reference to the uneasiness generated by the indeterminacy of liminality (James, 1986; Turner, 1967; Zukin, 1991). Positioned betwixt and between school and home, the bus is a mobile threshold where multiple social meanings relevant to children's lives overlap and congregate (Holman, 1992). These points of convergence offer fertile "lines of flight" along which contemporary educational debate might more profitably travel (Deleuze, 1983). Nespor (1997) writes in his preface to *Tangled up in School*:

> Instead of looking at school as a container, we have to peel back its walls, and inspect the strings and rhizomes linking it to the outside world (which is no longer 'outside'). We need to map the material trajectories of bodies to and from school. (p. xi)

Likewise, my study is an attempt to peel back the rhizomatic "routes" of the school bus, and examine the ways in which its passengers conceptualize and navigate the material and relational trajectories that shape and are shaped by their lives.

Extracurricularity

Often considered a "component part of going to school" (Fox, 1996, p. 25), and referred to as an "extension of the classroom" (DeBruyn, 1985; Mills, 1973, p.10), bus literature reveals ambivalence regarding the educational role of the school bus. In contrast

to Vail (1997), who writes: "the bus is a classroom," most writing conceptualizes the bus as a transitional space on the periphery of education (p. 36).

The driver's unique position in relation to the educational system as a whole also influences school bus culture. They are employees of the school district, but bus drivers' status within the educational system is often positioned as somewhat marginal (Vail, 1997). Though, like teachers, they are in charge of up to sixty children, driver authority is caught in the ambiguous intersection between the authority of school officials and that of parents. As Vail (1997) points out: "The driver is not empowered by school or the parents" (p. 35). Drivers, like their passengers, navigate "neither" regions between school and home where lanes of authority are not always clearly marked.

The marginal status of the bus ride in relation to experiences considered more concretely educational does not, however, diminish the importance of further study on the bus. In addition to issues of safety, bus literature tends to be in agreement with the sentiment that "when your child boards the school bus in the morning, the tone for the day is set" (DeBruyn, 1985, p. 1; Huffman, 1999, p. 6). Moreover, Fox's (1996) study reveals that a significant number of parents considered school bus experiences worthy of further study, and were deeply concerned not only about the amount of time their kids spent on the bus, but also the nature of that experience. Literature indicates that, however peripheral, the lived experience of bus culture is an important part of the broader spectrum of educational experience constituted by the school day (Fox, 1996; Jackson, 1968; Langeveld, 1983; Schubert, 1981). Kid commuters spend anywhere from three to twenty hours a week riding the bus—up to four times the amount of time they spend learning geography or science. Further, this commute is a day-to-day reality for over fifty-

four percent of K-12 students in the United States (DeBruyn, 1985). Obscured—perhaps by what Gary Fine (1988) describes as the "patina of the mundane"—the temporal/spatial journey that constitutes the bus ride offers a very unquotidian research opportunity (p. 76).

Multiple Perspectives

Each day over 22.5 million children make the round-trip journey between school and home via the familiar yellow school bus (DeBruyn, 1985; Glencross, 1999; School Bus Safety, 2000). This thesis makes a similar journey. Focusing on the bus, or more precisely school bus culture, it rides the route between school and home, awkwardly navigating the "array of intersections" such a trip entails (Rosaldo, 1989, p. 20). Often I am asked by colleagues and family: "What do you do on the bus?" Sometimes, in rare moments of brevity, I succinctly respond: "I watch." Though I also listen, talk with passengers and drivers, analyze documents, and collect relevant realia, the bulk of my data has been generated through participant observation: I watch.

Positioned directly in front of the driver, a long, rectangular and strategically tilted rearview mirror allows the driver to monitor much of the activity that takes place among passengers. A small video camera mounted high in the center of the front wall serves as an electronic compliment to such surveillance. A small note reads: "Notice video camera installed on this bus." Connected as it is to headquarters, this device allows the higher-ups in transportation to monitor the driver as well as his or her riders. In fact, sometimes they simply watch the driver watching riders. With all this watching, it is amazing what is left unseen.

Definition of Terms

Artifact: "A product of human art or workmanship: or by-product of prehistoric or aboriginal workmanship as opposed to natural object" (Oxford, 1009, p. 120).

Childhood: "Distinct from biological immaturity, [it] is neither a natural nor universal feature of human groups but appears as a specific structural and cultural component of many societies. . . . A variable of social analysis. It can never be entirely divorced from other variables such as class, gender, and ethnicity" (James & Prout, 1990, p.8).

Culture: "That complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society" (Taylor, 1874).

Culture: "Repository of social learning and socialization, the means by which societies preserve and strengthen their position in the world" (Kline, 1998, p.95).

Culture: "Any group of people who regularly associate with each other and associate with a set of shared beliefs, attitudes, mores, customs, values, and ways of thinking and behaving" (Gay, 1996, p. 219).

Culture: "A multiplicity of signifying practices rather than a bounded thing" (Caputo, 1995, p. 20).

Culture: "The peculiar and distinctive 'way of life' of the group or class, the meanings, values and ideas embodied in institutions, in social relations, in systems of belief, in customs and mores, in the uses of objects and material life. Culture is the distinctive

shape in which this material and social organization of life expresses itself" (Clarke, 1975, p. 10 in Epstein, 1998, p. 8-9).

Children's Culture: "A sphere where entertainment, advocacy, and pleasure meet to construct conceptions of what it means to be a child occupying a combination of gender, racial and class positions in society" (Giroux, 1996, p.89).

Peer Culture: "Consists of a system of knowledge, beliefs, behaviors, and customs shared by members of an interacting group to which members can refer and that serve as the basis of further interaction. Members recognize that that they share experiences, and these experiences can be referred to with the expectation they will be understood by other members" (Adler & Adler, 1998-b, p. 4).

Subculture: "A culture which is distinct, oppositional, but intimately related to the larger culture of which it is a part" (Rotundo, 1998, p.337).

Youth Culture: "A distinctive pattern of values and attitudes of the age groups between childhood and the assumption of full adult responsibilities (Parsons, 1943 1943/1954, pp.189-190).

Youth Culture: "What young people are concerned with" (Wulff, 1995, p.15).

Liminality: "The state of being on a threshold in space or time; a place where many social meanings congregate" (Holman, 1992, p. 266).

Realia: "Objects which may be used as teaching aids but were not made for that purpose" (Oxford, 1993, p. 2493).

Significance of Study

The road to exploring bus culture is uncharted territory "promising provocative questions" (Reinharz, 1992). Though riding the bus is a daily reality for millions of children, research that examines the lived experience of this familiar phenomena amounts to a near vacant lot (DeBruyn, 1985; Glencross, 1999; More Births, 1999). An inquiry into school bus culture necessarily raises questions particular to the experience of the bus itself. Such an exploration stands to lend insight into issues such as driver authority, seating, and discipline.

Research into school bus culture also has implications that reach beyond the bus itself and outward into the multiple milieus of children's lives. My fieldwork involved, among other things, eavesdropping on, participating in, and documenting countless conversations representing the multiplicity of school bus culture. Topics recorded in my field notes on bus No. 21 include, but are not limited to, homework, teachers, grades, tests, parents, grandparents, siblings, pets, allowances, jobs, television, cigarettes, vacations, pregnancies, music, sports, boyfriends, girlfriends, parties, jail, money, nature, drinking and drugs, playing, praying, eating, and sex. These conversational snippets raise compelling questions about safety and danger, living and learning, and simply "getting by" on bus No. 21 (Britzman, 1998, p.39). Further, characterized as they are by dangerous intersections of gender, race/ethnicity, and social class, such experiences serve to reveal immobile power structures and/or resistance in-transit.

Assumptions

Implicit in this ethnographic study are assumptions about culture. In looking at school bus culture I use classic anthropological studies of "youth culture," such as Cohen (1972), Mead (1978), and Parsons (1942/1964) along with more contemporary critical investigations such as Giroux (1996) and Kline (1998) to inform my own explorations into the more specific youth culture of the school bus—even more specifically, that of bus No. 21. These studies use traditional anthropological definitions of culture as a way of life—the distinctive customs, products, beliefs and outlooks of a particular society or group—as well as more experimental descriptions of culture as "fragmentary and confused" (Babcock, 1995, p.119). My study frames the lived experience of bus No. 21 in very similar terms. In doing so, my account is in some sense bound by assumptions implicit in the definitions I employ, as well as in anthropological notions of culture itself—even those that seek to be feminist or postmodern.

While the above-mentioned studies look at youth culture as a world distinct from adult culture, they do not necessarily problematize the notion of culture itself. As Wulff (1995) writes: "Studies of youth culture have usually not made any substantial contribution to the development of the concept of culture" (p.15). Neither does mine. This introduction's juxtaposition of multiple definitions of culture (along with brief discussions in chapter three concerning conflicting notions of fieldwork) do, however, keep notions of culture from escaping this account entirely untroubled.

Limitations

This study is limited by several factors. For one, all buses are different. Dusty rural routes resonate with a different cultural tone than their slicker, in-town counterparts. Buses that transport "exceptional" students differ significantly from other buses both in physical and social design. Most buses offer fertile composites of gender, social economic status, ability, age, and ethnicity. The exact composition of this blend differs both among buses and within the populations of single buses as they fluctuate from week to week, day to day, and even from morning to afternoon.

Though certain trends emerged, no ride—even on the same bus—was ever exactly the same. Rarely, if ever, did the same combination of riders take the bus on the same day. The distribution of passengers on the bus shifts as a result of "cyclical" events and in response to random occurrences. The population of junior-high boys on bus No. 21, for example, waxed significantly during wrestling season when non-regulars used it as a shuttle from school to practice. Attributed to church activities, several buses experience a weekly wane on Wednesday afternoons. The County Youth Shelter on bus No. 21's route generates an ever-shifting population of "at risk" passengers that greatly influences backseat happenings. Sporadic events which effect the day-to-day lives of riders also effect the bus populations in ways less predictable. Family emergencies, illness, a spontaneous shopping trip, Friday-night slumber parties, and other individual occasions all effect the distribution of school bus passengers.

Differences in gender, age grouping, social economic factors, and geography work together with a myriad of other factors to create fluid bus cultures. Although these

cultures might share similarities with those of other buses, each school bus remains in some sense unique. This study is limited in its capacity to account for these singularities. Further, all observation has been done on buses in the same community. Cimarron School District is not necessarily representative of those in other communities, particularly those considered to be urban.

Related to this limitation is the issue of driver authority. Though I study primarily how passengers construct and are constructed by school bus culture, the role of the driver cannot be ignored. On one bus, for example, the driver assigns seats alphabetically at the beginning of each school year. Several drivers use "designed" rather than assigned seating: girls on one side and boys on the other; or older passengers in back and "little kids" in front. One driver forbids talking above a whisper. The rules these drivers make create structural realities that greatly influence the bus' concomitant culture.

Chapters three and four both betray a struggle for balance. Chapter three outlines my methodological attempts to place localized forms of cultural activity, as observed on bus No. 21, within the context of practices more widely distributed among the multiple buses upon which I gathered data (Wulff, 1995). Nonetheless, my analysis in chapter four vacillates sometimes uneasily between structural and poststructural concerns; attempts to adequately address particularities sometimes give way to a tense propensity toward generalization. Whether it's described as a limitation or a tension inherent to ethnographic and more broadly qualitative research, as I struggled to present my data I often felt limited by tension of this sort (Baszinger & Dodier, 1997; VanMaanen, 1988).

Research Questions

What is it like to ride the bus? Is it "empty time" as Fox's 1996 study suggests? Or as a few articles assert, can it be seen as an educational tool or a classroom of sorts? (DeBruyn, 1985; Saks, 1991; Vail, 1997). If the bus can be conceptualized as an educational space, how do riders make meaning out of the "multiplicity of scattered practices" which constitute this mobile culture—positioned as it is on the outskirts between school and home? (Lather, 1991, p. 43). More broadly, how might an exploration of this culture help us to better understand the concretely historical and open-ended" context of children's experiences on the school bus, particularly as it intersects with education? (Thorne, 1994, p. 3).

Summary

In his classic work, *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, Clifford (1986) writes: "Ethnography is actively situated between powerful systems of meaning" (p. 2). This study situates school bus culture similarly. Data gathered traveling the liminal space between school and home as a participant observer on the school bus generates questions "at the boundaries" of school, and more broadly, of culture (Clifford, 1986, p. 2). The review of literature, discussion of methodology, and subsequent analysis help to situate these questions both theoretically and practically in relation to empirical interactions.

"Critical ethnography," writes Thomas, "resembles literary criticism in that we look for non-literal meanings of our data texts" (1993, p. 43). In this ethnographic study

of school bus culture, I step sideways and explore collisions of literal and figurative meaning. Using primarily participant observation, along with document analysis and informal interviews, I hope to change lanes and travel across and beyond the surface "literalities" of safety—pausing at the dangerous intersections that situate bus culture, literally and figuratively, as a "fluid, changeable social setting, in motion" (Bauman, 1989, quoted in Lather, 1991, p. 43).

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

Study of school bus culture reveals a fluid network of perpetual departures. A review of literature pertaining to school bus culture necessitates similar multiplicity. First, a historical overview of pupil transportation works to position school bus culture in relation to overlapping industrial, educational, and societal issues specific to school transportation. This overview also demonstrates school transportation's marginal status in relation to broader historical discussions of education. Current discourse pertaining to the school bus functions likewise, and highlights the dominant discursive role safety plays in such discussions.

Next, this review travels along trajectories that extend from the school bus into the more general terrain of childhood. A brief overview examines the merging traffic of childhood and youth cultures, where safety and danger crash. Studies of playgrounds, lunchrooms, and other spaces generally regarded as peripheral to education offer important insights into the variety of ways children make meaning out of "extracurricularities." Further, these studies encourage us to re-conceptualize what goes on during kids' "off time."

Historical "Routes"

A comprehensive review of literature related to the school bus yields only a few examples of scholarly inquiry into the lived experience of school bus passengers. Such a review, however, does enable one to place pupil transportation in an historical context. An examination of this context reveals a history driven by notions of educational opportunity, in which automotive industry intersects with the public project of schooling in interesting ways.

When asked informally: "When do you think they first started using school buses to take kids to school," passengers on bus No. 21 offered a variety of answers and rationales. Most, despite the promise of candy for the answer closest to the correct one, responded with a classic: "I dunno." Some just rolled their eyes. Several seventh grade boys thought it was right after World War II: that the school bus was an outgrowth of military innovation. Tina bluffed a convincingly specific "1954." A third-grade loner answered: "Little house times." I knew she meant the television show *Little House on the Prairie*, but I did not know kids still watched it. She won the candy—got the century right at least.

It was on August 31, 1869, that the Massachusetts General Court made the first authorization of public funds for school transportation (Franklin, 1983; Latta, 1969). This allowed students in Massachusetts to make their way to school in horse-drawn wagons and carriages "as a legitimate part of the community's tax program" (DeBruyn, 1985; Johns, 1928). In addition to providing the actual horse and carriage, a local farmer was usually contracted and paid in proportion to the number of students he drove to school

(Mills, 1973). The first two decades of the nineteenth century saw continued growth in school consolidation and transportation. In large part due to compulsory attendance laws and increased school consolidation efforts, by 1919 all forty-eight states had legislation making pupil transportation at public expense legal (Creation of, 1999; Franklin, 1983; Mills, 1973).

The histories of school transportation and consolidation stand in dynamic relation to each other, and are intertwined to such an extent that it becomes difficult to say definitively which movement facilitated the other (Johns, 1928). Consolidation required transportation, while publicly funded school transportation, in turn, accelerated consolidation efforts (Franklin, 1983; Johns, 1928). It does suffice to say, however, that these two intertwined movements grew out of debates about the common school and its role in providing equal educational opportunities to rural children and their urban counterparts. (Mills, 1973; Spring, 1994). The role transportation plays in these early debates on educational equity is replayed in the 1970s, with legislation ordering busing for racial integration and through the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1975 (Hirano, 1999).

Court Ordered Busing for Educational Equity

School desegregation is a topic well documented in educational histories (Cremin, 1988; Pai & Adler, 1997; Spring, 1993), though the role of court-ordered busing in the desegregation of public schooling is less documented. Of the influential educational histories mentioned above, only Spring (1993) addresses busing in any depth (p. 353-354). Often ignored in educational histories, school transportation—from consolidation to

desegregation—can be seen as a vehicle of re-distribution, retrospectively relegated to the side streets of ostensibly more philosophical discussions of educational equity in the United States.

In and attempt to enforce the desegregation efforts begun in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* 1955, bolstered by the Supreme Court de-segregation enforcement decree of 1957, and fortified by titles IV and VI of Kennedy's 1964 Civil Rights Act, *Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education* (1971) made busing a legal, albeit controversial, means of desegregating schools (Bickel, 1972; Spring, 1994; Schwartz, 1986). President Nixon later became a vocal opponent of busing, maintaining its purpose of ending the dual education system in the South to be fully achieved (Spring, 1994). Nixon led the 1970s conservative movement against court-ordered busing with the sentiment that the "'wrenching of children away from their families and from the schools their families may have moved to be near, and sending them arbitrarily to others far and distant'" put undo hardship on bus passengers and their families (Spring, 1994, p.353).

ersity Library

Throughout the seventies and the eighties, opponents such as Nixon suggested that transporting students to distant schools in "satellite zones" outside of their neighborhoods posed a threat to the well being—or "safety"—of passengers (Swann v. McKlenburg, 1971). Indeed, court-ordered busing did pose a challenge to the potent notion of "neighborhood schools." Literature dealing with court-ordered busing reveals the emerging tension surrounding the often-conflicting educational aims of diversity and community. Mills (1972), Underhill (1974), Noddings (1999), and Schwartz (1986) offer insightful discussions that explore this tension, and demonstrate that where school happens is as relevant to the public as what happens in schools. Arguments for and

against busing rely on notions of safety, which extend beyond the exclusively physical into a more a nebulous terrain of general well being situated both spatially and temporally in relation to the educational lives of children.

Opponents of court-ordered busing used the length of the ride passengers had to endure as an argument against busing (Hayes, 1981; Mills, 1972; Spring, 1994). Such arguments were rarely based on "research," and busing opponents soon found it was not unusual for passengers on "regular" routes to spend up to two and a half hours a day on the bus to and from school—the same as students bused by mandate (Hayes, 1981; Mills, 1972). In addition to highlighting the role of the school bus in the geographical dispersal of education, these discussions evoked questions about the ways in which education was distributed on the bus, as well as through it. Inquiries such as Robert Cole's (1971) interviews with a school bus driver, his 1974 work documenting busing in Berkeley (Underhill, 1974), and Michael Fox's (1996) study on time distance constraints made overtures toward establishing the experience of riding the school bus as educationally significant.

The school district in which this study took place is a small city where court-ordered busing is not practiced. I briefly mention court-ordered busing in order to situate the school bus historically in relation to national and state efforts to reconfigure the geographic and demographic distribution of "educational opportunity." Such efforts began with school consolidation at the turn of the twentieth century, continuing with court-ordered busing and changes in pupil transportation enacted as a result of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1975.

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IDEA On the Bus

Transportation of students with disabilities predates specific federal mandates guaranteeing students with disabilities equal access to education (Wagner, 1999). Beginning in the late sixties in accordance with the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, disabled students began to be transported to school via the school bus (Franklin 1983; Wagner, 1999). As Mike Wagner, vice president of Alpha School Bus company recalls: "In the beginning special ed. transportation was crude but it got the job done . . . They went to school, some in wheelchairs, some on boards, some in made-up contraptions but they were able to visit the outside world" (Wagner, 1999). With the enactment of both the Education of All Handicapped Children Act of 1973 and IDEA in 1975, guaranteeing a free and appropriate public school education including special education and related services, school transportation developed more sophisticated methods of transporting a more diversely abled population of students to school (Burns, 1999; Creation of, 1999; Franklin, 1983; Wagner, 1999).

In addition to providing increased educational opportunity, innovations in accessibility and assistive technology that began in school transportation have had a lasting influence on a public transit industry new to the logistical challenges of transporting people with disabilities. (Wagner, 1999). This influence resulted in an increased mobility on the part of the disabled populace that transcended the boundaries of schools. (Wagner, 1999).

My fieldwork does not significantly deal with special needs transportation. I rode "special education" buses just three times and found the physical and social

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configurations on these buses to be a fascinating, yet altogether different study. "Special needs" busing has evolved into a culture unto itself (Hirano, 1999). "Exceptional" children are bused separately in specially equipped buses driven by specially trained drivers (Blain, 1998; Bluth, 1999-b; Burns, 1999; Culver, 1999). The buses themselves are smaller and carry fewer passengers (Wilkins, 1999). In Cimarron where this study takes place, special education buses leave and return to the barn at different times than the other buses. Drivers get paid more. Despite these and many other differences, a brief review of literature regarding special needs transportation does give rise to issues that intersect with my exploration of school bus culture in several important ways.

First, special needs transportation represents an important strand of contemporary discourse on school transportation. Special needs transportation appears as a discreet category, and is dealt with in depth in prominent school transportation periodicals such as *School Transportation Director*, *School Bus Fleet*, and *School Transportation News*. Secondly, like court-ordered busing, the history of special needs transportation provides an example of the often-overlooked role everyday realities such as transportation play in less tangible conceptualizations of educational equity.

Finally, innovations in assistive and adaptive technology begun in school transportation are acknowledged as important components in the broader history of the disabled population in America (Wagner, 1999). The increased access to education these innovations allowed contributed to a burgeoning critical consciousness that coalesced in the Americans with Disabilities Act (Wagner, 1999). I mention these historical events that are seemingly only loosely connected to my study in order to highlight the ways school transportation has functioned in the broader spectrum of education—as more than

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1945; Hirano, 1999). Working collaboratively, state departments of education, automotive engineers, and safety consultants developed forty-four standards, including specifications for body length, ceiling height, aisle width, and color—bright yellow, of course (Cyr, 1946; Hirano, 1999). Regarding these standards, Thomas G. Pullen, 1946 president of the National Council of Chief State School Officers writes: "These standards are the results of the best thinking in the field of school transportation. Their adoption and enforcement by the states will further safety in school transportation throughout the nation" (Cyr, 1946). Co-sponsored by the National Commission on Safety Education, this conference, with its dual objectives of "safety and economy" also established the standard discourse of safety that would later be connected with every aspect of school transportation (Cyr, 1946; Donn, 1989). Since 1939, twelve subsequent minimum standards conferences have been held once every five years (Hirano, 1999). Technological innovation, ranging from the 1967 developments in seat design (termed compartmentalization) to the 1990s' advances in mirror technology, and finally the recent mechanical applications of the Internet continue to propel pupil transportation into its historical present (Franklin, 1983; History 101, 1999; Wilkins, 1999).

Though automotive details figure prominently in historical documents and current articles pertaining to school transportation, I was tempted to deem anything automotive as beyond the scope of my study and skip such articles altogether. While accounts of technical details have little direct bearing on my analysis of school bus culture, they have a direct impact on the lived experience of riding the bus. The school bus is, after all, a machine. Its "mechanical-ness" mediates the experience of the drivers who drive the bus and the students who ride it. I have seen students become utterly discombobulated when a

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tire goes flat, or turn surly in the face of a too-stiff suspension, as this quote from a usually amiable sixth-grade girl reveals: "Why is it so bumpity now? This bus is an old bouncy-ass piece of shit that can *not* be legal." Likewise, the experience of driving the bus is contingent on mercurial mechanical realities. Just ask the driver of any diesel bus on a cold morning.

With this in mind, I resisted the urge to omit periodicals such as *School Bus Technician* and columns like "Shop Talk" or "Tech-Tips" from this review. Admittedly, I only motored through articles such as "Rating a Oil's Quality Can Be a Slippery Task" (Hansen, 1999) and "Base School Bus Maintenance Intervals On Time, Not Miles" (1999). I did linger long enough over a broad selection of such articles to ponder the feel of a ride in a bus made of wood (Franklin, 1983); and once in a while, to sneak a peek at the tread on bus No. 21's tires (Cannon, 1999-c).

Contemporary School Bus Discourse

In order to get a feel for the current context that drives and is driven by school bus experiences, it is useful to review contemporary discussions that relate specifically to school transportation. Since very little scholarly writing has been done about the school bus, this review relies predominately on literature that might be considered "secondary," in that it is mostly non-academic. Such literature does, however, represent a valuable cross-section of conversation that proves relevant to school bus culture. Periodicals designed for school transportation practitioners—training manuals, United States Department of Transportation pamphlets and educational journals—reveal a school bus discourse dominated by day-to-day concerns where all rhetorical roads lead to safety. In

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general, the body of literature pertaining to school transportation can be read as being composed of multiple strands woven together by the omnipresent theme of safety. In each of these strands, safety is inextricably bound with general issues such as driver training or passenger discipline, and is entangled with issues specific to particular audiences.

Safety First and Last

Despite warnings about books and their covers, pick up the Fall 1998 copy of *Resource*, a catalogue offering "resources for all participants in the school transportation community," and the most persistent fears, aspirations, and preoccupations of school transportation are made immediately evident (Resource, 1998). The front cover shows a wintry scene; ice-coated trees glisten against a gray winter sky. Snow covers everything, including the road. A little girl with glasses and a plaid backpack boards the bus behind her stocking-capped kid brother, both bundled against the cold, as is the young mother who cheerfully supervises. A shiny, new yellow school bus faces the reader. Flashing a capable smile, a driver with thick mustache and sideburns beckons the children toward the open doors of his bus. Turn to the back cover: the perspective shifts so that the reader seems to be in the driver's seat looking through the windshield of the bus—at a tangle of trees flocking deep snowy drifts. A yellow sign cautions against dangerous curves. The pictures that jacket *Resource* (1998) serve to visually reinforce the omnipresent theme of the advertisements that fill the pages between them. With its mission "to meet the goal of safe transportation for school children," this collection of videos, books, games, stickers, and even surveillance cameras juxtaposes school transportation's pursuit of safety with a world full of peril (Resource, 1998, p.72). Advertisements for videos with ominous titles

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such as "The Moment of Truth" (p.44), "Bus Bash: A Crash Course" (p. 33), and "It Can Happen" (p.56) work in tandem with descriptions of books such as "Reckless Disregard" (p.33) and "The Responsibility is Ours" (64) to illustrate that the school bus is dangerous business. Further, this danger is demonstrated to be multifaceted. The risks of "road rage," sexual harassment, back injuries, hijackings, and litigation are enumerated next to the more predictable dangers of inclement weather, car crashes, and railroad crossings. A section dedicated to products that address "student management" reveals that passenger misbehavior and disobedience create crisis. Advertisements for books and videos on effective discipline promise that "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure," though nonetheless offer information regarding intervention, and restraint techniques (Resource, 1998, p. 11). The advertisements that appear in R*esource (*1998) reduce the world of school transportation to matters characterized by either safety or sorrow.

These calculated campaigns do more than hint at the vulnerability of their targeted audience. They provide succinct examples of discourse that overtly illustrates the blatancy with which safety is rhetorically connected to every aspect of pupil transportation. Other literature dealing with school transportation reveals a similar—if sometimes more subtle—connection. In nearly every article pertaining to the school bus, the twin themes of safety and danger lurk. Though a child is more than 172 times safer riding the bus than riding in a car to school, current articles dealing with school transportation portray an environment riddled with risk. (LeMon, 1999, p. 24; The ABC's, 1998 p.1).

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Tragic Tales

> The children of my town—their wide-eyed faces and fragile bodies swirling and tumbling in a tangled mass as the bus went over and the sky tipped and veered away and the ground lurched brutally forward.
>
> (Banks, 1991, p.35)

Tragic tales no one/everyone wants to hear—such as the above quote from Russell Banks' (1991) fictional account of a school bus accident—are told and retold in school bus literature. Such stories give shape to unimaginable misfortune, and remind readers of safety's stakes.

Exploring accidents from every angle, articles like "Playing With Fire" (Davis, 1998), and books such as *Reckless Disregard* (Kunen, 1994), try to make sense of school bus accidents in terms of industry policies and procedures for safety. Other articles, like "A Look Back at Train-School Bus Collisions" (Paul, 1998), attempt to place "the worst nightmare of parents everywhere" in historical perspective (p. 9). Judged by the number of lives lost, historic accidents like "Fox River Grove," the "Carrolton, Kentucky Fire," or the "Rail Crash at Riverton" take on lives of their own in cautionary articles analyzing the minute details that compose such catastrophes (Davis, 1998; Paul, 1998; Twenty-five Events, 1999). Many articles just report the unhappy facts. (Bus' Brake Failure Blamed, 1999; Bus Crash Victims, 1999; Council Reports Bus Crash, 1998; Fatalities in Loading Zone, 1998; Michigan Freight Train Crashes, 1999; Six Students Die, 1999). These "objective" pieces found in school transportation periodicals stand in counterpoint to sensationalized accident accounts offered by mainstream media. Though the day-to-day realities of school transportation are virtually ignored, incidents involving harm are big

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news. Martin (1999) writes: "Any school bus-related incident, especially one involving fatality or serious injury, typically results in 'bright light' media interest" (p. 55).

For the past two years media's "bright light" has been aimed at school bus accidents through a persistent focus on the seat belt debate. Fueled by Ralph Nadar's very public criticisms of "cookie-cutter" buses in the mid-sixties, the seat belt debate began with the 1976 amendment to the National Traffic and Motor Vehicle Safety Act of 1966 requesting the U.S. secretary of transportation to consider the benefits of occupant restraints in school buses (Creation of, 1999). Debate continued, and in 1986 New York enacted the fist bill mandating seat belts in all new school buses (Hirano, 1999). New Jersey followed in 1992 (Creation of, 1999). After these mandates, public discussions about passenger restraint died down temporarily, until a January 1998 CNN segment reporting an increase in the numbers of injuries to school bus passengers revived public concern (National PTA, 1998). A review of current school transportation periodicals demonstrates a lively debate concerning seat belts and safety (Cannon, 1999; NASDPTS Urges, 1999; NTSB Doesn't Back, 1999).

Though evidence on both sides of the issue is sketchy, the lack of seat belts is perceived by the public as a fatal flaw in school bus safety. This quote from Minnesota Governor Jesse Ventura reflects a popular notion about school bus seat belts and safety: "We have improved school bus safety in every other way; lets stop overlooking one of the most basic. . . . If a school bus seat belt saves even one life, it is money well spent" (Gov. Ventura puts, 1999). The seat belt debate, like accident accounts, amplifies discussion of school bus safety to matters of life and death. "We have to approach this subject very carefully and have to separate the emotional and political aspects of this issue. We have

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to focus together on preserving human life," comments David Torres, New Mexico's assistant state director of pupil transportation, as quoted in an article about the New Mexico Department of Education seat belt battles (Cannon, 1999). As this quote indicates, even school transportation "experts" who urge objectivity demonstrate difficulty extricating the issue of seat belts from the larger rhetoric of safety in which it is enshrined.

Despite the rhetorical force of pro-seat belt arguments, among school transportation professionals, ambivalence reigns toward the benefits of seat belts. A 1999 article discussing the seat belt stance of the National Transportation Safety Board titled "NTSB doesn't back seat belts, but doesn't rule them out either"(1999) clearly illustrates such ambivalence—as does current seat belt legislation. In the past three years, Florida, Louisiana, and California have passed laws mandating seat belts on all school buses (Hirano, 1999). All three states also have emergency exits—language written into their bills—which negates this mandate should current research determine that seat belts are not the best way to protect school bus passengers (Cannon, 1999).

Such ambivalence is warranted. There is no conclusive data that seat belts protect school bus passengers in the unfortunate event of an accident (Cannon, 1999; NASDTPS Urges, 1999; NTSB Doesn't Back, 1999). Moreover, there is even evidence to suggest that three-point lap belts might actually cause brain and neck injuries in low impact school bus accidents (Glencross, 1999; Painter, 1999). But the discourse surrounding school bus accidents—and even more so, the seat belt debate—is not driven by facts. Such discourse begins and ends with safety, and seat belts mean safety to a "buckle up" public.

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School Violence and Passenger Management

The topic of school violence is inextricable from current discussions of school bus safety. Recent rhetoric regarding "safe schools" portrays school as a dangerous place.

> No matter where you are, parents want their students to be safe and secure. . . . That might even precede a quality education. . . . With drugs, gangs, and guns on the rise in many communities, the threat of violence "weighs heavily on most principals' minds" these days . . . . Anyone who thinks they are not vulnerable is really naive (Violence and Discipline, 1998).

School bus literature does not demonstrate the above-mentioned naiveté. Articles dealing with sexual harassment, vandalism, and guns on the bus work with tales of school bus hijackings, rapes, and kidnappings to position school bus violence within the larger context of "school violence," while highlighting vulnerabilities particular to the bus (Bush, 1999; Engel, 1999; Parker, 1999).

School transportation literature describes school violence as an emerging phenomenon (Bush, 1996; Engel, 1999; Gangland, 1999; Safer school, 1999; Vail, 1997). "Ten years ago," writes Bush (1996), "no one in the pupil transportation industry could have imagined that the business of transporting kids to school could become as dangerous as it has today" (p. 4). The crime rate in American schools is actually decreasing, yet articles such as "Gangland No Longer Has Just a Big City Address" (1999), "How To Survive a Hostage Situation on Your Bus" (1999), and "Student Murdered on Mississippi Bus" (1999) use "real life" accounts of school bus violence to illustrate youth-generated violence as "the most disturbing social trend today" (Bush, 1999, p. 4). In an industry

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historically defined by its standards of safety, current episodes of youth violence—both on the bus and in schools—represent a burgeoning and uncontrollable threat to a vehicle vulnerable by design. With exits on either end, school buses are veritable rolling shotgun shacks supervised exclusively by drivers occupied with driving.

As MacCartney (1999) points out: "Lets face it, once they [students] were behind those high-backed seats, they could pretty much do as they pleased" (p. 52). Besides brief glances in the rearview mirror, drivers spend most of the ride with their eyes prudently on the road making them unavailable—unless they pull the bus over—to "manage passengers" or to intervene in violent incidents (Cannon, 1999; Engel, 1999; Parker, 1999). Engel (1999) describes the challenge inherent to driving a school bus:

> At the same time as having to keep their eyes and attention on the road, they are also expected to keep their young passengers in their seats and maintain order on the bus. With overcrowded buses and tight schedules, and more importantly, without another adult to help them deal with unruly children, this is an impossible mission. (p. 9)

Articles about crisis intervention and passenger management link violence with issues of discipline, and offer transportation officials and drivers advice for preventing violence (Burns, 1999; Bush, 1999; Cannon, 1999; Matke, 1999; Vail, 1997). However, as the above article illustrates, intervention advice and student-management tips are not seen as adequate compensation for the lack of adult supervision characteristic of the school bus (Engel, 1999).

The increasingly common use of surveillance cameras on school buses has proven successful in curbing discipline referrals (Schmidt, 1996). Though video cameras can

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function as a "third eye" of sorts—recording passenger transgressions invisible to the driver—they are no help in the event of violence perpetrated by attention-seekers (Hirano, 1999; Schmidt, 1996). Recent articles urging the use of trained school bus monitors on all school buses see increased adult supervision as the only safety strategy that is both preventative and interventive (Engel, 1999; Gov. Ventura, 1999; Grand jury recommends, 1999).

The lack of adult supervision separates the school bus experience from that of the classroom. As Gangland (1999) points out, the discrepancy between the school disciplinary procedures and those of the bus further delineates these two experiences and makes violence on the school bus more likely:

> In many situations, mishaps on the school bus are treated with less severity than if the same problem occurred on campus. The result: students may fight or cause other disruptions on the bus if they know the punishment they will receive will be less severe (p. 3).

Aligning with school disciplinary procedure is seen as a necessary step in deterring discipline problems and violence on the school bus (Bush, 1999; Engel 1999; Gangland 1999). Pending legislation in Texas, Colorado, Idaho, New York, and Pennsylvania puts legal force behind the goal of creating "a situation where the bus becomes an extension of the classroom under the school's code of conduct" by allowing courts to find passengers guilty of delinquent conduct for misbehavior on the school bus (Law is looking, 1998; Legislation, 1999). Further, research regarding school violence includes time spent getting to and from school as part of the school day (AASA, 1999; Malico & Peterman, 1999).

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Moving Billboards

Via the streets, the school bus penetrates the public sphere daily and thus is open to public scrutiny (Huffman, 1999; Martin , 1999). The recurrent notion of the school bus as a visible and somewhat uncontrollable extension of the school district occurs frequently in literature aimed at administrators (Bushweller, 1997; Huffman, 1999; Thomas, 1984). As Peter Thomas (1984) somewhat cautiously suggests in his speech at an annual meeting of the Association of School Bus Officials, the school bus and its driver often function as vehicles of first impression: "The school bus driver is sort of the front line emissary of the school district" (p. 3). Or as Bushweller (1997) writes: "Your yellow school buses, after all, are likely to be the only image of the public schools that many people in your community see morning and afternoon, every day" (p. 37). Writings by Huffman (1999), Martin, (1999), and Thomas (1984) betray similar efforts toward making sure administrators are aware that the bus plays an often-overlooked but key role in maintaining the public image of their schools as stem-to-stern "safe."

Expanding on the idea that the bus can be seen as a visual representation of particular school districts, articles by Bluth (1999-a) and Paul (1999) discuss the school bus as the dominant symbol of American education. "It is my opinion that the yellow school bus has replaced the red apple as one of the foremost symbols associated with American education," writes Bluth (1999-a, p.14). Paul (1999) uses the discourse of safety to imbue this new icon with even greater significance: "School buses have become the icon representing American education in the twenty-first century. As an industry, we need to define the school bus/education icon as a life saving system" (p. 29).

Conversely, two separate articles with the same title, "How to Survive a Hostage Situation On Your School Bus," maintain, the symbolic force of the "bright yellow school bus" renders it risky (How to survive, 1999; Parker, 1999). This quote from Parker (1999) addresses this vulnerability: "Federal buildings are not the only likely targets. The school bus could also find itself in the crosshairs. It is more visible and accessible than airliners, trains, or government buildings. And it remains a symbol of this country's future" (p. 29). While this quote aligns the school bus with other vulnerable American institutions, it also connects the school bus with the more specific vulnerability of transportation. As Bush (1996) suggests, school buses—like trains and planes—are involved in the dangerous public pursuit of getting people from here to there. Both Bush (1996) and Parker (1999) demonstrate how the symbolic force of the "bright yellow school bus" functions to make this process of transporting the precious cargo of America's future even more risky.

Bluth (1999-a), Parker (1999), and Paul (1999) discuss the bus as a visible icon or symbol representing education in the public imagination. Edney (1998) is also concerned with the public image of school transportation. Writing about the bus as the "loser cruiser," he acknowledges that, while the "big yellow" may be a powerful symbol of safety, it needs to rev up its low-octane image among today's youth:

> Today's children . . . as products of the video and computer ages, they are simply not impressed with safety statistics—we offer them no real selling points that they care about. . . . How do we get those children who don't perceive the bus as "cool" to come on board? (p. 77)

In a rare departure from the discourse of safety, Edney (1998) suggests that safety just might not be everything after all.

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An Extension of the Classroom

As stated earlier, bus literature reveals ambivalence regarding the educational role of the school bus. Whether conceptualized as the foundation of, a component of, or an extension of public schooling, the ride to and from school on the bus represents contested time between school and home. Vail (1997) argues that the bus is a classroom (p. 36). Davis (1998), in the annual report produced by Cimarron Public Schools (where this study takes place), writes about the bus as a "necessary part of sound educational program" (p. 4). Retired state Transportation Director Paul Stewart, as quoted in a 1999 article, concurs with Davis, carrying this notion a bit further by declaring: "Safe transportation for children is the foundation for education" (What Next?, 1999, p. 30). While influential dissertations by Johns (1928) and Franklin (1983) argue likewise, more prevalent is literature that describes the bus as "an extension of the classroom" DeBruyn, 1985; Mills, 1973, p.10).

The idea of extension is used to convey several overlapping messages about time spent on the bus. First is the notion, described previously, that the school bus functions as a literal extension of schools. With the added twist of safety, an excerpt from a 1996 United States Department of Transportation pamphlet expresses this notion of literal—almost visible—extension: "Although the school bus ride itself is one of the safest forms of transportation, there are substantial pedestrian risks associated with the trip. That's because the trip actually extends from home to school and back again" (Walk, ride, walk, 1996). Similar works in this vein position the bus both spatially and temporally as a trajectory that reaches out from the school proper and penetrates public and private

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spheres. Debruyn (1985) writes about the school bus in such temporal terms as an extension linking school time and home time: "When your child boards the school bus in the morning, the tone for the day is set. And as your child steps off the bus after school, that is the last contact he or she has with school that day" (DeBruyn 1985, p 1). Bushweller (1997), Thomas (1984), and Huffman (1999) all describe the bus similarly: as a trajectory reaching out to connect school and home.

Discussions of the role of school transportation in providing students auxiliary educational experiences such as field trips and school-sponsored extracurricular activities use similar language. Towards this end, Mills (1973) writes about the bus' use in field trips, describing it as "an extending arm of the classroom" (p.10). DeBruyn (1985) uses slightly different language to express a similar idea about the bus as extension: "Not only are your children transported to and from school safely, but bus service also expands your child's school room by providing a means to explore the world through field trips, [and] athletic competitions." (p. 1). As the motorized means of field trips and other "extracurricular" activities, the bus can be seen as a vehicle through which classroom learning is transported to intersect with "real world" knowledges positioned outside those spaces specifically designated as "school."

In contrast, many articles describe programs that extend class time into commute time by using the bus as an actual site for learning (Books on Buses, 1998; Bus Ceilings, 1999; Driver's Newsletter Diverts, 1998; Increase in Student Reading, 1999; Reading and Riding, 1999; Saks, 1991; School Uses Bus, 1991; Young Students Read, 1999). For instance, the "Reading and Riding" program helps kids "pass the time to and from school" by offering a selection of magazines on school buses (Reading and Riding, 1999).

Besides reportedly reducing student misbehavior on the bus by approximately twenty-five percent, school officials like the idea that the school's "reading program is extended by approximately two hours a day" (Reading and Riding, 1999, p. 23). A similar literacy program called "Books on Buses" gives elementary students the opportunity to earn "curriculum credits" (in addition to cookies and stickers) for books they read on the bus (Books on Buses, 1999, 24). The article does not explain exactly what a "curriculum credit" is, but the implication that this program (and others like it) extend classroom curriculum onto the bus, and make bus time count as school time, is abundantly clear.

"Idaho Skylights," whose aim is to take poetry and visual arts by Idaho artists into schools, suggests efforts somewhat toward the converse (Bus Ceilings, 1999). Seasonal ceiling murals created to look like skylights showcase poetry ranging from children's rhymes to more mature works, and expose kids to material seen as complementary yet extraneous to the curriculum (Bus Ceilings, 1999). As poets and artists ride along with students, explaining their work, the bus ride becomes a vehicle—both literal and figurative—that takes art to school. The bus ride can be seen to function as an extension of the classroom that provides educational "extras" a point of entry into core curriculum.

In their efforts to make time spent on the bus more overtly "educational," the innovative bus programs described above privilege notions about formalized learning. While such activities certainly stand to "enrich" education, they operate on an underlying assumption that without organized, adult-mediated activities, the bus ride represents what Fox (1996) terms "empty time" (p. 24). This notion is prevalent in contemporary literature regarding the bus. "Many pupils," says one article "spend hours on the buses and the time could be used more wisely than letting them sit there playing and getting into

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mischief" (What Next?, 1999, p. 31). Fox reports similar findings in his research concerning the time/distance constraints of rural transportation: "In general there was a feeling that the time devoted to riding the bus was a great waste of physical and intellectual time" (Fox, 1996, 25). Literacy and art programs aimed at giving passengers "something to do" on the bus attempt to ameliorate this wasted time in ways recognized by broader educational discourse as productive ("Books on Buses," 1999, p. 24). Such efforts, perhaps unwittingly, marginalize the myriad of learning that takes place in child-mediated spaces outside of formal education (Adler & Adler, 1998-b). Subsequent review of the literature concerning other "extra curricular" spaces (such as playgrounds and lunchrooms) explores notions of empty time in greater depth.

Describing the bus as an extension of the classroom works to legitimize school bus experiences within broader discourses of schooling. By looking at the bus as an extension of the classroom, this contested time/space is constructed in direct connection to educational language—behavior management, intervention, enrichment, and extracurricular, which in turn dominates the literature on school transportation. Further, the bus extends the classroom out towards home, not vice-versa. As Engel (1999) writes: "Parents need to know that their children's school day doesn't begin at school, but the moment their children board the bus, and that it doesn't stop until they reach home at the end of the day" (p.19). I found no articles describing the bus as an extension of home. The language of extension appears to be a one-way street.

Youth and Childhood Cultures

In order to understand the youth-defined space/time of school bus culture, I find it helpful to investigate the broader boundaries of youth culture as well. The brief review that follows draws from anthropological, sociological, and educational texts in order to outline intersecting and overlapping conceptualizations of children as they converge in historical and contemporary discourse. Such literature divides itself by drawing strict boundaries between what it terms childhood culture and youth culture (though recent scholarship perceives this boundary as more fluid). In brief adherence to traditional boundaries, this review begins with discussions of culture separated into youth and childhood domains. Soon after, in discussions of safety and innocence, borders shift and boundaries become less clear.

Childhood Culture

> "We know nothing of childhood: and with our mistaken notions the further we advance the further we go astray."
>
> Rousseau

Once taken for granted as a "natural" and uncorrupted state of becoming, contemporary scholars have reconstructed childhood as a contested space/time in its own right. Though notions of childhood innocence linger in the popular imagination, beginning with Aries (1962), studies of childhood began to depart from Rousseau's notion of the childhood as natural and instead began to investigate childhood as a social construction "distinct from biological immaturity" (James and Prout, 1997, p.8). Situating childhood in time, Aries (1962) revealed a childhood inextricable from historical and

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social contexts. Likewise, psychologist Robert Coles' (1967) interviews with child participants in school desegregation—in which children emerged as relatively autonomous moral agents—highlighted the historical present of childhood in dynamic relation to a political and social life often considered exclusively adult.

Social sciences' emerging interest in the concept of context as, "the unifying link between analytic categories of macrosociological and microsociological events" generated increasing anthropological and sociological interest in studying the everyday lives of children (Graue and Walsh, 1998, p. 9). Comparative studies such as those by Irvine (1995), Boyden (1997), Corsaro (1997), Glauser (1997), and Goldman (1998) disturb unitary definitions of "the child" by situating childhoods across culture. Operating from the idea of childhood as a variable of social analysis inextricable from variables such as race/ethnicity and social class and gender, ethnographic studies by Davies (1993), James (1993), and Thorne (1994) travel intersections. Through such studies, childhood further emerges as "a historical and cultural experience" (Jenks, 1996, p. 61).

Yet according to Jenks (1996), socialization theories linked to Parsons as well as Piagean developmental theories—which both construct childhood as preparation for life—continue to capture and monopolize the child in social theory (Jenks, 1996). In contrast, several ethnographic studies roughly characterized by either/both feminist and post-structural tendencies resist Piagean and Parsonian capture, leading notions of childhood innocence profitably astray. While uniform in neither content nor research emphasis, ethnographic studies by Sutton-Smith (1979), Fine (1988), Bennett deMarrais (1992) Davies (1993), Grugeon (1993), Thorne (1994), Nespor (1997), and Adler & Adler (1998-b) demonstrate a departure from the confines of socialization and

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developmental approaches. These studies examine peer culture in ways that acknowledge the "now" of children's lives. Sharing Sutton-Smith's view that "peer interaction is not preparation for life. It is life itself, " such research represents a shift from the future-centric focus common to much of the earlier work on childhood socialization (1979, p. 74). This shift provides a valuable point of entry towards an adequately mobile understanding of childhood and youth grounded in lived experience.

Chronological Borders

In drawing boundaries between childhood and youth culture, adolescence (whose own boundaries lack precision) often serves as the marker (James & Prout, 1997-b, Sibley, 1995). As Wulff (1995) explains, literature pertaining to childhood and youth, employs chronological constructs such as "teenager" to delineate youth from children:

> Youth culture is often associated with teenagers, people between the ages of 13 and 19, yet the cultural boundaries separating youth from children on one hand and from adults on the other, may differ. Not only is 'youth' consequently a construction, as is the term 'children', but in fact so is 'adults.' (p. 6)

As this quote indicates, demarcations of "youth" also serve to delineate categories out of which constructs such as "child" and "adult" emerge.

However, neat categories of "child," adolescent," and "adult" are disturbed by a multiplicity of factors. Shifts in the onset of puberty—at the rate of four months a decade—make for fluctuating biological boundaries, especially in relation to categories of adolescence (Corsaro, 1997; Postman, 1982). Changing laws regarding age of consent, alcohol consumption, and classifications of juvenile offenders demonstrate equal political

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and legal fluidity (Graue & Walsh, 1998). What Hymowitz (1999) calls the "teening of childhood" (p.104) blurs social borders, while teen and pre-teen pregnancy render maternal markers of maturity murky (Irvine, 1994). When does childhood begin? At what age does it end? James & Prout (1997-b) address the complexity of chronology:

> Although age, like gender, is based on biology, this tells us little about the social meaning and significance that is constructed around it and to use age as a unidimensional category can be extremely misleading. Age groups as social categories need to be seen in relation to their intersections with other important variables such as class, gender, ethnicity. (p. 236)

Likewise, Best (1994) illustrates how definitions of childhood fluctuate: "Not only does the definition of childhood vary among societies, but also it varies within our society. We may be able to agree about how old a person is, but the definition of childhood is subjective" (p. 8).

Best (1994) along with Adler & Adler (1998-b), Caputo (1995), Corsaro (1997), James (1993), James & Prout (1997-b), Jenks (1996), Massey (1998), and Wulff (1995) demonstrate childhood to be a highly subjective category and "discussions of the nature of childhood" to be even more subjective (Best, 1994, p.8).

In her explorations of youth cultures, Massey (1998) links social and spatial constructions to definitions of youth: "The very drawing of age lines and the definition of the spaces where particular age groups are allowed, is part of the process of defining an age group in the first place. The control of spatiality is part of the process of defining the social category of youth itself" (p.127). Adler & Adler (1998-b), James & Prout (1997-b), and Turner (1967) play with similarly spatial terms order to situate childhood and

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youth socially as betwixt and between. Turner (1967) conceptualizes adolescence as a dangerous liminal space between childhood and adulthood. Adler and Adler (1998-b) expand the concept of liminality to preadolescence: "Preadolescence represents a liminal state between childhood and adolescence, between the safety and security of childhood and the greater rewards and responsibilities of adolescence" (p. 199). James & Prout (1997-b) suggest liminality as a theoretical construct for the study of childhood.

Categories of childhood and youth represent a disorienting array of overlapping spaces and times demarcated by multiple intersecting thresholds and concentric transitions. Nonetheless, none of the above-mentioned scholarship disputes the saliency of age categories and their influence on childhood and youth cultures. According to James & Prout (1997-b):

> Age fixes the limits and boundaries to western conceptions of childhood and, although these limits are largely context specific and may vary, 'age' nevertheless exerts a powerful and constraining force on the daily activities of children. (pp. 232-233)

As James & Prout (1997-b) assert, even fluid boundaries contribute to the shape of everyday life.

Youth Culture

Credited with coining the term in the early 1940s, anthropologist Talcott Parsons (1943) positions "youth culture" in social terms:

> A distinctive pattern of values and attitudes of the age groups between childhood and the assumption of full adult responsibilities. This youth culture, with its

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irresponsibility, its pleasure seeking, its 'rating and dating,' and its intensification of the romantic love pattern is not a simple matter of 'apprenticeship' in adult values and responsibilities. (pp. 189-190)

Here, Parsons (1943) enduringly constructs youth culture as irresponsibility, pleasure, and romantic love. Most importantly, this definition establishes youth culture as distinct from that of adults, and situates it in between that of childhood and adulthood. Working in anthropology's comparative tradition (for example see Mead, 1928) Parsons was quick to limit the above definitions to youth in the United States. He was less quick to position his definition of youth culture in relation to gender and social class. As critics such as Jenkins (1983) and McRobbie (1991) illuminate, these early studies of youth culture—and later those of the Birmingham school—often fall short in their explorations of gender and/or social class in relation to power. Likewise, as critics point out (see Brake, 1985; Giroux, 1998; Irvine, 1995; McRobbie, 1991; Thorne, 1994; Valentine, Skelton, & Chambers, 1998) contemporary discussions still tend to construct youth as White, middle-class, and male.

Despite its emphasis on youthful irresponsibility and fun, Parsons (1944) did not depart from already deeply embedded notions stretching back to Hall (1904) of adolescence as a turbulent time of "considerable strain and insecurity," defined exclusively in relation to adulthood (p.101). In his exploration of rites of passage, Turner (1967) follows the tradition of Parsons by looking at adolescent culture as a dangerous liminal state between childhood and adulthood—an uneasy process of "becoming." While fictional books such as This Side of Paradise (Fitzgerald, 1920), Catcher in the Rye (Salinger, 1951), and Warner Brothers' 1955 film Rebel Without a Cause cemented

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images of adolescent angst and youthful alienation (particularly in relation to young males) in the popular imagination, scholars such as Erickson (1968) built on Parsons and Turner to reinforce constructions of an adolescence defined by the existential "crisis" associated with transition to adulthood (Epstein, 1998).

This conceptualization of youthful angst or what Hall (1904) calls "stress and storm" works in conjunction with anthropological and sociological explorations of youth resistance in order to define youth culture as oppositional, and therefore dangerous to adult authority. For example, Parsons (1944) positions youth culture in opposition to adult male culture:

> Perhaps the best single point of reference for characterizing the youth culture lies in its contrast with the dominant pattern of the adult male role. By contrast with the emphasis on responsibility in this role, the orientation of the youth culture is more or less specifically irresponsible . . . . Negatively, there is a strong tendency to repudiate interest in adult things and to feel at least a certain recalcitrance to the pressure of adult expectations and discipline." (p. 92)

The above quote focuses on youth culture as constructed exclusively in opposition to adult, male culture. According to Parsons (1944), youth culture's repudiations of adulthood threaten—albeit temporarily—values of an adult culture that youthful discontents (defined as male) will, in their turn, occupy and dominate.

Likewise, influential "delinquent" studies undertaken in the 1970s and early 1980s by British social scientists at the Center for Contemporary Culture or, as it is also known, the Birmingham school such as Cohen (1972), Hebdige (1979), and Willis (1981), reexamined "deviance"—as embodied by British working-class boys—as opposition to

dominant culture. Using a Marxist lens, the (male) oppositional behavior or recalcitrance attributed to youth culture by Parsons (1944) emerges through the Birmingham school as (male) resistance to hegemonic culture. Recklessness becomes resistance, but risk is not removed. (Parsons, 1950). (See *Women Take Issue* (1978) and McRobbie (1991) for potent feminist critiques concerning the exclusion of girls from such study). Giroux (1998) writes: "Lauded as a symbol of hope for the future while scorned as a threat to the existing social order, youth have become objects of ambivalence caught between contradictory discourses and spaces of transition" (p.25).

As Turner (1967) points out in his studies of liminality, transition is risky. A youth culture defined as in opposition or resistant to adult culture poses problems. According to Epstein (1998): "While some scholars and critics make positive assessments about the current status of adolescence, for the most part this bafflement seems to lead those interested in young people to define adolescence itself as a social problem" (p. 1). Making trouble for the status quo makes youth into troublemakers: rebellion spells danger.

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Extracurricular Culture

Adler & Adler (1998-b), Davies (1993), Sutton-Smith (1979), Fine & Sandstrom (1988), Grugeon (1993), Nespor (1997), and Thorne (1994) use ethnography to approach intersections of childhood and youth cultures in spaces considered peripheral to school proper. In the words of Amit-Talai (1995), these scholars acknowledge that:

> Youth cultural production occurs at home, at school, at work, at play, on the street, with friends, teachers, parents, siblings and bosses, draws elements from,

home-grown as well as transnational influences, and intertwines with class, gender, ethnicity and locality. (p. 231)

Adler & Adler's (1998-b) study of pre-adolescent peer culture, and Nespor's exploration of children's social relational networks, illustrate dense interconnections among school, home, and neighborhood that Amit-Talai (1995) addresses in the above quote. Looking at how gender plays itself out on the playground, research by Davies (1982), Grugeon (1993), and Thorne (1994) reveals similar multi-sited complexities.

In her essay, *Spatial Construction of Youth Cultures*, Doreen Massey calls into question issues concerning the centrality of formal educational spaces. In their studies of the "extracurriculum," Jackson, (1968), and Berk (1992) wander away from conventional curricular spaces. Further, studies by Brake (1985), Glauser (1997), Malbon (1998), McNamee (1998), Watt and Stenson (1998), and Willis (1981) venture entirely off school grounds—into the streets, houses, clubs, cyber-spaces, and other multiple landmarks that map the intertwining geographies of childhood and youth cultures. Likewise, Fine's (1987) famous little-league investigation shows just how much there is to learn from the "extra-curricular" realities of children's lives. Blending feminist, critical, and post-structuralist thought while focusing on children's cultures, contemporary literature investigating kids' "off" time pushes the boundaries of curriculum, and makes a compelling case for asking questions about inextricabilities: those intersections where school life and home life merge—on the outskirts of the classroom.

Safety and Danger

There is no question that children and youth face a host of very real dangers. Social problems such as poverty, abuse, and crime have very real negative effects on the everyday lives of children and youth. These problems, however, do not exist in a vacuum. As Best (1994) describes, "Definitions of social problems, like definitions of childhood, vary over time and among cultures" (1994). Definitions of safety and danger shift as well. Rather than enumerate current dangers, this abbreviated review highlights ambivalent discourse through which fluctuating—and often contradictory—categories of children and youth become constituted as simultaneously endangered and dangerous (Foucault, 1978).

Endangered

Contemporary discourse positions both children and childhood as "at risk." As Best (1990) notes, the rhetoric of child-protection in Western industrialized societies is deeply entrenched in a discourse of paternalism that constructs children as victims. Best (1990) and Zelizer (1985) trace the rhetoric of child protection back to eighteenth- and nineteenth-century sentimentalization of children as innocent, and childhood as an idealized safe haven. According to Zelizer (1981) and Jenks (1996), similar notions of childhood fueled the early twentieth century's child labor reform movement to rescue children from unsafe working conditions and to "return" them to the domestic sphere. Similarly, the safety campaigns of the 1930s demonstrate protectionist rhetoric at work in progressive efforts to get children off the streets and into the safety of the playroom (Best,

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1994; Zelizer, 1981). Such rhetoric replays itself in contemporary discourse of "Safe Schools," as well as in the omnipresent safety-talk in relation to the school bus.

According to both Best (1990) and Zelizer (1985), discourse that restricts childhood to the domestic sphere and constructs children as victims is central to contemporary constructions of "stranger danger" and the child-abduction narratives around which such dangers lurk. Corsaro (1997), in turn, looks at how stranger rhetoric loses sight of more familiar social problems—such as incest, physical abuse, neglect, and youth on youth violences, and poverty—that affect children and youth. Rather than denying responsibility for the protection of children, critical works by Best (1990), Zelizer (1985), and Corsaro (1997) uncover the ways in which protectionist discourse actually serves to put children at risk.

Further, Rose (1998), Silin (1995), and Kitzinger (1997) demonstrate how the rhetoric of the innocent child—what Britzman (1998) terms the "passion for ignorance"—actually makes children more vulnerable by denying children "access to knowledge and power" (p. 169). Also, Kitzinger (1997) reexamines notions of child-protection as a patriarchal product whose "focus on children's innate vulnerability (as a biological fact unmediated by the world they live in) is an ideology of control which diverts attempts away from the socially constructed oppression of young people" (p.175). Such scholarship provides a point of departure—just beyond the scope of this study—toward intersections of feminist theory, childhood studies, and the discourse of protection (McRobbie, 1991; Thorne, 1987; Caputo, 1995).

Between Safety and Danger: The "Dark Continent of Childhood"

Caught in a tangle of competing sentimentalities with trajectories reaching back to Rousseau (1769), childhood is enshrouded in notions of the "natural" (Aries, 1962; Jenkins, 1998; Jenks, 1996, Sibley, 1995). Such sentimentality constructs children as "noble savages," or "primitives" who inhabit what Fine (1998) calls "the dark continent of childhood" (p. 59). Jenks (1996) explains:

> In the same way that the "savage" served as the anthropologist's referent for human kind's elementary forms of organization and primitive classifications . . . the child is taken to display for adults their own state of once untutored difference, but in a more collapsed form: a spectrum reduced from 'human history' to one of generations. (p.6)

Seen as vulnerable and "pure" primitives, children and childhood are thus constructed as separate from adulthood and in need of protection from the polluting influences of the world. This paternalistic notion of childhood as a pure point of origin is not unidimensional. As the product of an ahistorical and romanticized discourse of childhood, the child becomes constructed as an exoticized Other (Jourdan, 1995). Like anthropology's other Others, the purity of childhood proves itself vulnerable to the arrow of time. Seen as mirroring human kind's own fall from grace, childhood innocence inevitably succumbs to the "corruption" of adolescence (Jenks, 1996). Literary classics such as *Lord of the Flies* (Golding, 1997, c. 1954) strike a parallel between the decline of human kind and the descent of childhood innocence. More recently, a study titled, *A Tribe Apart: Journey Into the Heart of American Adolescence* (Hersch, 1998), uses the

familiar trope of lost innocence in order to portray the "savage" decline of contemporary youth culture.

Literature that discusses the preservation of childhood intertwines with discourse calling for the protection of children. In doing so, such discourse highlights biologically based vulnerability (Adler & Adler, 1998-b; Kitzinger, 1997). Much like the "vanishing Indian" narratives of late nineteenth-century paternalism that constructed American Indian cultures as dying, literature such as Postman (1982) and Hymowitz (1999) describes the "disappearance" of childhood, positioning childhood culture on the edge of extinction (Sibley, 1995). Relating this sense of cultural preservation to protectionist philosophy, Kitzinger (1997) reveals common constructions of childhood as a "safe haven" to be dangerously close to constraint:

> Under the protectionist philosophy, childhood is a sanctuary to be lovingly preserved; little consideration is given to the implications for the children (or women) whose lives are increasingly confined, still less attention is paid to challenging the forces which make those bars necessary." (p. 176)

Similarly, Adler & Adler (1998-b), James & Prout (1997-b), and Loeske & Cahill (1994) discuss how the common practice of age grouping works to separate children and youth, and to sequester children in "developmentally appropriate" compartments.

Adler & Adler (1998-b) demonstrate the duality at work in the discourse of protection: "Our society's double regime of protection and control yields the unintended consequences of greater dependence, increased passivity, and the alienation of childhood" (p. 11). This quote points out the link between protection and control. Imagined geographically, as Massey (1998) would have us do, childhood culture can be understood

as attempting to preserve its purity and authenticity through closure (p. 123). While concepts of protection attempt to keep childhood safe from dangerous influences, such discourse—reliant on control—simultaneously imprisons or "encloses" children, within the confines of a childhood that comes dangerously close to becoming a "protected place of disciplinary monotony" (Foucault, 1977, p. 141).

Dangerous

According to James (1993); Jenks (1996); Jenkins (1998); and Kitzinger (1997); this enclosure called childhood also works to exclude. As James (1993) explains, "the Western ideology of childhood as a period of happiness and innocence works to exclude those for whom it is not" (p. 28). That and those which lie/s outside the safe enclave of childhood innocence become *dangerous*.

Kitzinger (1997) and Corsaro (1997) illustrate how such discourse excludes incest, physical abuse, and neglect. Irvine (1994) and Silin (1995) demonstrate how sex, and sexually transmitted disease (particularly AIDS) become constituted in terms of "risk" and are systematically positioned outside childhood. Britzman (1998) writes about sex and death along with cruelty, and genocide as "difficult knowledge" that threatens childhood innocence, and which "education seems to place elsewhere" (p. 117). Sibley (1995) demonstrates how certain knowledges, particularly those which defy classification, violate boundaries maintained by notions of purity and thus become constructed as "dangerous." Children who violate the boundaries of childhood purity —even by virtue of being violated—are thus seen as "polluted" and therefore dangerous. (Kitzinger, 1997; Lucas, 1998; Sibley, 1995).

Further, Sibley (1995) links this sort of exclusion to teenagers: "Adolescents may be threatening to adults because they transgress the adult/child boundary" (p. 34). Ambiguously situated on the outskirts of both childhood and adulthood, teenagers pose a risk to both categories and are thus construed as dangerous (Sibley, 1995, Valentine et al, 1998).

Parsonian notions of youth opposition, recent crimes involving youth (particularly school shootings committed by young White boys), and demonizing media portrayals work in reciprocal relation to these subaltern processes to construct youth as dangerous (Best, 1994; Wyn and White, 1997; Giroux, 1997, 1998; Kramer, 2000; Lucas, 1998; Parsons, 1944, Wyn & White). Classic studies from the Birmingham school, such as Cohen (1972), Hebdige (1979), and Willis (1981), examine constructions *dangerous* (male) youth in relation to social class. In discussions of boyhood, Kindlon & Thompson (1999) and Pollack (1998), demonstrate how the discourse of danger is mediated by normative constructions of masculinity. McRobbie (1991) provides an exploration of Other dangers in her explorations of *risks*—such as teenage pregnancy—embodied by young girls. While Giroux (1997), Kramer (2000), and Lucas (1998) examine intersections of race and youth.

These constructions of dangerous youth are most often associated with adolescents and teenagers. However, recent high profile violence committed by children, concomitant legislation easing the way for states to try children as adults, and what Hymowitz (1999) calls "teening of childhood," are rapidly expanding danger's boundaries to encompass pre-adolescents as well.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Qualitative research, especially that identified as critical feminist, attempts to illuminate the everyday contestatory and contradictory realities of lived experience in order to call commonly taken for granted assumptions into question (Lather, 1991; Merrium, 1988). As stated earlier, the bus ride is just such a reality for millions of children. Assumptions of safety, educational equity, and empty time, taken for granted, shape and are shaped by the temporal/spatial experience of this daily commute to and from school. The multplicities of school bus culture require methodological mobility. As a point of entry into inquiry, I scrape together fragments of well-worn direction. Drawing primarily from overlapping strands of critical, feminist, and poststructural thought, I scare up theoretical compasses and methodological maps to orient my research across contingencies toward the multiplicities such a trip entails.

Ethnography

Embarking upon my research of bus No. 21, I developed and delivered a short, in-depth description aimed at the participants in this study. Still, these riders and their drivers remained slightly unclear as to exactly what the purpose of my research was. Even after I had ridden for several months, Libby, a redheaded third-grader asked: "Haven't you passed the bus driver test yet?" Other passengers conflated the role of researcher with

that of newspaper reporter and probably still remain convinced, despite repeated explanations to the contrary, that some day bus No. 21 will make the paper.

Riders and drivers alike, familiar with the genre of shock journalism, were quick to relay sensational episodes of school bus life. Participants as young as five years old offered exacting accounts of traffic accidents and fistfights as well as the time Patrick locked the substitute driver outside the bus. It was nearly incomprehensible, however, to these passengers and drivers that, as a student of ethnography, I was in pursuit of the "everydayness" of school bus culture: more than isolated incidents of high intrigue, I was interested in the "abrasive potency" of passengers' daily routine (Jackson, 1968, p. 4).

Ethnographic convention, engaged as it is in the risky and contemporarily thankless task of cultural representation, does play itself out somewhat like journalism. Roughly equal parts "realist tale" and true confession combine with self-conscious yet ultimately uncontrollable literary artistry to create undeniably voyeuristic "realities" (VanMaanen, 1988). But such representations quickly render themselves chronically unstable. The mimetic thrust of traditional ethnographers such as Radcliffe-Brown and Malinowski morph into interpretive efforts ala Geertz. These give way to the contemporary ethnographic "demand for voice and situatedness" that in turn proves deeply vulnerable to the always impending, solipsistic paralysis of poststructuralism's unyielding indeterminacy (Britzman, in press, quoted in Lather, 1997, p. 5). Critical cultural accounts wedge themselves in among the colonizing fault lines of experimentally "partial, committed and incomplete" ethnographic truths (Clifford, 1986, p. 7). Meanwhile, feminist ethnography threatens collapse under the weight of its own "vigorous self-reflexivity" (Lather, 1991, p. 66).

Far from fatal, the ontological instability inherent to ethnographic representation carves out "a disjunctive space that expands rather than reduces interpretive possibilities" (McCoy, in press, quoted in Later, 1997, p. 7). Overlapping and intersecting ethnographic texts—thick descriptions—stand to offer multiple points of departure through which networks of necessarily fragile understanding become possible. The frictional fictions of ethnography—grounded in interpretation—rub up against boundaries of knowing and give flight to looping empirical truths. These uneasy lines of flight allow us to revisit "very old conflicts" such as racism, classism, and sexism in potentially fertile ways (Britzman, 1998, p.2).

In regard to ethnography's epistemological limitations, Geertz (1973) writes: "It is not necessary to know everything in order to understand something" (p. 20). Further, as Clifford 1986 reminds us:

> The aim is not to indicate unfortunate gaps remaining in our knowledge . . . but rather to present an inherently imperfect mode of knowledge, which produces gaps as it fills them (p. 8).

This study of school bus culture demonstrates ethnography's uncertain topography. The cracks, crevices, crannies and pot holes—those gaps in knowledge that Sutton-Smith playfully terms "epistemological funk-holes"—create uneven surfaces along which more complicated (riskier) explorations of the everyday lives of children and youth might travel.

"Fieldwork"

Sitting next to a nine-year-old girl self-pseudonymed Unique (my most consistent insider informant), I tried to explain fieldnotes: "The field is the place where you're studying, so the bus is the field and fieldnotes are notes about what happens on the bus." Although she had read fleetingly many of my entries, and taken notes of her own in extemporaneously constructed folded paper notebooks, Unique had a difficult time getting past the literality of the "field" part. "The bus can *not* be a field. It's inside, like a car, it moves," she insisted. As I attempt here to describe the mechanics of "the field" (data collection, data analysis, setting, participants) I become increasingly inclined to wonder with Unique: what exactly constitutes the field? How does one delineate the spatial/temporal boundaries of the perpetual points of departure and overlapping intersections that constitute school bus culture?

Immersing oneself in another culture by venturing into "the field" has long been a rite of passage for would-be anthropologists (Bazzanger & Dodier, 1997; Glesne, 1999; Rosaldo, 1989). The field has been the place in which the lone ethnographer "encountered the object of his quest" (Rosaldo, 1989, p. 30). For traditional ethnographers such as Malinowski, Parsons, and Margaret Mead—whose task it was to "grasp the natives point of view . . . to realize his vision of his world"—the field was the place where a particular culture manifested itself most naturally (Malinowski, 1922, p. 25; quoted in Adams, 1994, p.22). The explanation of the term "field" I employed in an attempt to help Unique understand the research process betrays the influence of such tradition. Her response—

that the bus because of its mobility can not be a "field" in the way I described—mirrors contemporary challenges to boundaries drawn by traditional ethnography.

Nespor (1997) articulates such a challenge in his attempt to reconfigure "the field":

> Instead of looking at educational settings—schools, classrooms, and so forth—as having clear boundaries and identifiable contents, I look at them as extensive in space and time, fluid in form and content; as intersections of multiple networks shaping cities, communities, schools, pedagogies, and teacher and student practices. (p.xiii)

As the above quote illustrates, postmodern and poststructuralist research makes a self-conscious effort to avoid fixing ethnographic fields temporally or spatially as containers of culture (Caputo, 1995; Davies, 1994; Kinchelo & McLaren, 1994; Lather, 1991; Marcus, 1998). While my study certainly works to position school bus culture (both temporally and spatially) in relation to school and home, time spent "in the field" on the bus cannot be neatly contained by such boundaries. Though school bus culture can be seen as existing between the social landmarks of school and home, my fieldwork wanders across a vast network of overlapping intersections through which school bus culture is constituted. The school bus is, in fact, a social institution, but according to Davies (1984), its inherent mobility cannot be overlooked: "The networks that comprise an 'institution' are not static 'fields' of interaction, but constantly shifting eddies" (p. 215). As Davies (1984) suggests, the networks which comprise "the field" do not manifest themselves in the fastidious grid of conscientious cartographers, but rather as a shifting and swirling tumult of interaction that ethnographers reconfigure into "fieldwork."

As I describe/define my own fieldwork, I struggle between the obvious need to legitimate my practice by providing a coherent methodological template and the potent urge to express the less coherent "messy reality" of my experience in an ill-defined field (Marcus, 1998). Both desires result in the uncomfortable construction of a realist tale (VanMaanen, 1988). Neither desire, however, allows my ethnographic effort to capture the "reality" it seeks. Visweswaran (1994) describes this inability as an inevitability of ethnography: "Ethnography, like fiction, no matter its pretense to present a self-contained narrative or cultural whole, remains incomplete and detached from the realms to which it points" (p.1). The map of my fieldwork—with its very deliberate details and defenses—thus remains wholly partial in spite of itself.

Settings

> We have to examine the crumpled spacetime topography that brings some institutions and neighborhoods close and pushes others away. We need to map the material trajectories of bodies to and from school . . .
>
> (Nespor, 1997, p. xi)

Intrigued by Nespor's (1997) geographically inspired metaphors regarding educational research, I took a turn toward the literal and headed to the Cimarron Public School bus barn hoping to explore trajectories between school and home via the school bus and asking, like Nespor (1997), "What do we talk about when we talk about schools?"(p. xi). The spatial context or "setting" for this project entailed a multiplicity of spaces—mobile settings within settings—linked figuratively through research and more literally by the bus routes mapped so painstakingly by school transportation officials. It is

important to remember that as my primary setting (the bus) runs its route, seemingly static categories of setting overlap, intersect, and interpenetrate—they move.

Community Context. Cimarron is a college town smack dab in the middle of America. Sitting roughly sixty miles from the geographic center of the United States, Cimarron reportedly "offers the best of both small town and university-city living" (Community Profile, 1999) Turn to the "Quality of Life" section in their community profile and it is evident that Cimarron is quite proud to be included as one of "America's 100 Safest Cities." (Community Profile, 1999).

According to this same community profile Cimarron is known as "Oklahoma's Education Community" (Community Profile, 1999). The fact that forty-five percent of its residents have completed sixteen or more years of formal education is not so surprising, since the university is the city's largest employer (Community Profile, 1999). We drove right through its campus every day on bus No. 21. As we passed various buildings, younger passengers liked to point out the window and tell me about relatives who worked at "the college."

The second largest employer is a large small engine factory in the "industrial district" on the far northern edge of town. Cimarron's four other major factories are located nearby. Exactly opposite, on the southernmost corner of town, just inside the city limits, is the public housing unit where twenty of bus No. 21's passengers live. More than once, riding the morning route, we passed one or more individuals walking the shoulder of Main Street. Pointing and waving out the window, one passenger would shout to another: "Hey, there's your mom (dad)." The image of these parents making the long trek to work on foot became a blur as the bus sped by, spiriting "the future" off to school.

Cimarron Public Schools enrolls approximately 5,234 students in five elementary schools, one middle school, one junior high, and one high school. (Davis, 1998). Just about half of those students—2,600 students to be exact—utilize school transportation. (Davis, 1998, p. 7). Cimarron's fleet includes forty buses that collectively cover 124 miles each day. (Davis, 1998, p. 7). "The Cimarron Public Schools Transportation Department is a necessary part of a sound educational system," reads the district's 1997-1998 annual report (Davis, 1998, p. 4). To the 2,600 passengers who ride the bus to and from school almost every day, the bus is a necessary daily reality (Davis, 1998, p. 4).

The Barn. The bus barn is located in an old brick school building, built in the early twenties, which houses a small alternative high school program and other miscellaneous "educational services" overseen by Cimarron Public Schools. Such services include the Professional Development Center, the building and grounds department, a computer lab, a teleconferencing center, the district shipping dock, school-wide mailing office, and the transportation department and bus lot. Known as the bus barn, this large lot houses all of the district buses, which are parked in rows and surrounded by a tall chain link fence. The lot also includes two swampy wash bays, where drivers hose down their "big yellows" weekly, and a garage for the ongoing maintenance and repairs such a fleet requires. The transportation director and dispatcher offices are inside adjacent to a central room lit with bright fluorescent lights. Clipboards with route sheets hang neatly along one wall, keys on another. A large chalkboard announces the news of the day. This central room is remarkably small considering the thirty employees that gather here four times a day to pick up their bus keys and route sheets and clock in and out.

Interactions with transportation workers and bus drivers were an important part of participant observation. Most days I arrived at the bus barn fifteen to twenty minutes early in order to hang out with the drivers en masse. Mornings, I sat at a long communal table drinking coffee with them as they prepared for their route. In the afternoon, I usually sat outside on the "landing" with the smokers. I mostly just listened as both groups talked about how their buses were running, the activity trips they were scheduled to drive, passenger, parents, and, of course, other drivers. Though I kept my notebook closed, these conversations provided me with a glimpse of general school bus culture from the drivers' perspective, and steered my observations toward more particular phenomena specific to individual drivers, passengers, and routes.

Bus No. 21. The bus itself is a bright yellow, twenty-five seat, 1996 International. Kory, the driver, keeps it clean inside and out, as did drivers Amber and Dan before him. The exterior is shiny clean. The inside is less shiny, but very, very clean. When I board the bus for the morning or afternoon routes, there is usually no trash anywhere. The non-slip, black rubber safety flooring is swept daily and mopped weekly, and is markedly unsticky. A well-used push broom hangs ready on the wall above the first three seats. Uniformly covered in deep green vinyl, the seats themselves are mostly without rips or tears, but are worn thin in some places. Rare appearances of graffiti come and go. Similarly, the buff-colored walls are mostly blank except for official documents and postings. But in ephemeral blossoms of creativity, the walls sprout passenger-made signs or photographs. The windows are relatively clean, but not sparkling. Some afternoons, you can read the residue of messages such as "I luv TJ" or "you suck" finger-written in

morning condensation. Several windows hang half-open, perpetually diagonal in their frames.

Despite isolated pockets of disarray, order, safety, and authority mingle to create the visual theme of No. 21 and all the school buses I rode. Barring the push broom and the occasional sticker or sign, bus walls are adorned exclusively with rule postings and safety-related signage and accessories. A thick plastic box labeled "Body Fluid Clean-Up Kit" is affixed dead center upon the front wall. Above the box hangs a sign: "Infectious liquid spill control chemical inside." Three emergency exits are clearly demarcated by red and black letters painted directly on the bus interior. Two square, plastic fixtures resembling some sort of super-industrial skylights (drivers and riders indeed referred to these as skylights) dominate the ceilings of newer buses like bus No. 21. Boldly written letters succinctly instruct: "Push up for ventilation, pull down to close." On the mercurial autumn afternoons early in my fieldwork, I became useful pushing up and pulling down in accordance with the environmental whims of riders too short to adjust skylights independently.

"Watch your step" warns a sign at the front of the bus. Positioned between this and the driver's head a sign warns: "Don't lose your riding privileges," followed by an eleven-item list (with number eleven marked out and two additional unnumbered commands tagged on the end) of the official bus rules to be discussed in more detail in chapter four.

Of course, this is a description of bus No. 21 parked and empty, a hollow and spacious setting temporarily dormant and still. As such, I can move around the bus with ease. Before and after routes, looking under bus seats and scouring the floor for artifacts

and realia, I could slip through the narrow aisle gracefully and turned only slightly sideways; or sit stretched out in a seat with my feet in the aisle, quietly taking smoothly written, fully legible field notes. Set to motion, the setting changes dramatically. It becomes hard to hear over the engine. Writing is rough.

Constant embarkation and disembarkation, particularly in the afternoon, fully transforms the setting. The ride feels different: equally bumpy, yet somehow more restrained and solid. Acoustics shift. A cacophony of talking, laughing, squealing, and shouting dwarfs the engine's sound. The smell of vinyl and rubber mingles with the odors of young bodies clustered in tight quarters. As I try to switch seats, navigating the now-narrowing aisle, I seem to grow. My hips impede me. Sitting with kids two or three to a seat, I begin to feel big. Thorne (1994) also reports this sense of shifting "spatiality" in relation to spaces identified with children: "I knew I had crossed more fully into kids' spaces when the sense of scale diminished, and I felt too large" (p.14). Filled with passengers, the school bus emerges as a "kids' space." It is important to remember, however, that the sense of spatial scale is inherently unstable, even within this youth-defined space. The bus seats—ergonomically designed to protect children's bodies—set the scale. The same seats that seem to swallow kindergartners squeeze the bodies of some older adolescents like last year's shoes. As the following discussion of study participants reveals, both the population and the setting involved in school bus culture are variegated and mobile.

Participants

The population of participants in this study is large in number and diverse in scope. I gathered data through participant observation on a total of fifteen different buses with an average population of forty passengers and one driver each. This study directly included over 615 participants ranging from kindergartners to retiree drivers. However, my research focuses on the population of bus No. 21, which includes roughly thirty-two sixth- through eleventh-grade students, twenty-two kindergarten- through fifth-grade students, and three different drivers. I say roughly because school bus populations are not static. Riders come and go for a variety of reasons. For example, during my time on No. 21 nine students moved to other towns or across town, while six new kids joined the route. Two passengers were expelled from school, and two others were banned from the bus for the remainder of the school year. A pregnant high school passenger began attending the off-route alternative school after she began "to show." One rider turned sixteen and started driving herself and another rider to school. Additionally, the county youth shelter provided a constantly shifting population of "at risk" youth. The driver population was equally unsteady. Bus No. 21 went through three different divers during my fieldwork. The first driver, Dan, left in November for a counseling job at a university in another state. Driver number two, Amber, left in March to become a Navy pilot. Kory completed the year after a shaky start.

Despite the fluidity inherent to this population, approximately twenty-five passengers rode the bus nearly every day of my fieldwork. I relied on this group—on five members particularly—to keep me informed in regard to population shifts. They let me

know who had moved, or who was just missing temporarily because of basketball, play practice or other activities. They also introduced me to new riders.

The population of No. 21 offered a high level of diversity in relation to the fourteen other buses studied. Passengers ranged in age from five to eighteen years old. There were roughly equal numbers of males and females, though girls rode more consistently. Considering the relatively homogeneous makeup of the town where the study took place, bus No. 21 also reflected a high level of racial/ethnic diversity. The core group of twenty-five students was composed of about fifty percent White and fifty percent non-White passengers. Fifty percent of the non-White category was African-American. Non-White passengers only made up approximately thirty percent of the larger passenger population. However, throughout the course of the study these ratios fluctuated.

Most of No. 21's riders came from lower middle-class or working class homes. This was in contrast to the perception of a White junior high boy, Todd (decked head-to-toe in Nike swooshes), who announced for my benefit: "We're all ghetto here." The middle class was also well represented on bus No. 21. As will be discussed in more detail in chapter four, the socio-economic status of passengers was, in general, common knowledge. Since riders have multiple opportunities to see where fellow passengers live and are privy to other economic identifiers, on-the-bus attempts to hide economic conditions prove difficult if not futile.

Beyond surface demographic detail, describing even the rather stable core group of participants is not easy. Davies (1982) writes about such difficulty:

> What to choose to tell? What is relevant? If I count as relevant the fact that they are generally from poorer homes and that they are considered to be average or

below average on school performance, I am not describing them in terms that they would choose in describing themselves (p. 11).

Davies' (1982) solution to the above dilemma was to use a brief profile of each participant written "in terms that they might choose themselves" (p.11). I am uncomfortable providing profiles of even the core group of passengers in my study. The bus is a group setting. Since I did not employ formal individual interviews, I am uncertain how these participants would choose to describe themselves individually. I do know through informal group discussions that, as a group, riders consider bus No. 21 to be composed of the "bad kids" from the "hood" as opposed to "preps" on other buses. Further, eight different No. 21 passengers on five different occasions remarked in reference to my research: "You picked the worst bus." Probing questions about the meaning of "worst" elicited only giggles, silence, or shrugs.

What this study ultimately attempts to provide is a composite portrait of participants in school bus culture, based on data gathered on multiple buses with an emphasis on bus No. 21. This composite does not provide a single central point from which I attempt to reconstitute a "cultural whole" (Baszanger & Dodier, 1997. p. 17). Rather, I hope that the analysis provided in chapters four and five adequately circulates between several sites and levels of generalization, such that it will allow the relevant and astonishing particularities of participants to emerge in reciprocal motion to broader generalizations regarding school bus culture (Baszanger & Dodier, 1997, p. 23).

Test Drive

My present study began with a snippet of a pilot conducted in the spring of 1999. Sixteen hours of participant observation on one school bus, and two rounds of structured interviews with three elementary school-aged passengers (my niece and nephew and their best friend), allowed me to test various qualitative strategies and gave rise to many of the questions that guide this study (Glesne, 1999). Taking the school bus for a qualitative spin allowed me to weigh the data gathered from structured interviews with that gleaned from informal, unstructured interviews conducted in the field as a part of participant observation. I found, as did Nespor (1997), that "using conventional one-on-one interviews would have meant missing most of the kids' ways of expressing themselves" (p. 233). Transcripts from these pilot interviews reveal that, as a result of the adult/child power relation and simple inexperience, I tended to control interviews in a very "grown-up" way. Consequently, I wound up eliciting stilted answers that seem mostly like what my kid participants thought I wanted to hear (Nespor, 1997). In addition to calling my attention to the ethical particularities of research with children, this brief pilot generated the questions about race, class gender, and age on the school bus in relation to the discourse of safety that permeate this study.

Participant Observation

Before embarking upon my "real" study, I approached the transportation director, Ms. Poole, with a one-page synopsis of my research proposal. I found in Ms. Poole a researcher's ally. She was interested in the data from my pilot study, curious about the

process of participant observation, amused with my enthusiasm for the school bus, and proud to have her operation as the subject of study. After gaining the support of this immediate gatekeeper, I negotiated with Cimarron Public School District officials to gain district sanctioned access to the field (Glesne, 1999). By the first day of school in the fall of 1999, I was, notebook in hand, on the bus.

This study relies primarily on participant observation. Incorporating Wolcott's (as cited in Glesne, 1999) guide to data gathering strategies into my research design, I began with eight weeks of "broad sweep observations" on twelve different buses (p. 49). I rode each bus twice—once in the morning and once in the afternoon—paying special attention to configurations of race and social class, seating patterns, and bus driver/passenger relations. These early strategies proved useful in gaining a general understanding of the research setting (Adler & Adler, 1998-a). As these initial observations progressed and I became more comfortable in the field, I employed "observations that search for paradoxes," focusing on obvious intersections of race, social class, gender, cross-age interaction, and passenger misconduct—all in relation to the discourse of safety. (Wolcott in Glesne, 1999, p.49). This data helped to identify the "fertile conflicts" of meanings that make up school bus culture and helped generate criteria for narrowing my sample (DuBois, 1979, p. 18).

I then narrowed the focus of the study toward a single school bus using a technique Merrium (1988) terms "purposeful sampling" (p. 48). I chose bus No. 21 in response to questions generated by initial "grand tour" participant observations, and in accordance with the study's overall purpose of examining school bus culture across relational and material trajectories, in a setting relatively free from formally enforced age

stratification. According to Merrium (1988): "Purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that one wants to discover, understand, gain insight; therefore one needs to select a sample from which one can learn the most" (p.48). In order to learn about the intersections of race, social class, gender, and age, I was looking for a bus whose ridership represented a broad spectrum of these categories. I needed a sample that provided maximum variation (Glesne, 1999). Ironically, due to the rather homogeneous demographic makeup of the town in which this study took place, the delineation between sampling categories collapsed, as "maximum variation" also represented—by virtue of its uncharacteristic diversity—an "extreme or deviant case" (Glesne, 1999, p. 29). Nonetheless, I successfully narrowed my focus to one school bus that offered maximum variation in terms of race/ethnicity, social class, and age while proving adequately representative of salient cultural features (such as seating patterns, material culture, and driver interaction)—common to the multiple buses on which I observed.

This selection was not easy. Though school buses shares certain cultural similarities, each route I rode was distinctive and evoked particular questions. Pursuing certain questions meant forgoing other, equally compelling lines of inquiry. This tension between the particular and the universal cropped up again in the process of data analysis where "reconciling an individual case's uniqueness with the need to understand generic processes at work across cases" gave rise to considerable analytical irreconcilability. (Silverstein, 1988 as cited in Huberman & Miles, 1998). Such wrestling proves fruitful, however, in coming to an understanding of school bus culture that explores boundaries by describing "processes of innovation and structuralization," and that "is itself part of the process" (Clifford, 1986, p. 3).

I kept these "processes of innovation and structuralization" in mind throughout my seven months of participant observation on bus No. 21 (Clifford, 1986, p. 3). During this time, I gathered data by riding the bus on average of two to three days per week throughout the school year. Moving around the bus and sitting with a variety of passengers, I took extensive on the spot field notes that I later expanded into more detailed accounts. These notes covered a plethora of topics. Aiming for the kind of "thick description" made famous by Geertz (1973), I recorded physical descriptions of the bus, its passengers and their houses, bus stops, landmarks of the route, and other aspects of the physical surroundings (p. 6). Field notes also documented conversations among passengers, the driver, parents, and myself. Often, in the course of my travels amongst various seats, I conducted very informal interviews asking passengers identical questions such as: "What was the funnest time you ever had on the bus?" or "Why do you always sit here?" Much like Nespor (1997) and Davies (1993), I found these informal and unstructured conversations to be rich sources of social and historical information. Plus, since it was impossible for me to "pass" as a regular passenger, these questions helped me build rapport with riders based on my role as a researcher (Lofland, 1993 as cited in Adler & Adler, 1998-a, p. 83).

I concluded the study by conducting fifteen hours of participant observation on several additional buses, looking for negative cases as well as similarities that would help situate my findings from No. 21 within the larger context of school bus culture (Glesne, 1999). These final observations on multiple buses bolstered analysis by re-dispersing my focus across multiple school bus cultures, and allowed me to ease out of a field I had come to enjoy quite a bit.

Documents, Artifacts, and Realia

For this study, I gathered documents ranging from official district business from the bus barn to wadded-up homework on the bus. I looked at training materials, flyers, memos, and countless other categories of paper scraps. Additionally, I was privy to several months of "conducts" (records containing descriptions and recommendations concerning episodes of passenger misconduct). Lincoln & Guba (1985) and Hodder (1998) make a distinction between records and documents. This distinction, according to both, involves modes of power. Hodder (1998) writes: "Documents involve a personal technology, and records a full state technology of power" (p. 111). My analysis does not make such a distinction. The bus navigates betwixt and between school and home, where technologies of power both personal and public overlap and intersect. This study does, however, make a distinction—between artifacts and realia.

Glesne (1999) uses the metaphor of archeology to describe the function of artifacts in qualitative inquiry. Glesne (1999) writes: "Archeologists reconstruct life in past times by examining the documents left behind. These documents, usually called artifacts, provide archeologists with the basis for hypothesis" (presumably about the lived culture of dead cultures (p.58). While Hodder (1998) dispenses with archeological metaphor, he nevertheless describes material culture in the past tense as "the intended and unintended residues of human activity," and "the material traces of behavior" (p. 113). Library scientists and Native American scholars use the concept of "realia" to distinguish cultural objects currently in use from those "artifacts" left behind or pilfered from now-extinct cultures. In this study, I too use this distinction in order to evoke the historical

present of material objects as active contributors to current school bus culture rather than simply using the term "artifact," which constructs material culture as scraps of evidence that cultures leave behind. The Pokemon cards I snag (for analytic purposes, of course) in exchange for candy bars are part of a complex system of distribution through which school bus culture is constituted (Atkinson & Coffey, 1997). Likewise, the crumpled notes I find on the floor after kids disembark do more than represent cultural "residue" (Hodder, 1998). This textual realia informs the discursive reality of the culture it documents. (Atkinson & Coffey, 1997; Watson, 1997).

According to Eisner (1991), "the array of events and artifacts that can be used as a source of data is limited only by the researcher's sensitivity and insight" (p. 185). Afterwards, he mentions possibilities such as announcements, posters, and graffiti. But what about cigarette butts, Pokeman cards, and orange peels? For this study I collected and analyzed such things in addition to documents, in part to explore what kinds of texts influence and are influenced by school bus culture. My collection—zip-locked in individually labeled baggies—also reveals the urge of the time-encapsulator, and perhaps the ethnographer, toward stock piling representative ephemera in effort to "suppress time, by lifting events out of the flow of lived experience" (Atkinson & Coffey, 1997, p. 57).

Often refereed to as "mute evidence," material culture can tell many stories of its own (Atkinson & Coffey, 1997; Eisner, 1991; Hodder, 1998). In this study I approach documents, artifacts, and realia as data in its own right, not as supplementary evidence used merely to corroborate participant observations (Atkinson & Coffee, 1997). Material culture, in addition to its utilitarian functions, does more than merely document reality: Atkinson & Coffee (1997) write:

> The realm of documentary reality does not rely on particular documents mirroring and reflecting a social reality. Rather, we can think of a semi-autonomous domain of documentary reality in which documents reflect and refer (often implicitly) to other documents (p. 56).

Though this quote refers specifically to documents, I found that both artifacts and realia functioned similarly as reflections of wider systems of school bus culture, as well as in self-referential networks of "distribution and exchange" constituting material culture (Atkinson & Coffee, 1997).

Those scraps of orange peel, for example, that I collected from the floor in the back of the bus function on a utilitarian level as litter. On another level, this litter reflects a broken rule, or perhaps provides evidence of passenger resistance. In contrast, interpret these peelings within the context of other related texts, such as the "official" typewritten rule document at the front of the bus with rule number eleven: "No food, drinks, candy, or gum," scratched out. Examine these in conjunction with a construction paper sign featuring bi-colored, puffy letters reading: "Throw that orange peel in the trash." A textual relationship emerges. The orange peel, rule sheet, and passenger-made sign refer to one another as they inform and reflect the ways in which power and authority are negotiated and navigated on bus No. 21. Further, these "texts" combine to form a rich and intertextual discursive reality through which school bus culture is constituted (Atkinson & Coffey, 1997; Watson, 1997).

Data Analysis

In this study, data collection and data analysis went hand in hand (Marshall, 1989). Data in the form of field notes, documents, artifacts and realia were collected in an ongoing fashion and coded bi-weekly to identify emergent themes. Early analysis of broad-sweep observations proved less than graceful and generated numerous loosely connected categories. Week by week, these clumsy analytic efforts whittled away at conceptual chaos, and slightly more salient conceptual categories began to emerge. In turn, common themes and questions—concomitantly clothed in contradiction and ambiguity—helped inform and guide subsequent data collection.

Van Maanen (1988) describes this dynamic relationship as the "dialectic between experience and interpretation" (p. 93). In my study this dialectic expresses itself in the reflexive relationship between fieldwork and analysis. The process of analysis (coding data and organizing it into conceptual categories) helped to "make sense" out of a wide array of scattered social realities through quasi-systematic interpretation. Simultaneously, interpretation shaped the experience of data collection and analysis, themselves social realities. Using multiple methods (participant observation, document analysis, and informal interviews) helped me to link multiple facets of school bus culture along a vital interpretive network (Miller, 1997).

Ethical Issues

"Don't be a big mouth. Don't ask a lot of questions.
Remember this is kids' off-time."
(Kate Jewett-Williams)

While discussing my research plans with my nine-year-old niece, she offered the above methodological advice. Her words resonate strongly with those of qualitative researchers who seek to adjust the modernist's model of researcher as "universalizing spokesperson" (Lather, 1991) in favor of a conceptualization of researcher as "cultural worker" with a critical voice, one conscious of its own fallibility and careful not to shout down emergent and contradictory human situations (Kinchelo, 1994). In a similar vein, Nespor (1997), Fine & Sandstrom (1988), Adler (1998), Thorne (1994), and Sutton-Smith (1979) all agree that, for adult researchers working with children, becoming totalizing "big mouths" is of particular risk. Grounded in the social construction of age, this propensity is of course related to inequity of power. Thorne (1994) writes: "Like Westerners doing fieldwork in colonized Third World cultures, or academics studying the urban poor, when adults research children they study 'down,' seeking understanding across lines of difference and inequality" (p. 12).

Similarly, Adler & Adler (1998-b) discuss the power relationship between adult researchers and the children they study by proposing that childhood is akin to a minority group in an adult-centric society. "Where researchers situate themselves, both concretely and ideologically in relation to children," the Adlers (1998-b) write, "not only influences the assumptions they make, the questions they raise, and the types of answers they seek, but also has a significant effect on the outcome of their research" (p. 6). As Thorne's

(1994) work points out, this ethical imperative is not unique to research with children. Feminist research demands a similar self-reflexive examination of its own positions particularly in relation to its subject (Behar, 1995; Lather, 1991; Oakley, 1981; Visweswaran, 1994). Weiler (1988) discusses this feminist imperative: "The need for the researcher to locate herself in terms of her own subjectivity is fundamental to a feminist methodology. Moreover, a different kind of relationship is called for between knower and known, researcher and the object or research" (p. 63). Reconfiguring the relationship between "the knower and the known" becomes even more complex when adults study the lives of children. (Adler & Adler, 1998-b; Fine & Sandstrom, 1988; Sutton-Smith, 1979). Children's current status as a protected group generates specific ethical dilemmas related to issues of safety and subjectivity distinct to research with children.

Adler's (1998-b) study addresses these dilemmas and describes the double regime that characterizes children's culture: "As a group, children are distinguished by their perceived need for simultaneous protection and exclusion. They are held in a dependent posture, given a status that ostensibly protects them but effectively excludes them from societal decision making (p. 11). Bus literature, permeated as it is by issues of safety, emerges out of children's status as a protected group, while simultaneously serving to reinforce such status. Researchers working with children must carefully consider their own position as adults in relation to issues of protection. (Adler & Adler, 1998-b; James, 1993; Nespor, (1997). Situating myself in this process is inevitable. A self-reflexive examination of this positioning in relation to the protected status of the children is an ethical necessity as well as a problematic. Sutton-Smith (1979) discusses the impossibility of a value-free documentation of children's lives: "We know there is no

privileged access to anything. We always approach them from some perspective or other" (Sutton-Smith, 1979, p. 68). Further, the temporal position of adults in relation to children muddies matters of positioning in interesting ways (James, 1993).

Fine & Sandstrom (1988) write: "Few groups in our culture are as close and as distant as are our children" (p. 9). While social constructions of age effectively distance adults from children's lives, the fact that all adults have been through the temporal experience called childhood breeds familiarity. In studying childhood, the insider/ outsider dichotomy breaks down. Straddling what Sutton-Smith (1979) describes as an "epistemological funk hole," learning about childhood cultures requires constant interrogation of irresistible familiarities and simultaneous efforts toward rendering them strange (p. 68).

Fine & Sandstrom (1988) describe this familiarity as a dangerous illusion—a sort of intellectual déjà vu in which adults assume that, since they have passed through childhood, they possess a greater knowledge of childhood than they actually do. Fine & Sandstrom (1988) further describe this problem as one that essentially amounts to ethnocentrism and that is compounded by our failure to recognize it as problematic (1988). Looking at children's lived experience through the retrospectively subjective lens of our own childhood is a constant adult predisposition related to the prevalent developmental constructions of childhood which define children as incomplete adults (Thorne, 1994). The subjectivity inherent to such a stance, Fine & Sandstrom (1988) continues, "may cause us to lose the trail of their culture" (1988, p. 10).

In contrast, Heshusius (1994) points out that apprehending the horizons of emerging subjectivities can prove equally impossible: "The essence and starting point of

the act of coming to know is not a subjectivity that one can explicitly account for, but is of a direct participatory nature one cannot account for (p. 17). While keeping in mind the more tangible ethical dilemmas of "studying down," I look toward tensions of subjectivity—inherent to the process of "coming to know"—to keep my study of school bus culture from becoming a complacent, easy ride (Nader, 1972).

Researcher Roles

Though I was a participant observer—talking with and moving among my subjects—I remained what Adler & Adler (1998) describe as a "peripheral-member-researcher," in that I established myself as a "sort-of" member of bus No. 21 culture. Passengers knew me, not by my name, but by my function as a researcher. Even Unique—with whom I sat with for at least a minute or two on every ride except one—called me the "bus lady." My role was, in a sense, well defined. All the riders on No. 21 knew I was doing research on the bus—or more specifically that I was a student from "the university" writing a "report" on what it's like for kids on their bus. The notion of research and its ultimate end product, however, meant very different things to different passengers, drivers, and transportation officials.

This discrepancy was made clear to me in a variety of ways. Sometimes passengers asked me to intervene in squabbles: "Hey bus lady, tell Willy to stop staring all crazy." Additionally, each of the drivers, asked me at least once to tell them what back seat passengers were "up to." Though confusion over the role of the researcher was recurrent, more prevalent was tension surrounding participant roles. An exchange

between two junior high school boys seated in abutting seats adjacent to mine eloquently demonstrates such tension.

> Dave: She wants to know what it's *really* like on the bus. Just act like normal. She wants us to pretend she's not there, (turning to me) don't you?
>
> Laura: (shrugging) I don't really know.
>
> Todd: But we can't act normal, we know she's there (turning his back to me).

In this brief interchange between school bus "natives," dilemmas central to ethnography emerge. What exactly is it that ethnographers want/need from participants?

In using words like "act" and "pretend," Dave demonstrates a sophisticated understanding of the cultural performance ethnography requires of its participants. Todd, however, displays some reluctance in playing his part. More significantly, he quite effectively punctures the illusion of transparency to which research—ethnography in particular—has traditionally so vigorously clung (Harding, 1987; Rosaldo, 1988, Spivak, 1988 as cited in Fine & Sandstrom, 1998, p. 138). With the aim of illuminating lived experience, ethnographic methods, especially participant observation, rely on naturalistic convention (Adler & Adler, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 1998; Glesne, 1999; Van Maanen, 1988). I certainly did not want to project false invisibility or expect passengers to "pretend" I was not there. Nevertheless, both Todd and Dave seemed to catch light of an underlying urge toward naturalism inherent to ethnography. As Todd pointed out, my articulated research goal—to explore the everyday realities on No. 21—betrays ethnography's ambivalent wish that participants act somewhat impossibly normal.

Playing It Safe

Both the transportation director and the coordinator were extremely forthcoming with information. Sensing that this trust was both precious and fragile, I was reluctant to push it. I refrained from asking "hard questions" about alleged (minor) incidents of driver misconduct, or negative episodes of any kind for that matter. When an angry parent arrived at the bus barn stomping mad, or a scathing editorial about school transportation appeared in the local newspaper, or a driver had an accident, I could sense a sort of anxiety on the part of officials connected with me and my notebook. It was obvious transportation officials did not want to talk about certain subjects, and this researcher obliged—I played it safe.

I approached initial participant observation on bus No. 21 with equal caution. During the first month of fieldwork, I tried to temper cultural intrusion by keeping (uncharacteristically) quiet and by cultivating an air of respectful disinterest. Notes were scribbled discretely. Probes were very gentle, never expressing disapproval of any kind. I refrained from sitting in the most coveted seats, and never sat uninvited in the same seat with other passengers. Eventually, however, I surrendered to the fact that even my self-consciously subdued presence was absolutely obtrusive. As Nespor (1997) writes:

> Even if perfect surveillance was possible (a disturbing thought), the presence of an observer always has an impact on a situation, and an observer who refuses to exhibit any recognizable signs of being a normal person—talking, chatting, and so forth—makes the others present invent an intelligible role for him or her—spy, fool, asshole, whatever (p.201).

As I became more comfortable in my role, I became bolder. Though I tried to be respectful of participant's time and space, I reconciled the fact that my presence frequently overtly interrupted or altered "normal" activity. My pursuit of data was no secret; No flies on these walls (Van Maanen, 1988). As chapter four will discuss in more detail, passengers usually switch seats at least three times per ride. During the course of a two-hour route, I switched seats upwards of seven times per route as well. Passengers would often move in response, sometimes to facilitate, but more often to dodge documentation. Many days, participant observation on No. 21 resembled a not-so-subtle game of elaborately mapped chase.

Representation

I would wager that if you asked the kids on bus No. 21 to describe me, most would mention my notebook. Things move pretty fast on the bus. Attempts to represent even a modicum of cultural activity required near constant note taking. Passengers sometimes told me what to write or what not to. I documented their wishes and obeyed. Riders also asked to read my notes, which I willingly shared, but never relinquished physical control of my field notebook. Some riders seemed flattered to be included in notes. Upon discussing pseudonyms, one White junior high school boy I call Nathan requested, "Just use my real name. I don't want a fake. How will people recognize me?" I told him that through the "thick description" in my account his identity might emerge, despite the pseudonym, and that he and perhaps others who knew him might indeed be able to recognize him. As soon as I spoke, I remembered a similar conversation one week earlier.

After weeks of documenting and watching Tim, a White high-schooler who lived at the county youth shelter, tape cigarettes to the backs of his knees and elbows to sneak them past the shelter's rather extensive daily frisks, he expressed suspicion:

Tim: Damn, lady, you're not writing this down.

Laura: I write everything. Remember, just fake names.

Tim: Damn.

Laura: I don't have to write it down. Do you want me to stop? I could. . .

Tim: As long as you don't like use my real name nobody can know.

Laura: No one will know.

This conversation is a near reverse of my earlier described discussion with Nathan. While I reassured Nathan that his identity might emerge in my account despite pseudonyms, I all but promised Tim exactly the opposite. Both assurances were offered in good faith, yet neither is exactly true.

This sort of ambivalence permeates qualitative research, particularly in relation to matters of confidentiality (Adams, 1994; Adler & Adler, 1998; Glesne, 1999). As Punch (1998) writes: "there is no consensus or unanimity on what is public and private, what constitutes harm, and what the benefits of knowledge are" (p. 179). Though it was forthright to say the thesis for which I was gathering data is a "public" document, explaining the ramifications of divulging "private" information to kids aged nine, twelve, and even sixteen years old was itself an ambiguous act of representation. In the face of such fickle distinctions, sanctuary is arbitrary. On all levels, representation is risky.

Conclusion

Qualitative research, like the bus itself, is a vehicle that in some sense transports people back and forth between public and private lives. I cannot help noticing how my situation as researcher parallels that of the bus driver in some ways. Our perspectives, despite our varied tools of surveillance, are wholly partial. We both have blind spots. Some things we choose not to see. There are tales we opt out of telling. Certainly all of the drivers with whom I spoke had months worth of school bus life to tell. No doubt they excluded some information, and carefully chose the other that they so generously shared. Likewise, for each observation my analysis uncovers many are left undisclosed. Stories are left untold. I skipped over particulars—not without some anxiety—in favor of illustrating more general trends. Singular and ephemeral moments of high intrigue often had to be abandoned in favor of data deemed more accessible. All participants in this study construct stories with caution. In the end we all seek safety. One afternoon, as we pulled into the bus barn, a driver told me: "I thank God every day that I get home without an accident that nobody got hurt." I wonder how many researchers, arriving likewise at the arbitrary end of a qualitative journey, utter just such a prayer.

CHAPTER FOUR

ANALYSIS OF DATA

Introduction

Boring wild kick-ass sucky mean cool stupid scary friendly unfair rough bumpy loud lousy hot rowdy noisy fun . . . This montage represents the most common adjectives used by riders to describe their daily bus commute. As these words generated by passengers indicate, school bus culture is not a unitary phenomenon. It is multiplex and fueled by paradox. The following analysis presented in two broad categories struggles to present a coherent, albeit partial, discussion concerning the lived experience of school bus culture, while illustrating how this culture varies from bus to bus and from day today—even seat to seat—on a single bus. Rosaldo (1989) offers a conception of culture in general that makes significant ethnographic inroads toward accounting for such disjuncture:

> In contrast with the classic view, which posits culture as a self-contained whole made up of coherent patterns, culture can arguably be conceived as a more porous array of intersections where distinct processes crisscross from within and beyond its borders. Such heterogeneous processes often derive from differences of age, gender, class, race, and sexual orientation (Rosaldo, 1989, p. 20-21).

The "distinct processes" of school bus culture do indeed travel beyond the borders of school and home along a mobile network of intersecting and overlapping trajectories derived from such differences. The first section of analysis describes this cultural network

in roughly structural terms. It explores the ways in which, despite the fluidity inherent to this peripatetic culture, race/ethnicity, gender, social class, sexual orientation, and age emerge as social landmarks which construct and are constructed by school bus culture within the context of larger, more stagnate "landscapes of power" (Zukin, 1991).

What do kids learn on the bus? This question drives the second section along a curricular course, shifting the focus first to common knowledges as they manifest themselves in school bus gossip and rules and then to learnings enacted just beyond the driver's gaze. This section concludes with an examination of the uneasy curriculum of teasing and other *difficult knowledge.*

Mobile Power Structures and Resistance in-Transit

Though this study looks at school bus culture as a fluid transitional space between school and home, as Zukin (1998) writes concerning liminality, "these transitions are not completely fluid situations" (p.29). Culture is not altogether up for grabs on bus No. 21. While school bus culture navigates the "neither" regions betwixt and between school and home, it does not entirely detour the structural realities of the social landscape it travels. Much like Foucault's (1977) Panopticon, the school bus can be seen as "a type of location of bodies in space, of distribution of individuals in relation to one another, of hierarchical organization, of disposition of centres and channels of power" (p.205). Which bus kids ride, as well as when and where they catch it, situates school bus culture spatially, temporally, and socially. So do seating patterns. Linking the spatial and the social, Massey (1998) writes in reference to the spatial relations of youth culture: "All these relations which construct space, since they are social relations, are always in one way or

another imbued with power" (Massey, 1998, p. 125). School bus culture is permeated with such power—forming and re-forming itself into mobile power structures and resistance-in-transit related to the safe distribution of bodies from home to school and back again.

Spatial Regimes

Walk through the office door of Cimarron's transportation director and the first thing you see is a wall-sized district map dotted with numbered red pinpoints connected by a flummoxing network of intersecting and overlapping lines. Though it is nearly incomprehensible to the uninitiated, this route map gives what Michelle Poole, Transportation Director, describes as a "big picture view" of how school transportation is spatially configured in Cimarron School District. From this view, the trajectories of school bus routes seem to map a "planned and readable," spatially defined culture (deCerteau, 1984, pp. 92-93 in Nespor, 1997, p. 121). This abstracted tableau of school bus culture offers a useful tool for looking at the surface totality of spatial relationships through which passenger populations are distributed among and within school buses. The experience of riding the bus, however, reminds us that this space is anything but one dimensional—that school bus culture is instead a "multi-sensory bodily experience, not something consumed in a look, but something felt, smelled, heard, and tasted as well as seen" (Nespor, 1997, p.21).

Spatial, temporal, and social configurations enacted through school bus routes work to "eliminate the effects of imprecise distributions, the uncontrolled disappearance of individuals, their diffuse circulation, their unusable and dangerous coagulation"

(Foucault, 1977, 143). By regulating the flow of bodies to and from school sites, routes operate spatially, temporally, and socially as a "technology of power" that reflects and reinforces existing social orders while working simultaneously to produce new ones (Foucault, 1984, p. 252). Further, these technologies of power related to routes: spatial regimes, timetables, and age segregation designed for purposes of "regulating the relations of time, bodies, and forces," link the process of school transportation with the broader project of schooling, which employs similar technologies in order to regulate student bodies (Foucault, 1977, p.157).

Most overtly, the organization of school bus culture into routes reflects geographical and logistical concerns. Routes put order to the spatial and temporal contingencies of transport. The district's 124 miles is divided into twenty-nine routes. Passengers as well as drivers are expected to strictly adhere to district derived routes. Designated bus stops are designed, in the words of the route dispatcher, with "safety in mind," and are non-negotiable. Even though some routes overlap with more than one bus often making a stop within the same block, passengers are permitted to ride only their assigned bus. Further district policy forbids passengers (without a note from parents) to disembark at a stop other than that designated by the route sheet. This district policy helps drivers account for their passengers. Routes effectively control the distribution of riders along the trajectories linking school and home and regulate the comings and goings of passenger populations as they make this journey.

This transportation network builds year by year. As the school district grows, routes grow and deviate, take unanticipated turns, and eventually divide, creating new distinct geographical patterns. As kids repeatedly ride through institutionally imposed

configurations of city streets and dirt roads, these routes—despite geographical incongruencies—emerge as what Nespor (1997) terms "spatial regimes," and what passengers come to call neighborhoods (p.92).

Upon riding for the first time on each school bus, I asked several passengers individually: "Where does this bus go?" This is a complicated question, since only the passengers at the last stop know in-toto where the bus actually goes. Influenced by temporal as well as spatial constraints, the geographical perspective of the rest of the riders is inherently partial. Nonetheless, passengers answered, usually naming the schools on the route first. When I asked where else the bus went, almost invariably they said something like, "Oh, around my neighborhood." Initially this answer seemed to reveal something like geographic ethnocentrism. But as I listened and observed further, I began to realize that for passengers, especially younger students, bus routes function as spatial and social networks that help construct their concepts of neighborhood. School bus routes help define the spatial and social boundaries of nebulous notions of neighborhood. As Nespor (1997) writes: "space can't be treated as a static totality. It is constantly lived, experienced, reordered by those who move through it" (p.94).

In some cases, these routes work to geographically unite passengers in neighborhood networks that counter other systems of social organization. Once, while riding bus No. 13, a White fifth-grade boy named Randall showed me around "his neighborhood" by pointing out various landmarks. As we rode along a dirt cul-de-sac through a trailer park about one half mile from the posh subdivision where Randall lives, he pointed at a dilapidated mobile home with bits of aluminum flapping in the wind and a sagging front porch. Randall then told me with disgust: "See there? That's the trashiest

house in my neighborhood." I doubt Randall's parents would classify the mobile home park as part of the *their* neighborhood. Likewise, it is unlikely that the occupants of "Fairview Mobile Home Park" consider themselves part of "Robinwood," the upscale suburban enclave where Randall lives. Far more significant than the one half geographic mile that separates these homes is the vast social chasm that delineates social class. For Randall and other riders, school bus routes often unfold as "spatial regimes" creating geographically determined communities composed of unlikely neighbors (Nespor, 1997, p.94).

Conversely, Bus No. 21's route expands the notion of neighborhood beyond geographical boundaries. "We're from the hood, man," answered a twelve-year-old Latino named Reuben when I asked where his bus went. Herkeesha, an African-American high school junior, responded similarly: "Oh, to the Heights and around there. This *is* the hood bus." Both of these students live in the "Heights," the two-story block of public housing apartments on the southern edge of town where twenty or so of bus No. 21's passengers live. The Heights offers a diverse group of Native American, East Indian, White, Hispanic, and Latino passengers, but the majority of the kids at this stop are African-American.

On its way out to the Heights and the smattering of stops which surround it, bus No. 21 snakes through the center of town depositing a mix of White and African-American riders (mostly African-American) at various stops throughout the only historically African-American neighborhood in Cimarron. Jerita, an African-American sixth-grader, lives between two of this neighborhood's most important landmarks: the Southern Baptist Church and the shady side of a large park where neighbors gather in

lawn chairs to visit under a cool canopy of sycamore. When I asked Jerita where her bus went she responded: "You know, the hood and stuff." I probed, asking, "The hood? Where's that?" She rolled her eyes. "Like, my house," she replied. Separated by four miles and a large creek, Jerita's neighborhood and that of the Heights share a cultural identity linked strongly by notions of race. These two legs of no 21's route make little logistical sense. Rather, the "hood" of which Reuben, Herkeesha, and Jerita speak demarcates a social landscape to which No. 21's route simultaneously responds and reinforces.

But as Nespor (1997) explains them, spatial regimes such as neighborhoods are "externally imposed in one instance, partially self-designed in the other" (p. 94). So while Herkeesha talks about the route in terms of the "hood," Nathan, her White bus mate, positions it cardinally as "south of town." Another White male rider whispered to me that No. 21 was 'the black bitch bus." Tara, a Latino junior high girl, mapped the route for me along relational lines: "Oh, we start at Atlantis', then Vicki's house, and Andrea's. Oh yeah, there's Dave our old bus driver's house . . . " As Ms. Poole's map indicates, school bus routes serve to regulate the flow of bodies to and from school. These routes, however, also travel a social landscape as a "spatial regime" that constructs and is constructed by the lived experience of school bus passengers.

Temporal Imperatives

No driver leaves or returns to the bus barn without his or her route sheet "timetable" neatly affixed to the ubiquitous brown clipboard (Foucault, 1977). Timed to the minute, drivers run their routes every day exactly as prescribed by these sheets, with

few exceptions. Clutching his clipboard, fifteen-year veteran bus driver Maurice remarked about routes: "You can set your watch by my route sheet, tell the time by the stops, keep right to it. No matter, traffic or construction, you run right on time." Drivers who keep to their route sheets make the multiple arrivals and departures that compose their routes with remarkable punctuality. Those who deviate even a little—say to avoid a vicious dog or to carry a kid with a broken leg to her doorstep—wind up late. Punctuality is taken very seriously. Even fifteen minutes late and parents call the bus barn, or even worse, as I witnessed on several occasions, parents wait at their child's stop and confront the driver directly. As Slavin (1995) writes, "Some things you don't mess with—transportation and school lunches"(p. 40). Carefully timed routes help drivers tame the messy temporal uncertainty of the multiple departures inherent to school bus culture. Further, school bus schedules also influence the temporal patterns of passengers' home time.

Age Segregation

About half of Cimarron's twenty-nine buses run the same route twice daily. Passengers ranging in age from five to eighteen ride together on one route. Each of the buses in the fleet's other half runs two slightly different daily routes that are designated "A" and "B." Passengers on these buses are divided into two age groups. "A" routes run earlier and transport sixth- through twelfth-grade students. Afterwards the buses run their "B" routes (or as some drivers call them, "little kid routes"), which consist exclusively of elementary school students.

The rationale behind age segregation is part logistical. Local elementary schools start up to half an hour later than the middle, junior, or high schools. Breaking up routes means less morning time spent on the bus or waiting in the school cafeteria. In the afternoon, however, "B" route riders often have to wait for their bus nearly a half an hour after elementary schools dismisses. The separation of "A" and "B" routes also functions to lower passenger loads. Although the maximum load is sixty passengers, thirty-four passengers can fill a bus. Splitting the route in two usually allows for most passengers to sit in their own seat, which offers increased physical protection in case of an accident, and also reduces discipline problems associated with issues of space and territory. (Glencross, 1999).

In the course of my research, I rode buses that were age-integrated and buses whose ride was divided into "A" and "B" routes. Bus No. 21 offered a unique research opportunity in that it was age segregated when I began riding in August, switched to a cross-age route in November, and then became re-segregated in April. This allowed me a glimpse at the way different configurations of age played themselves out on a single bus as well as among the sixteen different buses that I rode. Though I will address the certain (bus) cultural aspects in more detail later, the differences among "A," "B," and cross-age routes can be characterized briefly as follows:

"A" (sixth- through twelfth-grade) routes were, in general, more bodily subdued than their "B" (kindergarten through fifth-grade) counterparts. "A" route talking was generally quiet, except for a few students on each bus who regularly yelled out the window at their friends, other vehicles, and anonymous pedestrians. Though "A" route students moved around quite a bit in stolen moments when the bus was not in motion—

such as at red lights or four-way stops— I saw very little of the standing in the aisles, arms out the window, or hopping up and down in seats that was relatively routine on "B" routes. Eating and drinking are common practices on "A" routes. On nearly all of the "A" routes I rode, passengers openly ate chips, fruit, or candy chased by soda pop or bottled water. I found "A" route talk to be substantially more bawdy than that of "B" route riders. While conversation only occasionally centered on sex or drugs, sexual innuendo and language permeated the conversation of both male and female "A" route riders. Aside from isolated back seat hubs of rowdiness, and a barrage of teasing, the mood was generally mellow on "A" routes. Passengers, sitting mostly one to a seat, mainly just talked, listened to their Walkmans, or simply looked out the window.

In contrast, "B" routes are best characterized by their physical and sonic exuberance. "B" routes hum with physical movement. Passengers crowded together, often three to a seat, and move around frequently (usually when the bus is not moving), switching seats multiple times throughout one route. Quite regularly, young riders hop up and down, jump in and out of their seats, and wedge themselves between seats. In near perpetual motion, feet kick and arms wave, accompanied by much wiggling and touching. "B" route riders sit close (nearly on top of one another), hold hands, tickle, poke, and grab. Riders squeal, sing, shout, giggle, chant, and make many, many, other less easily classified sounds. Nespor (1997) maintains: "Kids value settings for the possibilities they allow for bodily play and performance" (p.119). This certainly appears to be the case on "B" routes. Nearly eighty-five percent of "B" route riders described the bus as "fun." Whether bopping each other's heads with telescopic paper cones, waging staring wars, or simply marveling at one another's double-jointedness, "B" passenger bodies are in near

constant play. Though the school bus reveals numerous structurally imposed physical constraints, it is obvious that "B" routes offer what Adler & Adler (1998-b) describe as increasingly rare opportunities for "spontaneous play" relatively unencumbered by direct adult interference (p. 99).

"Cross-aged" is my word for routes that combine passengers from ages five to eighteen. Drivers and passengers call these "mixed" routes. As I suggested earlier, Bus No. 21, with its vacillating age configurations, provided an excellent opportunity for making comparisons between age-divided and mixed routes. When I asked Unique which she preferred, she replied: "Mixed. It's less wild. Less jumpin' around and like screechin' and stuff." My experience meshes with that of Unique. Cross-aged routes were markedly quieter and more physically reserved than the "B" routes. Younger kids moved around less and sat facing the front more. There was much less actual playing but more reading, quiet talking, and listening to the older kids. Middle, junior, and high school students were swift to holler directives such as "Stop screaming," "You best git in your seat," or "Shut up" to curb the behavior of elementary riders. However, for the ten or fifteen minutes on mixed morning routes—after all of the sixth- through twelfth-graders had been let off at their respective schools—elementary physicality ruled. Singing, kicking, poking, grabbing, and playing commenced. For these short minutes, the corporeal docility of "A" routes was transformed into "B" route-style physical ebullience.

When I asked Herkeesha (Unique's eighteen-year-old sister and No. 21's oldest rider) about "A" versus mixed routes, she was adamant: "For sure separate, those smelly little kids yellin and shit." Nearly all the eighth- through twelfth-grade passengers concurred that they preferred age-segregated routes. Unlike these older passengers, sixth-

and seventh-grade student responses were generally positive. According to seventh-grader Sandy, "Mixed routes are better because the elementary are cute." Likewise, a sixth-grader named Mike said, "Little kids are cool." Another sixth-grader told me he likes mixed routes because "Those kids [elementary students] make good Pokemon trades." Willy, a seventh-grader often picked on by older passengers, responded: "Mixed. That way you get to mess with the little kids." Some middle-schoolers demonstrated ambivalence. Both Jerita and Karen replied: "It depends." Reuben only shrugged. Not one middle-schooler to whom I posed the question of preference responded negatively about mixed routes.

Adler & Adler (1998-b) offer a description of the hierarchical structure of school culture in relation to middle-schoolers that is useful in thinking about these students' experiences on the bus:

> They move through the later elementary school years, conquering these domains, until they stand at the top of the age hierarchy, kings and queens of the school. They have size, maturity, status, and power, until they move on to the next school and fall to the bottom of the hierarchy (198).

A similar sort of hierarchy exists on the school bus. In relation to age, high-schoolers command reverence, junior high passengers receive respect, and elementary riders enjoy little status. Middle-schoolers are positioned in the middle. On "A" routes, these passengers were quite reserved, often clustering together and only rarely interacting with older students. On mixed routes, they were full social participants talking to and exchanging insults with both older and younger kids. The presence of elementary riders seemed to bring middle school and younger junior high passengers to life. Mixed routes

allow middle school riders to temporarily reestablish the kind of hierarchical relationships with elementary students as described by Adler & Adler (1998-b). By defining themselves in opposition to "the little kids," middle-schoolers establish themselves as older, bigger, and more mature.

Important as these age hierarchies are in understanding school bus culture, it is important to remember that passenger populations, situated in time, shift as riders embark and disembark. The authority of high-schoolers on No. 21 visibly diminished as they briefly became outnumbered, nearly four to one, by elementary passengers. It was restored several stops later when the ratio of older to younger riders once again became more favorable. The organizational dictates of the route intermingle with spatial, temporal, and social dimensions to influence the distribution of power throughout school bus culture. In thinking about how these dimensions shape and are shaped by school bus culture, it is important to consider, like Nespor (1997), "how activity is improvised and negotiated, how people's acts are grounded in limited and partial perspectives that unfold and develop in time" (p. 121).

Despite the age hierarchy, interaction between younger and older mixed-route passengers was common, usually on the terms of the older riders. When he was not trying to engage the adults (the driver and the researcher) in conversation, Kevin, a seventeen year-old ninth-grader, was usually flirting with seventh-grade girls. Older siblings or cousins sometimes sat with younger relatives. As described above, middle-schoolers often engaged themselves with elementary passengers. On the other hand, "little kids" who tried to infiltrate the spaces of older passengers were quickly put in their place. Using phrases ranging from the relatively benign ("Get outta here you little donut") to the

more intimidating ("Get lost before I beat your ass"), older passengers on mixed routes reserved the privilege of setting spatial boundaries. For example, Beaux, a White middle school "babe" as he was called by junior high and high school girls, upon rare invitation sat in the very back seat with high-schooler Herkeesha, the matriarch of No. 21. An African-American kindergartner named TJ. had an open invitation to sit among the junior high and high school backseaters, who often held him on their laps. Only after weeks of delicate negotiation, were fifth-graders Julie and Tasha "allowed" to spend a portion of every route listening wide-eyed to the tales of high school-aged youth shelter residents. The sort of mingling between preadolescents and adolescents facilitated by mixed routes represents what (Fox, 1996) terms an "unnatural social grouping" that runs counter to the strict age segregation fundamental to the organization of contemporary schooling (p.27).

In addition to accommodating temporal and spatial concerns, age-segregated routes prevent interaction among preadolescents and adolescents. As was discussed earlier, at the start of my eight months of observation on bus No. 21, the route was separated into "A" and "B" segments. When Amber took over the route in November, the routes became consolidated into one. By April, however, this route had been mysteriously re-segregated, despite the resulting logistical inconvenience. When I asked about the motivation for this change, Kory, the new driver, responded: "I can't see or hear what they're up to when they're all together as well." Amber told me: "It's just easier when they're separated." This ran contrary to my observations. I found mixed routes to be considerably more "in control" than those that were age-segregated.

As in the case of Bus No. 21, age segregated "A" and "B" routes are sometimes designed for the sole purpose of keeping preadolescent and adolescent children separated,

thus avoiding "unnatural social groupings" (Fox, 1996, p. 27). Fox (1996) betrays ties to developmental psychology by positing age-segregation as natural. In contrast, Caputo (1995) sees age categories such as "child" and "adolescent" as social constructions. She writes:

> [W]ords such as adolescents, youth, teenagers and young adults. The boundaries between them seem to be placed arbitrarily . . . Age is one example of an important criterion that is used in our commonsense notion of how the categories of children and youth are defined. Yet it is a parameter that is arbitrarily placed (Caputo, 1995, p. 35).

Dividing passengers into "A" and "B" routes effectively reinforces socially constructed categories of child and adolescent by preventing "dangerous coagulations" across age groupings (Foucault, 1977, p.143). In regard to preadolescents, the organization of school bus routes, much like that of schools, "protects them from contamination by adolescents, who might infect them with the difficulties and precocity of their age" (Adler & Adler, 1998-b, p.198). Deeply enmeshed in accepted constructions of adolescent risk, age-segregated routes serve to keep the precious cargo of childhood innocence safe from the dangerous adolescent influence of world-wise teenagers (Caputo, 1995; James & Prout, 1997; Thorne, 1994).

Seating

So far, I have discussed the geography of school bus culture in terms of temporal organization, and spatial regimes within the context of broader social landscapes, dynamically constituted through relationships of social class, race/ethnicity and age. No

aspect of school bus culture, however, evokes its complex social architecture more vividly than that of seating patterns. On the bus, such patterns are rarely static. Questions of where to sit will not "stay still." Intersections of race/ethnicity, gender, and age interpenetrate and positions of power solicit surprising social mobilities.

Social Mobility

I boarded the bus with an open mind, but I had notions. Interested in seat choice and how this related to the social organization of the bus, I naively assumed that seat choice was singular, made by each rider once per trip. Instead, I found a culture on the move. The school bus, much like Thorne's (1994) findings in an elementary classroom, is a place where, "seating and movement are subjects of continual negotiation" (Thorne, 1994, p.136). Students switch seats at least three times per route. Each time the bus stopped to pick up or deposit a rider, or even paused at a stoplight, at least one rider moved to another seat. Some jockeyed for "better" seats, grabbing the preferred back seats when they became open or moved away from social pariahs and closer to "cool" kids. In the morning, whole groups of kids would sometimes move together. On four of the buses I rode, when all the sixth- through twelfth-graders had disembarked, several elementary kids would say in unison, "Move up," and all the remaining riders obeyed. At the next stop they usually scattered. Conversely, on No. 21, morning elementary passengers—every one of them—moved to the back seats, occupying coveted teenager territory. On another afternoon, at a stoplight between the junior high and the high school, seven riders smoothly switched seats simultaneously in delicate spontaneous choreography.

Some kids seemed to move in accordance with purely personal patterns. My first morning on No. 21, a kindergarten girl moved seven times—methodically making her way up one side of the bus and halfway down the other. Later I asked her which was the best seat. She pointed to the front seat catty-corner to the bus driver. Her brother was in it. That afternoon, Tina, a high school girl, positioned and repositioned herself among the same three seats eleven times. Such "back and forthing" was quite common and made a systematic mapping of seating patterns impossible. Passengers also move to avoid conflict. On several occasions I watched Peter, a stocky White fourth-grader, initiate incidents among his elementary contemporaries by calling them names—"fudgepacker," "Q-tip," and "chapstick" were among his favorites—or by hurling "insults" such as "Your mother's a lesbian." Upon impact, he would slip back several seats, thus successfully dodging the brunt of conflict. By the time his buddies got the driver's attention and "told," Peter was nowhere in the vicinity. Many other riders employed similar spatial tactics to their advantage as well. Andrea, a quiet blonde seventh-grader, moved to circumvent the unwanted attention of a persistent ninth-grade boy. Willy, who was teased by both older and younger riders, kept on the move to keep episodes from escalating.

Seats, like culture, on the school bus are not simply up for grabs. Mobility is no simple matter. For example, as was discussed earlier, only a select few "little kids" were "allowed" to sit with backseaters. Certain older kids were also barred from the back. When I first began riding No. 21, it was segregated by more than age. Separated by three empty rows of seats, White kids (except for Tina) sat in the front, while African-American riders (along with other "non-white" passengers: Hispanic, Latino, Native American, and East Indian children) sat in the back. By the middle of the year, No. 21

was more integrated. As Foucault (1984) writes, "space is fundamental in any exercise of power" (p. 252). Subtle and not so subtle configurations of race/ethnicity, social class, gender, and age restrict movement, set spatial parameters, and push social boundaries on the bus. However, in the following discussion of how such configurations relate to seating, it is important to consider the mobile context. Situated in time as well as space, the geography of school bus culture quite literally changes shape at every stop.

Gender Mingling

Social configurations of gender on the school bus are varied and complex. Unlike Thorne's (1994) findings concerning gender segregation and playgrounds, and Nespor's (1997) observations in school lunchrooms, boys and girls somewhat voluntarily share space on the bus. In her study, Thorne (1994) found that "On the playground, an area where adults exert minimal control and kids are relatively free to choose their own activities and companions, there is extensive separation by gender"(p. 44). On the school bus (which is also a mostly kid-mediated space that offers riders choice of companions), self-segregation by gender is less prevalent. Broad definitions of space such as front, middle, and back were not divided according to gender. Despite the fact that elementary school riders often boarded the bus in two separate teacher-supervised lines (one for girls and the other for boys) no section of any bus was labeled girls or boys only. However, on one bus that I rode, the driver enforced strict gender boundaries. Per instructions, boys sat on the left side and girls on the right. Four other drivers confessed to experimenting with this system of gender segregation at one time or another in order to, as Travis (a driver with a master's degree in education) put it, "keep things under control." On no bus,

however, did I see passengers self-segregate in this manner. In general, boys and girls sat intermingled throughout the bus.

In broadly spatial terms, boys and girls more often than not sat "next" to each other. It was quite common for boys and girls to sit in seats adjacent to one another. However, in their initial seat choice, when forced to share a seat passengers did tend to self-segregate by gender. Boys sat with boys, girls with girls. Such segregation was less common in subsequent seat choices. When switching seats, passengers often voluntarily sat gender-mingled together in the same seat. Though it is tempting to attach a symbolic meaning such as "primary" to riders' initial seat choice, such ranking is perilous. As has been discussed previously, seating pattern—and more broadly school bus culture—is situated in time as well as space. Rather than functioning as an indicator of primary affiliation, this first seat seems to serve more fully as a point of departure. As passengers embark and disembark, or simply move around among seats, the gendered pattern shaped by initial seat choice is quickly replaced by equally ephemeral spatial and social configurations.

Power Positions

In positioning seating patterns within the social landscape of school bus culture, I find Thorne's (1994) discussion of social marginialization and the geography of school lines to be a useful foil. At school, particularly elementary school, getting from here to there (lunchroom, playground, etc.) involves lining up (Jackson, 1968; Thorne, 1994). The process of getting to and from school involves similar linear positionings. Passengers queue up to board and unload the bus single file. Further, the actual seating pattern of the

bus can be seen as organized into two parallel vertical lines. Thorne's (1994) analysis of the process of lining up contrasts the front positions with those in back:

> The front of the line is a desired and contested zone. As a reward, the teachers often let a specific child— the 'line leader' or 'goodest one,' as a kindergartner explained—go first. . . . The back of the line is sometimes defined as the least desired space, even a place of punishment. . . . (p. 41)

This distinction is in some ways reversed on the school bus. Though all space on the bus is contested to some degree, the back of the bus is, in general, the most coveted seating space. The front of the bus is generally less desirable. Riders mostly sit up front because they have to.

As discussed earlier, not all riders are "allowed" to sit in back. Younger kids, in particular, are relegated by social hierarchy to the front section. Further, on some mixed routes drivers enforce age-segregation by assigning the front half of the bus to elementary passengers and the back section to older kids. This was the case for a time on No. 21. Every day for about two months as we approached the elementary school the driver, Amber, would yell: "Make room." At the next stop sign middle-schoolers and the smattering of junior high and high school frontseaters crowded toward the rear with back seat riders. However, this system was perpetually subverted in multiple ways. The same few middle-schoolers avoided the move every day by hunkering down in their seats where, once enveloped by the elementary masses, they could emerge undetected. Many passengers just complied, waited a few stops, and then moved where they wanted. Some obedient elementary students, however, stayed in the front as directed.

Disobedient passengers were also relegated to the front section. Unlike Thorne's (1994) teachers who, as a reward for good behavior, promote students to the front of the line, drivers reserve the very front seat directly behind that of themselves as a punitive space for school bus malefactors.

In addition to those passengers positioned as "in trouble," the very front seat is split between social pariahs and flirters. Marginalized riders often rely on the driver for social interaction. For example, Kevin, a seventeen-year-old ninth-grader on No. 21, who was never openly teased but was predictably ostracized by other riders, spent most rides in one of the two front seats chatting with the driver. When Amber replaced Dan as the driver, these conversations took on a more flirtatious flavor. Other, less-marginalized, White junior high boys on occasion sat momentarily in the front seat to converse with Amber in a similarly flirtatious vein. Then they moved back. Otherwise "cool" female passengers also spent time in the front seat flirting with male drivers. On one bus, the front two seats were placed on reserve by the driver for four of his most ardent female junior high admirers who would rotate between these seats and the back section scene. Perhaps, because of the ways participants in school bus culture rabidly inscribe heterosexuality (discussed in a subsequent section), I did not ascertain any overt same-sex flirting between drivers and passengers.

While avoiding the front seats, other riders sat in the front section more or less voluntarily. An East Indian middle-schooler told me she sat near the front because: "In the back seat they have bad habits." Mel, a White fifth-grade boy, warned me away from the back seat: "Stay up here, back there's cussin' all the time and worse stuff." When I asked Atlantis, a mixed-race junior high girl, about the backseaters, she responded:

"Oooh, they're perves." The words of these frontseaters construct the back section as a position of unspecified risk. While passengers like Pria, Mel, and Atlantis sit near the front to spatially separate themselves from the "perverted" social influence of backseaters, others sit in the front for physical protection. Second-grader Roger avoids the back for this reason: "Not safe—high school, they hit hard." When asked why she never sat in the back seat, fourth-grader Unique expresses a similar fear: "My sister and her friends will beat the crap out of me if I go back there." One morning, sitting uncharacteristically up front, former backseaters Jody and Tammy (both in junior high) revealed that they relocated because: "The sexual harassment is bad. Oh yeah, in back it's bad." Considerations of safety—physical and otherwise—position the front section near the driver in opposition to the risky social practices and errant physicality of the mostly adolescent-mediated back seat.

While the front section provided passengers protection from the uncertain authority of backseaters, sitting in either of the two seats at the very front was seen as direct alignment with driver authority. With the exception of drivers' children (who sometimes rode along), kindergartners, pariahs, and flirters were the only passengers who more or less willingly put themselves in that position, or engaged the driver in conversation for more than fleeting moments. Most passengers (myself included) were careful to avoid it.

In contrast, the very back seats held great allure. School bus passengers scramble to sit in the back, while students typically marginalized at school lead the pack. The back third of the bus generally fills up first, both in the morning and afternoon routes. This

behavior runs counter to Thorne's (1994) observations about the back section of school lines:

> Although generally a devalued space, the back of the line has its uses. During the process of lining up, socially marginal kids often wait to join the line near the end, thereby avoiding the pushing and maneuvering at the front (p.41).

Unlike Thorne's (1994) analysis, riders push and maneuver themselves in all sorts of ways to position themselves in the very back of the school bus. For several weeks, Vicky, an enterprising junior high student, bartered her way to the back by trading band fund-raiser suckers. Her brother won his seat scoring cigarettes for youth shelter residents. Other students would let backseaters use their portable CD players or allow them to copy their homework in exchange for the back seat. There was also considerable physical negotiation. Passengers cut in line at the bus stop or pushed their way to the front of the line in order to sit in back. You have to board the bus early in order to enjoy back seat privileges. Though this luxury can be fleeting: junior high riders who board early are accustomed to relinquishing their hard-won back seats to high school girl backseaters. For example, every afternoon on No. 21, junior high-schooler Eddie surrendered his back seat upon the arrival of his high school-aged sister Tonya and her bus friend Herkeesha. Such surrender demonstrates how riders put spatial relationships to use in creating and maintaining social boundaries. Further, this seating pattern reflects and reinforces social the hierarchies common to school bus culture, but that represent a slight departure from the social organization typically found in schools (Adler & Adler, 1998-b; Adler, Kless & Adler, 1992; Corsaro, 1997; Thorne, 1994).

On every bus on which I gathered data, African-American and other racial/ethnic minority passengers tended to sit in the back third of the bus. One of the very back seats was occupied, at least once per trip, by an African-American passenger. Additionally, slightly more girls than boys sat in the back third. Yet the seat farthest in the rear were the first pick for nearly all passengers. Though "back" and "front" are still cogent categories on the bus as well as in school lines, in the mobile, kid-mediated space of the school bus spatial expressions of marginalization are less linear. On No. 21 as well as on other buses, students such as racial/ethnic minorities, outspoken girls, and youth shelter residents—all of whom are often marginalized in schools—make up the bulk of the back seat population, which enjoys considerable social status within school bus culture (Adler & Adler, 1998-b; deMarrais & Lecompte, 1999; Fordham, 1993; Thorne, 1994). Unlike the "devalued" rear position in the school lines of which Thorne (1994) writes, back seats are hot property in the social geography of the school bus. Although riders sit facing the front, generally it is the back of the bus— defined in opposition to the front-seat authority of the driver—which serves as its social center. By positioning themselves in the contested backspaces of the bus, passengers on the margins at school move to the center of school bus culture. On bus No. 21 this central social space was dominated by "loud," non-White, teenage girls termed by other passengers: "backseaters bad-asses" (Fordham, 1993).

Teenager Territory. Despite it's much contested status, the term *adolescent* carries little direct meaning with the actual cultural participants (on the bus) to which it refers/constructs (Adams, 1994; James, 1986; Turner, 1967; Valentine, 1998). The term

teenager, however, means plenty to passengers. While, as noted earlier, the exact border between childhood and adolescence is somewhat murky, on bus No. 21 the age of thirteen demarcates the boundary of "teenagedness" with unanimous clarity. When I asked the question: "So how old do you have to be, to be a teenager?" every passenger—except for two eighth-graders rendered silent by the stupidity of my question—answered "thirteen." In describing youth culture, Adler & Adler (1998-b) note:

> [Y]outh represents the most salient period for age demarcation because people are changing most rapidly in their younger years, and are stratified by outsiders and themselves into broad age groupings and specific subgroupings (p.197).

Consistent with Adler & Adler (1998-b), in matters of spatial stratification, categories of age combined with school grade classifications to create perhaps the most unyielding social category in school bus culture. As Valentine (1998) writes, "The age of the physical body is used to define, control, and order the actions of the social body" (p.5). This is certainly true on the bus, though other social categories such as gender and race/ethnicity certainly exerted influence in determining where passengers could sit. The back section was unequivocally considered teenager territory. Though younger riders sometimes sat there, the social category "backseater" belonged exclusively to teenagers—but not to all teens equally.

Power Beads, Body Glitter, and Backseat Bad-asses

Every school bus I rode had a cohesive group of "backseaters." As previously discussed, these are junior high and high school students who sit together in the coveted

back section nearly every day for most of each ride, and exhibit the boundary work Adler & Adler (1998-b) describe as characteristic of cliques:

> Cliques have a hierarchical structure, being dominated by leaders, and are exclusive in nature, so that not all individuals who desire membership are accepted. They function as bodies of power within grades, incorporating the most popular individuals, offering the most exciting social lives, and commanding the most attention. (P.56)

Both girls and boys occupied the back section of bus No. 21. However, it was a core group composed of one African-American junior high girl, one White, and three African-American high school girls (along with a fluctuating entourage composed of junior high females) that generated and limited the conversations that set and maintain its social and spatial boundaries. According to Eddie (an African-American eighth-grader whose older sister Tonya is a an integral part of the core group), "They're like queens or somethin'." And they are, yet school bus "cliques" differ from those described by Adler & Adler (1998-b) in several important ways.

Though core-group backseaters command the most attention, and to a large degree set social and spatial boundaries on the bus, their popularity is ambiguous. Backseaters are not necessarily popular. For example, No. 21's core group of backseaters (African-Americans Herkeesha, Sabrina, Tonya, and Tina, who was White) were not particularly well liked by other passengers. In fact, most passengers I spoke with used expressions of disgust or fear when referring to backseaters. Terms such as "nasty," "skanky," and "loud bitch" were common descriptors. Riders, however, generally deferred to this exclusive group in seating choice, often gave them treats, and displayed

considerable interest in activity they instigated. Yet the all-girl core group of backseaters did not possess or exhibit any of the factors such as high SES and academic performance, appearance, and precocity that Adler, Kless, & Adler (1992) associate with female popularity.

No. 21's core-group backseaters were not rich or middle class, nor were they considered "pretty" by passengers with whom I spoke. The female entourage—or as Adler & Adler (1998-b) call them, "wannabes"—who positioned themselves in favorable proximity to the back seat core group, however, were more mixed in terms of social class affiliation and appearance (p. 81). With elaborately enameled fingernails, multiple strands of gemstone "power bead" bracelets, shimmering eye shadow, and lots of body glitter, the lip-glossed appearance of these "cool followers" stood in contrast to the spartan style of upper-strata backseater girls (Adler & Adler, 1998-b, p. 81). Remarkably unadorned, core-group backseaters did not adhere to—and in fact, separated themselves from—many of the middle class norms of popular female appearance. They wore, except on rare occasions, no discernible makeup, and their hairstyles demonstrated little fuss.

Like most other riders (male and female), core-group backseaters wore T-shirts, jeans or cargo pants, and tennis shoes on every day that I observed. Unlike other passengers, this core group of backseaters was open about the fact that their clothes came from a local discount store. In fact, they often used the origins of their outfits in rapid-fire verbal play that demarcated conceptions of social class boundaries and that revealed resistance to dominant, generalized conceptions of Gap-obsessed, teenage consumption patterns:

Herkeesha: Yea, I got these cargoes at Walmart.

Sandra: Yeah, I can tell.

Tonya: Better than all that Hello Kitty crap you buy. I bet when you go to the mall your mother, fuckin' spends $200 on Hello Kitty and Abercrombie shit and—

Tabitha: And we're like we do Walmart. So does (points one by one at various male passengers) he, and him, and look at those shoes. Now for fuckin' sure him.

(Lots of laughter)

Herkeesha: Now, we *are* some poor mother fuckers. But we don't waste all that fuckin' money.

Frequent references to discount shopping and being broke, such as the above example, challenge the "glamorous consumption fantasy" whereby youth becomes universally constructed as middle-class brand enslavement (Wulff, 1995, p. 9). Additionally, the un-acessorized appearance of back seat girls resists stereotypical constructions of fashion-crazed femininity. When Vicki asked me what my green power bead bracelet "meant" (different "power" such as romance or intellectual stability are attributed to the type of gemstone beads that make-up power bead bracelets), I told her that it was supposed to attract money. The irony was not lost on backseater, Tabitha who commented acerbically, "Looks like you lost in that deal. Spending good money on that power thing."

Though core-group backseaters on No. 21 did not display the academic achievement Adler & Adler (1998-b) associate with popular girls, neither did this group display extreme, overt resistance to school. Herkeesha, who was part of a college preparatory program, was the only backseater who had distinguished herself academically. Even the other three, despite their claim that they were "not into school,"

demonstrated a relatively positive attitude toward school. Only rarely did backseat talk focus on schoolwork, however, such talk revealed that backseaters did some homework, studied for tests, and were, at least minimally, concerned about grades

In terms of precocity, No. 21's most precocious girl, Atlantis (as rumor had it she often passed as a "college girl at frat parties"), was no backseater. She sat in the middle and remained aloof toward backseat happenings. As will be discussed in more detail later, though backseat talk was often overtly sexual it did not seem particularly precocious. Sexual allusions were rarely framed in terms of actual personal experience. Sex talk was mainly used to sound "tough"—adding vulgar value to intimidating talk, thus functioning to enforce social boundaries such as rigid heterosexuality. However, when it became common knowledge that fifteen-year-old backseater Tonya was pregnant, and when her "fiancée" began riding the bus home with her each day, sexual innuendo became more personal. The couple became a central target of graphical sexual vignettes. As Gardner notes, "The pregnant appearance in public context has traditionally been thought symbolically to introduce sexuality into precincts where it has no business, such as schools, places of commercial business. . ."(p. 80) By bringing private sexuality to public eyes, Tonya's pregnancy and her impending marriage won her new quasi-grownup status linked with her now undeniable sexual precocity.

Paradoxically, her pregnancy also afforded the very sturdy and robust Tonya new status as "fragile," and in need of protection. Driver Amber made daily attempts to get Tonya to sit up front where, as Amber told me, "It is so much safer." She continued: "The back is so bumpy. In her delicate condition, I would just feel more comfortable." Tonya's warning to her younger brother, however, demonstrates that such delicacy did

not preclude her role as enforcer of social boundaries: "Git outta my seat. Just because I'm knocked up doesn't mean I can't knock the shit outta you." In terms of her role as a backseater, it was business as usual for Tonya, despite her precarious position. Tonya used her enhanced—albeit ambiguous—sexual status in familiar ways to maintain social and spatial boundaries on the bus.

Core-group backseaters on No. 21 unraveled conventional notions of female popularity. Instead of embodying the popularity traits such as high SES, stereotypically pretty appearance, and academic achievement that Adler, Kless, & Adler (1992) gender female, backseaters on No. 21 cultivated status through acting tough. Adler, Kless, & Adler (1992) discuss toughness as a primarily male attribute involving "displays of physical prowess, athletic skill and belligerence, especially in repartee with peers and adults" (173). The architecture of the school bus, however, severely limits the range of physical displays and makes demonstrations of athletic skill nearly impossible. Consequently, riders conquer school bus space verbally instead of physically. On all buses I rode, backseaters' ability to set social and spatial boundaries was linked to their skill in generating, sustaining, and dominating verbal display and exchange.

Tough-Talk.While physical displays such as breath-holding contests were prevalent among particularly younger passengers, tough talk ruled. No. 21's "backseat bad-asses" entertained, intimidated, and dominated other riders—and sometimes the bus driver —through the clever repartee, convincing threats, skillful impersonation, well-timed jokes, venomous insults, and sheer vocal force that Corsaro (1997) terms "oppositional talk" (p. 146). According to Corsaro (1997): "Oppositional talk is playful teasing and confrontational talk that some African-American children frequently use to

construct social identities, cultivate friendships, and both maintain and transform the social order of their peer cultures"(p. 146). Though I saw children of every race engage in "tough" talk, on No. 21 its masters were all African-American girls, except for Tina who is White. While their oppositional dexterity helped push boundaries of gendered social order by constructing their identity as "backseat bad asses," oppositional talk did not necessarily transform such structures.

For example, take these backseater girls' daily ritual of catcalling out the school bus window to "hot" male college students. Such screaming was against bus rules. As long as there was no swearing, this breach was often tolerated by drivers as harmless fun. Though if the content of the yelling got too "wild," drivers would reprimand: "Settle down girls." At times, since the driver's hearing was limited by the engine roar, it went unnoticed. Yelling such phrases as "What's in your jeans, cowboy?" or "Ooh, I like cowboys. Let me ride your horse," predictably established the all-female, backseat core group as a potent point of attention on No. 21. Though some female passengers were embarrassed by this behavior (particularly Herkeesha's little sister), in general girls enjoyed it and cheered backseaters on. Boys, on the other hand, were not amused. Instead, male passengers expressed indignation in regards to this behavior: "That's disgusting sexual harassment," or "Yeah, I'd really want to date a girl who yelled at me like that. Loud bitches." Backseat girls, in employing the discourse of sexual objectification traditionally linked to male privilege, rearranged discursive space on the school bus, regulated male discourse, and disrupted gendered notions of sexual harassment. "Positions of power and powerlessness," writes Davies (1993), "are achieved through talk, through social practices and through social and architectural structures"

(p.199). Discursive practices such as the above mentioned cat-calling demonstrate that, though back seat girls make good use of the architectural limitations inherent to school bus space to alter gendered social structures, such alterations do not necessarily represent a wholesale departure from the broader patriarchal landscape of power to which such structures belong. This all-female group used acting tough—their skill at direct verbal conflict—in lieu of collaborative language to reinforce enduringly hierarchical rather than communal backseat boundaries (Thorne, 1994). Further, "backseat bad-asses" did not embody an "egalitarian ethos" often attributed to female solidarity (Thorne, 1994, p. 95).

Backseat solidarity was slippery. According to riders, members of this powerful and cohesive school bus "clique" did not hang out together at school. Though these four students had ridden the same bus to and from school together for six years, they were not, as Tonya put it, "school friends," nor did they often convene socially in their "off time." "Cliques," according to Adler & Adler (1998-b), "are at their base, friendship circles" (p.56). As a mobile intersection in social space, the school bus demonstrates that the dense social configurations that compose youth culture are not necessarily static: boundaries travel, spheres interpenetrate, and circles change shape.

Acting tough on the school bus means talking tough—in ways that push the boundaries of normative constructions of adolescent femininity. Though, as Fordham (1993) and Hooks (1989) point out, the "historic hegemony over talk" McRobbie (1991) associates with women does not work for all women equally (p.79). Language styles that depart from those of White, middle-class femininity reinforce boundaries of race/ethnicity and class. Thorne (1994) also reminds us:

> Generalizations about 'girls culture' come primarily from research done with girls who are class-privileged and white; the experience of girls of other class, race, and ethnic backgrounds tend to be marginalized (p.102).

While both Thorne's (1994) analysis of gendered spatiality, and the constructions of female popularity employed by Adler & Adler (1998-b) are helpful in looking at gender and power on the bus, both influential discussions self-consciously bear the mark of middle-class White privilege. The tough talk of the predominately African-American, fully female, working-class power-quadrangle that drove No. 21's backseat scene call background to the foreground, and cause gendered generalizations to swerve. As an alternative to the prevalent "peer culture" approaches to the social lives of children and youth, research on No. 21 illustrates that "'social life is fractured along numerous lines of difference constitutive of overlapping and multiple forms of otherness'"(Philo, 1992, p. 201, quoted in Valentine et al., 1998, p. 7).

Curricular Routes

"Knowledge is not only power but also the key to a
safe and harmonious ride on Big Yellow"
(Vail, 1997:34).

In addition to its un/common sense work of distributing student bodies among sites of learning, and its well documented function in "setting the tone for the school day," might the school bus be conceived of as an educational space/time in its own right? (Bushweller, 1997; DeBruyn, 1985; Huffman, 1999; Thomas 1984). Etymological definitions of curriculum employed by Pinar & Grumet (1976) re-situate or

reconceptualize curriculum as existential motion grounded in context. Similarly, Eisner (1994) uses the historic roots of the term curriculum as a metaphoric point of departure to explore its boundaries. Eisner writes:

> Initially the word came from the Latin currere which means 'the course to be run'. This notion implies a track. . . something that has a beginning and an end; something that one intends to complete" (p. 25).

Excavating earlier definitions, Eisner (1994) and Pinar & Grumet (1976) situate curriculum beyond the strict spatial and temporal boundaries of an educational discourse that relies on separating public and private spheres, delineating disciplines, and corralling discourse into curricular compartments.

Eisner links this notion of curriculum with progressive educators' move to broaden the definition of education beyond the confines of the classroom proper:

> Progressive educators recognized that what children learn in school is wider than what goes on in classrooms and more varied that what teachers intend to teach. The experiences secured in the hallways and the playgrounds of the school were also influential aspects of educational life and should not, in their view, be separated from the responsibility educators should assume for guiding the child's experience in other aspects of school life (p.26).

As Eisner (1994) points out above, progressive educators allowed for a concept of curriculum that encompassed "all the experiences the child has under the aegis of the school" (P.26).

But as Eisner (1994) also points out, progressive notions of curriculum were not all encompassing. All experiences are not counted as equally educational. Paraphrasing

Dewey, Eisner (1994) defines non-educational activities as those "activities of habit that punctuate our lives" (p. 37). Such a definition puts the "myriad of learning" that takes place on the school bus in a precarious position. Though variously conceived of as an extension of the classroom or as "off time," using Dewey's via Eisner's (1994) definition, the commute to and from school can easily be situated as merely a non-educational—or even mis-educational, habitual means to elevate educational ends. But as Schubert (1981) warns, "education cannot be equated with schooling. Education is more pervasive; it embraces and interpenetrates all of life" (p.185-186).

This study of school bus culture demands a departure from the progressive—via Eisner (1994)—curricular course and instead takes Schubert's (1981) lead that "nonschool institutions and relationships are educative, they embody curriculum; therefore they should be studied by using curricular lenses" (p. 193). This study takes a detour. Looking at how curriculum is embodied in everyday life, I use an ethnographic lens to study the dense intersections of school, neighborhood, and home, as well as the knowledges they might produce as they converge in the mobile milieu of school bus culture. Taking liberties with the etymological roots of currere, school bus routes emerge situated in space and time along a curricular trajectory linking home and school.

The following discussions of knowledges termed *common* and *difficult* follow from the previous section's examination of the interpenetrations among life inside the bus, and that of the social landscape it travels. In the following discussion, familiar school bus practices—gossip, regulation, subterfuge, surveillance, teasing, and sexual harassment—call attention to configurations of power, knowledge, and danger at the overlapping boundaries of everyday curriculum.

Common Knowledge

The bus, as has been previously discussed, can be seen as a mobile intersection in social space. This section looks at how, in the midst of such motion, information circulates, and gossip emerges as common knowledge. Next it explores the uncommon ways a common set of rules becomes embodied on Cimarron school buses.

Predictably, the perpetual motion of school bus culture—riders embarking and disembarking, and switching seats—creates an environment in which networks of information sprout with rhizomatic rapidity. The private lives of passengers quickly become public. "Secrets," such as Tonya's pregnancy, rove without resistance among seats as passengers move. Toss your cookies, even discretely, as did Herman (a tow-headed fifth-grader), and in minutes everyone—except the driver—knows about it. On the bus, rumors fly, allegiances ramble, and trust among passengers runs prudently thin.

In addition to generating networks along which in-bus gossip easily takes flight, the school bus becomes an intersection in social space where disparate "outside" knowledges converge. On the bus, populations separated by age and a host of other social constructions at school convene and reconfigure. Knowledges conjoin. Take for example one afternoon trip on Bus No. 21: Atlantis, who is considered popular at her junior high, informs Vicky, who does not travel in such circles, about the most recent sexual antics of the head cheerleader and her boyfriends. In turn, Vicky (who possesses her own illicit knowledges) shares the name of a friend from whom Atlantis might purchase cigarettes. Junior high-schooler Kevin gives a group of middle-schoolers insider tips on how to get an "A" in a certain teacher's class. In the back, high-schoolers Alonzo, Marcus,

Herkeesha, and Tina exchange partisan versions of a rumor about a racially motivated fight between a "prep" and a "hood." Also near the back, a fourth grade boy asks a Junior High boy about his older sister's rumored drug habit, "How can she make good grades and smoke crack?" Who in turn responds, "All crack does is open your mind."

On many occasions, I witnessed cross-age conversations in which older riders shared illicit knowledges—information about drugs, alcohol, cigarettes and sex—with younger passengers. Just as frequently, I watched cross-age exchanges about the more "innocently" pragmatic information such as the whims of a certain teacher, the exact date the carnival was set to arrive, or where the cheapest power-bead bracelets or tennis shoes might be bought. All of these conversations reveal how the bus functions as an intersection in social space where separate lanes of school-stratified socialities often merge, and across which knowledge relevant to the lives of riders circulates and becomes common.

Rules

On every bus in the Cimarron fleet, a sign positioned to the immediate left of the driver's head warns: "Don't lose your riding privileges," followed by an eleven-item list (two additional unnumbered commands tagged on the end) of the official bus rules:

Don't lose your riding privileges
Follow these rules
1) Bus driver may assign seats
2) Be on time and courteous
3) Cooperate and obey driver cheerfully
4) Remain properly seated
5) Keep yourself and belongings inside the bus
6) No profanity
7) No tobacco, alcohol, or drugs
8) Keep aisle clear and carry only what you can hold in your lap
9) Violence is prohibited
10) Do not destroy property
11) No food, drinks, candy, or gum
Keep the bus clean
For your own safety do not distract driver through loud talking, laughing, or any misbehavior

This is the standard set of rules and is often the only paper or document affixed to bus walls. On nearly every bus I rode, however, this standard set of rules is altered either in letter or in spirit, or in some cases both by passengers and drivers.

Rules were routinely negotiated by individual drivers. For example, some drivers strictly enforced rule number six: "No profanity." Others were more lenient, allowing all but the "f-word." On some buses, eating and drinking were strictly forbidden. Other drivers, however, gave passengers carte blanche. Tacos, cinnamon rolls, and coffee—anything went. Some drivers allowed food and drink, but only that which they considered "non-messy:" One driver elaborated:

> No sticky stuff, like soda or, uh, donuts. I let them bring clean snacks and water if it's hot. This is my bus. I have to clean it up. If I find wrappers, it's all over. The kids know that."

Riders do know. On each bus, despite fluctuating boundaries, passengers demonstrated an exacting knowledge of the rules as lived on their particular bus. As indicated by a second-

grader named Jeff, they knew about the boundaries on other buses too: "On No. 10, you can eat pizza, ice cream, anything."

On many buses, certain rules are literally under erasure. Rule number eleven: "No food, drinks, candy, or gum," was marked over, scratched through, or otherwise made unintelligible on at least six Cimarron buses. On one bus, "No tobacco, alcohol, or drugs" was altered so as to read "do drugs." "No profanity" elicited comments such as, "yeah right," and a very temporary "fuck you"—both written in felt tip out to the side of the rules to which they responded. Due to the rule sheets prominent position as the only "permanent" textual feature gracing the front wall of the bus, riders also used its abundant white space to make their mark on school bus history. Neatly and not-so-neatly scrawled messages like "Shelly was here 1998," "Travis and Danika 4ever 1999," and "We're the class of 2005" quickly rendered rule sheets artifactual, like paper petroglyphs from another year's route.

While this standard one rule sheet is the norm, some buses suffer from a surplus of rule sheets. One driver made sure riders knew the rules. In addition to the standard up-front placement, rule sheets were posted on each of the back walls, one on each wall towards the middle, and one on either side of the front seat. I rode one bus that had three different rule sheets posted. The standard sheet was posted in front, but over each back seat hung two slightly different rule sheets. The one on the right side read a lot like a streamlined version of the presently used sheet, the heading beginning with the familiar "Don't lose your riding privileges." But instead of the current: "Cooperate and obey driver cheerfully," it simply and more grammatically read: "Cooperate with the driver." Its ten rules regulated arms and feet, profanity, eating, drinking, and smoking. It did not

mention drugs, alcohol, violence, or distracting the driver. Rule number one on this alternative sheet was: "Observe same conduct as in the classroom." This yellowing set of rules read like a nostalgic holdover from a mythical school bus time without drugs, alcohol, and violence, when students did not have to be told to be punctual, obedient or cheerful, and when classroom conduct meant being good.

Likewise, the left side rules positioned themselves in a bygone context. While the right rear rules revealed a time when authority was implicit, the set of rules posted above the left rear seats hearkened to a kinder, gentler bus. Its six short rules were written in the positive. Commands had replaced constraints: "Help keep your bus clean, use waste paper baskets"; or "Be on time to keep bus on schedule." Except for "Use no profane language!" this list employed no "nos." Like a fleeting humanistic experiment, this short list showed little connection, in form or content, to the standard set of rules in use.

Despite multiple and disparate representations, passengers know the rules—at least the ones that count. Ironically, the rule that counts most is left unnumbered: "For your own safety do not distract driver through loud talking, laughing, or any misbehavior." This unnumbered statement positioned at the very bottom, underneath eleven numbered rules, reveals the subtext of power as it is negotiated on the bus. First, this statement makes an explicit discursive link between passenger safety and the rules. Any misbehavior, it warns, put riders at risk. This conversational snippet between a junior high boy and girl further illustrates the sort of relationship between driver authority and the notion of safety as it plays itself out on bus No. 21 as well as on other buses.

> Matthew: "She's (former bus No. 1 driver currently driving bus No. 3) cool. She lets you do stuff like turn around in your seat and stuff."

Jody: "The thing about bus drivers who don't care is that a lot of kids get hurt."

As Jody articulates, the relationship between authority and safety is, in some instances, conceptualized by students as conflated. Enforcement of rules becomes connected with care, and being good becomes equated with being safe. As previously discussed in the second chapter, I found the discursive link between driver authority, passenger behavior, and safety to be a similarly prominent feature of discourse found in school bus literature.

In addition to its function of making, already implicit links between safety and authority explicit, the rule sheet addendum serves with more subtlety to inform passengers about the somewhat fluid boundaries of behavior in a space "controlled" by necessarily inattentive adult authority. Occupied with driving, driver attention is split: "At the same time as having to keep their eyes and attention on the road, they are also expected to keep their young passengers in their seats and maintain order on the bus"(Engle, 1999, p. 9). Supervision is partial. "Do not distract driver" is embodied by passengers as "do not attract attention, do not get caught." Passengers learn quickly that loud, boisterous behavior gets you busted and that quiet transgressions enacted just outside the driver's gaze often go unpunished.

Take for instance, rule number four: "Remain properly seated." As was previously noted, on most buses passengers switch seats many times per route. As long as this is done while the bus is stopped and without fuss, drivers generally do not object. Drivers will, however, offer the common reprimand, "Stay in your seat," to riders whose seat-switching becomes conspicuous. Additionally, the notion of proper seating entails sitting on one's rump, facing forward with hands and feet out of the aisle but inside the window, and no more than three passengers to a seat (state director's position, 1999). Sit up on

your knees facing the seat behind you, or, in order to converse across the aisle, sideways with your feet in the aisle—and you are busted. Both of these positions are easily observed in the rearview and obstruct the driver's field of vision. Drivers usually respond quickly with correction such as: "Face the front," "Feet out of the aisle," or "Sit on your butt." Less easily caught are the countless other less-than-proper positions that riders sometimes assume.

Aside from the above mentioned improprieties, older passengers usually sit right, an exception being the common practice of facing sideways to lounge, legs outstretched horizontally across the seat. Elementary passengers assume a wider range of improper seating positions that often go undetected by the driver. For example, kneeling on the floor facing backwards and wedged in the space meant for feet was a popular position among the kindergarten through second-grader set. Likewise, laying down parallel to the seat and rolling around on the floor between seats was not infrequent among smaller passengers. One middle school girl moved back and forth between middle and rear sections of the bus by slithering on her belly underneath seats. Such "subterranean" transgressions are nearly impossible for a driver to see.

Even above-ground improprieties such as kneeling or crouching in the seat on haunches, or standing on one's head (I only saw this once) are, when the perpetrator is small, difficult for a driver to catch. Such mis-positions do not usually last long. On mixed routes, No. 21 as an example, older non-elementary passengers offer swift correction: "Git down off your head, NOW!" The allure of these often uncomfortable, illicit positions is short lived. It does not seem to feel right to sit wrong. The bus is physically designed for passengers to sit facing forward with feet in front. Further, habits

of bodily regulation learned at school and at home through expectations of car safety no doubt make their way onto the bus in differing degrees.

Despite the inability of the driver to enforce issues of proper seating, passengers, regardless of age, spend most of every ride properly seated. Though certainly the above mentioned seating improprieties are less than safe, my purpose in discussing these incidents is not to highlight danger. Rather it is to demonstrate, using a single category, the range of "misbehavior" that routinely escapes the driver's eye—that fails to distract. Riders quickly ascertain such boundaries.

"Do not distract driver" is, in some sense, a practical strategy. It acknowledges the inherent inability of any human to simultaneously drive and directly supervise passenger behavior. However, the following excerpt from a letter to the editor written by a parent of two bullied passengers, suggests that the boundaries that limit drivers' capacity to supervise sometimes represent unwillingness rather than inability.

> Then you get on a bus, one that in my case has a reputation for being one of the worst buses in town, and the driver doesn't want to hear that so and so hit me, so he says that the one who tells gets the conduct (Reed, 2000).

Conducts are forms filled out by the driver (and in some instances by the passenger malefactor) that detail misbehavior, and which describe prescribed consequences. They are signed by parents as well as school and bus officials. While I have never witnessed a driver give a conduct to the informer rather than to the perpetrator of a school bus infraction, it is true that drivers do not want and do not encourage a constant barrage of tattled tales. With upwards of sixty passengers, such behavior would no doubt prove genuinely distracting and certainly unsafe.

However, as this mother points out in her letter titled: "Who can defend school students?" a school bus environment that discourages reporting can prove equally dangerous:

> Last week, my son was hit in the head with a full bottle of apple juice. The little girl that did it has joined with a group of kids that like to daily harass my son and daughter. These kids call my son a "faggot" and my daughter a "bitch" on almost a daily basis. . . . My children have had to endure what has been going on because they are afraid to tell (Reed, 2000).

I witnessed a similar code of silence on bus No. 21. Passengers, especially outcasts, would endure extreme teasing, verbal threats, and even kicking and hitting. Regardless of motivation—whether it was fear of driver reprimand as the above letter suggests, or the fear of peer reprimand that I witnessed daily—many riders were reluctant to solicit driver intervention. However, it must be noted that on every bus rode there seemed to one or two riders who demonstrated no such compunction toward informing, though the often highly embellished tales these passengers told functioned more as an offensive rather than a defensive maneuver. As the above excerpt illustrates, on the bus passengers learn not to tell. The subtext of the rule sheet's addendum reinforces this knowledge. Its lower line states: "For your own safety don't distract driver through . . . any misbehavior." It should more properly add: "your own or anyone else's." In regard to the lived experience of school bus rules, the bottom line often becomes: For your own safety, know the boundaries, do not attract the driver's attention, and most of all, do not tell.

Mis/conducts

"The purpose of conducts," according to the "Notice to Parents" section on the actual conduct form, "is to inform you [parents] of a disciplinary incident involving the student on the school bus." Though these forms are titled in bold, black letters: "BUS CONDUCT REPORT," only *mis*conduct gets recorded.

Such misconduct is organized into categories, so drivers may simply check off infractions. The vast array of misconduct is organized into nine categories, such as "violation of safety procedures," "fighting-pushing-tripping," and "rude-discourteous-annoying." As might be expected, broad categories leave room for considerable overlap. Take for instance my favorite misconduct category, titled, "excessive mischief." This category was employed in the documentation of an excessively wide range of infractions about which I read: Its boundaries boundless. For example, diverse activities such as chewing on a straw, throwing trash out the window, and "constantly making fun of the driver" were all labeled "excessive mischief." Holding up a sign that read "I love you, lick me hard," or holding your brother's head out the window were labeled similarly.

Additionally, drivers sometimes used more than one category to describe singular offenses. For example, when a junior high girl on bus No. 13 got busted for yelling out the window, the boxes labeled "excessive mischief" and "rude-discourteous-annoying" were both marked. In an attempt to clarify, the driver added a few comments of her own: "She has a small problem of blowing kisses to everyone who is anywhere close to the bus." Such commentary adds clarity to behavior caught in overlapping categories. Parents sometimes add their own comments to conduct reports as well. For instance, one mother

wrote at the top of a conduct report sent home for her to sign: "Having your feet in the aisle is not a reason to give this violation to Stephan. He is a good kid." As this quote reveals, the opinions of drivers, riders, and passengers sometimes diverge.

Conducts reveal overlapping lanes of authority as they converge in school bus culture. Conducts are always issued by the driver (though several drivers have riders write their own conducts), and are also signed by the transportation director and a parent of the malefactor. After the first conduct, the child's school principal or vice principal signs also. In addition to detailing offenses, conducts recommend disciplinary action. First and second offenses usually result in a temporary seating assignment or a parent-student-driver conference. Third and fourth offenses, depending on the specific nature, might get a rider kicked off the bus for a week, or it get him or her in-school suspension. Such suspension takes place at the rider's school site and is overseen by school, not bus, personnel. The decision to permanently expel a child from the bus is made jointly by all parties.

"Referrals," says a 1999 article in *School Bus Fleet,* "give us a window through which we can see students in a different light" (Referrals, 1999, p.16). Referrals also provide a textual intersection from which to see the often-disparate perspectives of bus drivers, school transportation officials, school administrators, parents and passengers overlap/converge/diverge.

Super Vision

> "The perfect disciplinary apparatus would make it possible for a single gaze to see everything constantly. . . . [A] perfect eye that nothing would escape and a centre towards which all gazes would be turned."
>
> (Foucault, 1977, p. 173).

Despite the bus's reliable rearview mirrors, the empirical limitation of the driver is a well known albeit mostly unspoken fact. As has been previously discussed, passengers on every bus demonstrated that they knew that "once they were behind those high-backed seats, they could pretty much do what they pleased" (MacCartney, 1999, p. 52). But passengers also know that their behavior is at constant risk of being surveilled by school bus officials using a video camera enclosed inside a metal, box-shaped housing prominently mounted on the ceiling near the center of the front wall, right next to the rules. A small, official looking note announces the camera's presence: "Notice video camera installed on this bus."

Though the driver's back is turned, the red light on the black box reveals the eye of the video camera to be ever vigilant. However, this is only an illusion. Often the housing is empty, the red light a decoy. Cimarron is rumored to have only three video cameras distributed amongst its forty buses. In addition to responding to requests from drivers, bus officials often place cameras on buses in secret, so as to monitor both the behaviors of drivers and passengers without their knowledge. Articles touting the use of cameras on the bus such as "Video Helps School Bus Drivers Understand the 'Childhood Mind' (1999) reveal that the secret and therefore omnipresent threat of surveillance is designed to produce effects similar to those Foucault (1977) attributes to the Panopticon:

"So to arrange things that the surveillance is permanent in its effects, even if it is discontinuous in its action" (p. 201). Advertisements reading "Decoy cameras available!" (Surveillance, 1998, p.72) demonstrate that the school bus passenger and driver, like the inmate of which Foucault (1977) writes, "must never know whether he is being looked at any one moment; but he must be sure that he may always be so" (p. 201).

Upon embarking upon bus No. 21, several riders habitually checked to see if the locked box was empty or full. Passengers pet, shake, and knock on the "tamper-proof" casing searching for signs (Surveillance, 1998 p. 72). Sometimes Reuben, a junior high boy, put his eye right up to the box and stared deeply into its hollow "eye," hoping to catch a glimpse of what, if anything, lay inside:

Eddie: Shake it.

Reuben: Hold on. Sometimes if the light is right, like not too sunny, you can see it in there.

Eddie: Hurry up man. Well?

Reuben: Can't see. If it is, I guess they'll be seein' my great big eyeball.

Difficult Knowledges

Passengers learn all sorts of things riding the school bus. Looking out the window, they learn about their environment—its social texture and commercial topography—and have the opportunity to observe man-made as well as seasonal changes in its natural landscape. But all that riders see is not necessarily pretty. Sights such as the carcass of a neighborhood dog splattered on the street, or a police car parked in a passenger's

driveway, or a curbside fight between husband and wife, illustrate that this daily ride is not necessarily a scenic drive. Further, the social landscape inside the bus, as has been previously discussed, demonstrates that school bus culture is often no easy ride.

Though passengers describe the bus as "cool," "friendly," and "fun," they also describe it as "unfair," "scary," and "mean." Much of what kids learn from, or about, during the bus ride represents "difficult knowledge" (Britzman, 1998, p.117). Britzman (1998) uses this term to describe "controversial knowledges" perceived as "in need of containment" (p. 133). Such knowledge includes that of cruelty, inequity, victimization, poverty, power, sex, death, and aggression—dangerous knowledges that "education seems to place elsewhere" (Britzman, 1998, p. 117). In looking at what riders learn while navigating the outskirts between school and home, Britzman's (1998) term travels well.

Many of the knowledges I watched passengers grapple with on the bus are indeed difficult. The school bus is a place/time where the public and private worlds of its riders intersect and sometimes crash. Riding the bus, passengers bear constant witness to "new editions of very old conflicts" that refuse to contain themselves (Britzman, 1998, p. 2). Remnants of public violences such as poverty, racism, sexism, and heterosexism intermingle with flashing glimpses of private traumas turned common knowledge. Daily occurrences of teasing, sexual harassment, and sex talk carry their own polyvalent curricula. But what is to be learned? What might riders learn from their own and others' painful encounters in a risky transitional space on the edge of education? (Britzman, 1998, p. 117). Pushing the boundaries of curriculum, difficult knowledge provokes difficult questions for which answers are certainly no cure (Britzman, 1998).

Teasing

Mirror, Mirror on the bus,
Who's a geek and who's one of us?

Taunting, teasing, and other verbal play designed to provoke irritation, anger, humiliation, or fear constituted a fundamental discursive practice on the school bus. Such talk was also often used to "enrich" the social atmosphere (Corsaro, 1997, p. 147). Exchanges such as the following were a common feature of school bus culture:

Thad: "You're a chapstick-eater, crack-head, fudge-packer."

Unique: "Shut up, fat turd."

This repartee between a White male and a female African-American elementary passenger on bus No. 21 illustrates the most prominent teasing pattern on the bus as well as how such patterns situate themselves in time and space.

The above sample represents one whole teasing episode in its entirety. In the mobile milieu of school bus culture, this sort of one-shot spar is by far the most common pattern of teasing. Almost salutary in frequency and rhythm, such jabbing usually did not take hold, and episodes failed to escalate. It was common practice for passengers to flee after the first verbal punches were exchanged—particularly in confrontations that seemed potentially perilous. Take the above episode, for example. After being called a fat turd, Thad (who was considered by riders to be "chunky") simply changed seats. Conversely, riders, after delivering a potent initial zinger, stood to gain social status by moving while they were ahead. Also, as has been previously noted, such scattering behavior nearly entirely precluded the possibility of driver intervention.

This was an effective conflict resolution technique for most passengers. However, for those whose social mobility was restricted, moving offered no escape. When Willy (an openly ostracized middle school passenger on No. 21) fled conflict by moving, he generally found more of the same wherever he went. As a cross-age pariah, he was in near perpetual motion. With no safe place, his only refuge was the socially stigmatic front seat.

Some riders positioned the delivery of taunts and threats in relation to time as well as space. On many occasions I watched riders instigate scraps right before their teasing object's bus stop or that of their own. Tim (a high school youth shelter resident who rode No. 21 for a time) routinely initiated incidents with backseater Herkeesha immediately before his stop. Right before Tim disembarked, he would call her a derogatory name or insinuate that Herkeesha had sexual interest in one of his friends. She often got reprimanded by the driver for yelling retaliatory profanities out the window at Tim as he sauntered away from the bus. In another, more frightening instance, I saw Andrew, a multi-pierced, spiky-haired ninth-grader in a torn leather jacket, point his finger at a small fourth grade boy wearing a tie and warn: "You better watch it ya little gay wad. I'm gonna beat your head in." As the fourth-grader got up to disembark, Andrew added: "Remember, I know where you live." Riders utilize spatial and temporal constraints to both avert conflict and to enhance it sometimes quite frightening ways.

Andrew's reminder highlights a distinct feature of school bus culture. Riders do know where one another live, in what kind of neighborhoods and homes, and with whom. As private lives merge into public, it becomes difficult to hide.

The bus gives kids a chance to see how other kids live. Passengers utilized this data to add a personal touch to taunts that remained public in their sometimes explicit, but

more often implicit, reinforcement of stereotypical constructions of race, class, gender, age, and sexual identity. For example, as No. 21 passed the public housing unit one afternoon, the sight of an African-American woman waiting at the school bus stop prompted Todd (a White high-schooler) to initiate the following exchange with Tabitha (an African-American high-schooler):

> Todd: Hey, Tabitha there's your mom. She on welfare or somethin'? Hey everybody, Tabitha's on welfare.
>
> Tabitha: She works.
>
> Todd: Selling crack.

This exchange demonstrates a common teasing strategy whereby passengers put personal facts to work in combination with social stereotypes to fashion taunts, which capitalize on public prejudice, yet resonate with the sting of intimate attack. In the above exchange, Todd mobilizes knowledge gained from past bus rides in a ways that reinforce common racist, classist, and sexist constructions of "the welfare mother." While this strategy is certainly utilized in other venues such as school, traveling the peripheries of private spheres gives school bus passengers increased access to the private geographies of bus mates. Positioned in a double-jeopardy dynamic, this in turn makes all passengers more vulnerable, but not necessarily equally.

Family Matters

Though passengers make fun of one another's houses, yards, cars, pets, parents, and siblings, families proved to be points of particular vulnerability. "Your mother is a lesbian," or, "Your father is a fag" were particularly common taunts and were not taken

lightly. Calling the heterosexuality of another rider's parents into question was nearly guaranteed to negatively escalate verbal exchange, and often resulted in formal conducts issued by the driver. As has been previously noted, this sort of taunt precipitated the only real physical fight between non-siblings that I witnessed on any bus. Additionally, if a parent entered the bus for any reason, this was fodder for jokes featuring the sexuality of said parent for days on end. Likewise, siblings were popular subjects of such "ridicule."

In school, siblings are usually separated by grade or school site. Not so on the bus, where categories of familial affiliation proved significantly salient. Often when I asked riders: "Who's that?" in relation to another passenger, they responded not by name but by affiliation: "Oh that's Tony's step-brother." On the bus, riders seem to know in detail how everyone is related, and all riders learn "coolness" runs in the family. I once witnessed a group of three (two African-Americans and one Native American) middle school girls draw an elaborate family tree as proof to other riders how exactly it was that they were distant cousins of the same "cool" White high school boy.

It is also a fact on the bus that "uncoolness" runs in families. Riders were verbally skewered for even the slightest social faux pas on the part of their siblings. The profanity of older siblings was a constant source of embarrassment for elementary riders. The general goofiness of younger siblings served as constant fodder for taunts aimed at their older kin. More generically, passengers often made fun of each other's siblings without regards to specific behaviors. In a departure from the one-shot spar, passengers would say to a rider something equivalent to: "Your brother (sister) is a fag (lesbian), retard" and then other riders would ask their sibling, "So, what's it like to be a lesbian (fag, retard)?"

Besides irritating the siblings individually, such double-timing barbs, as they made their way around the bus, usually wound up pitting siblings against each other as well.

Contrary to the familiar image of siblings standing up for one another, having a sibling on the bus made riders more vulnerable in some cases. In addition to being teased about one another, siblings often picked on each other. Though some siblings stuck together, the worst arguments, most vicious teasing, and the largest number of physical fights on the bus occur between siblings. Bus No. 21 provides many examples of less-than-pleasant and event violent sibling relationships. In rare instances when half-sisters Herkeesha, Karen, and Unique acknowledged one another's presence on the bus, it was brief and usually ended with: "Shut up you ugly bitch," or some other term of anti-endearment. Middle-schooler Jerita perpetually tattled on her first grade brother TJ. and Jacob was quick to offer the entire bus (circumspect) personal evidence aimed at calling his older brother Jared's heterosexuality into question: "He's like, he watches the Family Channel everyday, and takes pink bubbly baths. He's like transsexual."

Further, teasing was more likely to turn physical when it involved siblings. For example, backseaters Eddie and Tonya were nearly as likely to exchange punches as they were insults. With alarming frequency, I saw junior high-schooler Todd hold his seven-year-old brother Roger in a modified headlock until he cried. After physically separating a pair of second grade brothers—who spent their time at the bus stop wrestling in the gravel and passed most of every bus trip in perpetual scuffle—I tried to distract them through small talk. I asked, "What are you going to be for Halloween?" The smaller of the two, whose arms and face were speckled with little scratches and bruises, responded: "Somebody who got beat up by my brother."

Indeed, discussions with the Transportation Director indicated that physical fighting of this sort between siblings was common on the bus. My review of two months' worth of conduct slips written on multiple buses concurs. Contrary to literature that configures the school bus as an extension of the classroom, the trajectory linking school and home is not a one-way street. Home-style violences—habitual manifestations of sibling rivalries—travel with students onto the bus, and perhaps even further into school.

Sexual Harassment

Sexual allusions and terms permeate school bus discourse. Since so much of the harassment—teasing, taunting, and needling—that occurs on the bus is either explicitly or implicitly sexual, I found the conceptual framework of sexual harassment useful in examining such behavior.

In 1993, the American Association of University Women (AAUW) released Hostile Hallways: The AAUW Survey On Sexual Harassment in America's Schools. According to this study focusing on schools, you have been a victim of sexual harassment if anyone (teachers, school employees, or students) has done any of the following against your will:

> ***Made sexual comments, jokes, gestures, or looks in your presence; **showed, gave or left you sexual pictures, photographs, illustrations, messages, or notes; **Wrote sexual messages/graffiti about you on the bathroom walls, in locker rooms, etc.; *Spread sexual rumors about you; ***Said you were gay or lesbian; Spied on you as you dressed or showered at school; *Flashed or mooned you;

*Touched, grabbed, or pinched you in a sexual way; **Intentionally brushed against you in a sexual way; Pulled your clothing off or down; **Blocked your way or cornered you in a sexual way; *Forced you to kiss him or /her; *Forced you to do something sexual, other that kissing (p. 5, quoted in deMarrais & LeCompte, 1999, p. 319).

The asterisks are my addition. One asterisk indicates activities that I saw occur on bus No. 21 at least once. Two asterisks indicate activities that I saw more than once, and three asterisks indicate daily occurrences.

As the above asterisks illustrate, sexual harassment is a common occurrence on bus No. 21. My experiences on other buses proved likewise. Passengers knew and freely used the parlance of sexual harassment. Further, riders shared a remarkably unified understanding of what forms of speech or behavior constituted its boundaries. When enacted by a male, talking specifically about or touching specific regions of female bodies was considered sexual harassment. Tim's command to Tina: "Show me your tits," was a clear case of sexual harassment as understood on the bus. Likewise, even more veiled references to female body parts fell within the boundaries of sexual harassment. Take for example when Todd told Tammy: "You should work at Hooters (a restaurant known for its buxom waitresses in tight T-shirts). You would *fit* right in." The two male and three female riders who witnessed the event all agreed it was sexual harassment.

However, when elementary student Libby called seventh-grader Willy a "pencil-dick," the language of sexual harassment was not put into play. Likewise, the incident in which backseater girls pleaded with middle-schooler Beaux to take off his shirt, and even tugged on it a bit, was not constructed as sexually harassing. Similarly, same-sex

references or touching (even contested body parts) did not fall within the highly gendered, heterosexist boundaries of sexual harassment constructed by school bus passengers.

Although I saw several isolated physical incidents such as sexual pinching or bra-snapping, verbal displays were far more prevalent. (Though as I witnessed on more than several occasions, narrow aisles certainly provide fertile ground for wandering hands.) As the discussion of "backseat bad-asses" and teasing illustrated, on the bus, power is most often wielded discursively.

Sex Talk. On bus No. 21, sexual language—"medical" and slang terms describing sexual acts and genitalia—permeated discursive practice. Such language was sometimes used in textual offenses. I caught a glimpse of an anonymously authored note asking: "Do you want to buy a condom," whose recipient was an embarrassed fifth grade girl. One day male middle school passengers held signs that read: "Suck my dick?" out the back window for the reading displeasure of the female drivers in cars paused behind the bus at red lights. "Tammy is a slut" was written on the back of a middle section seat for three days before it was erased.

More prevalent, however, were oral forms of illicit speeches. Passengers used sexually explicit slang evoking graphic sexual images toward a variety of ends—such as to entertain, provoke, frighten, disgust, intimidate, and threaten—but most often to harass one another. Such language was routinely incorporated into taunts in graphic yet predictable ways. The time-honored oedipality "motherfucker" was a favorite, as were references to oral sex, onanism, and bestiality. Although these allusions (even among elementary riders) often exhibited a shocking range of detailed sexual knowledges, the discursive forms these allusions took proved provincial:

Herkeesha: "You want it in the ass."

Tina: "According to Lorenzo, *you* wanted it in the ass last night."

Herkeesha: "No *you* do."

On one level, this exchange represents a good example of what Corsaro (1997) terms harmless "oppositional talk." Although the above imagery evoked by these teenage girls is vividly sexual, the exchange betrays itself as little more than a sexually graphic form of "I know you are but what am I?" But as Irvine (1995) notes in specific reference to sexual language: "Language is not neutral, either culturally or politically. . . . Rather our words, symbols, images, and metaphors are deeply reflective of our social norms and cultural values" (p.110).

In its allusions abnegating sexual practices most commonly associated with homosexual males, the subtext of the above is implicitly homophobic. According to Irvine (1995), "homophobia . . . serves as a mechanism to regulate sexuality, to push people in the direction of a heterosexual identification (p. 84). On the bus, explicit as well as implicit references to homosexuality were used in derogatory ways to rigidly inscribe heterosexuality. Not one bus ride passed without such an occurrence. Every day, on every bus I rode, riders as young as five years old used terms such as gay wad, lesbo, fudge-packer, or faggot as insults. Betraying its own heterosexist thrust, AAUW (1993) calls calling someone gay or lesbian sexual harassment. As has previously been discussed, calling someone's heterosexuality into question on the bus represents fighting words. The bus is not a safe place for even talk of being gay.

If, as Irvine (1995) contends, "the enormous range of words for genitalia compared to other body parts . . . illustrates the cultural salience of, and anxiety about,

these areas of the body," then certainly the wide range and prevalence of sex talk on the bus, particularly in regards to homosexuality, reveals the cultural salience of —and anxiety about—this body of knowledge (p. 113). Further, perhaps the omnipresence of difficult sexual knowledges as they manifest themselves on educational outskirts, such as the bus, point to conspicuous absences inside school curriculum—absences in regards to a sex education characterized by gaps in cultural relevancy (Irvine, 1995), "widespread denial of the existence of gay youth in our classrooms" (Silin, 1995, p.72), and an enduring "passion for ignorance" (Britzman, 1998; Silin, 1995).

Rumors of the Masturbating Child

In addition to "risky" discursive practices such as teasing, sexual harassment, and sex talk, I often witnessed passengers use their bodies to push the boundaries of decorum. On No. 21, fourth-grader Unique was fond of demonstrating her double jointedness by bending her fingers all the way back for my benefit. Peter sometimes taunted his compatriots by putting their possessions—such as pencils and erasers—in his nose. I witnessed riders on every bus I rode make vulgar gestures at one another and/or at passing vehicles.

These acts, considered to be disgusting, were revealing nonetheless, pointing to the complex ways in which riders used their bodies to mediate school bus culture. Likewise, the following discussion about difficult bodies—corporeal and epistemological— push boundaries of decorum, yet prove similarly revealing.

As if to test my mettle or perhaps pique my interest, early in my fieldwork Dan (No. 21's driver) told me an unsettling story. "You should have been on last week," he

began. As the tale goes, Marcus was caught—by other passengers and the video camera—indulging in what Foucault (1978) describes as the "child's vice," and then flinging the fruits of his labor at fellow passengers (p.42). The driver concluded the story by saying, "Marcus is off for three weeks and then in front for the rest of the year. I won't let him scare my little kids like that again." Passengers only mentioned this incident to me three times and would not elaborate.

This rumor was disturbing. Dan used terms such as "perversion" and "deviance" with an unsettling pseudo-psychological authority that put notions of childhood innocence at risk. All this talk about "borderline sexually predatory behavior" (Dan's term) made me realize I was in unfamiliar—perhaps even dangerous—territory. Like Dan's "little kids," I became anxious. So anxious, in fact, that I never corroborated Dan's story with school bus officials, nor could I bring myself to ask to see the tapes of Marcus' transgression.

To say I felt violated is an overstatement, but to explore these rumors of sexual violation as violations in themselves is not entirely out of line. While Dan's forthcomingness with details of deviance served my research well, it was not without its own improprieties. According to the AAUW (1993), sexual gossip that makes one uncomfortable does constitute sexual harassment. But more than that, as gossip, rumors make for unstable data. Traveling the borderlands between fact and fiction, these rumors carried an uneasy influence.

In his exploration of nineteenth-century rumors of the masturbating child, Foucault (1978) suggests that, rather than regulating sexual discourse, such discursive sites "radiated discourses aimed at sex, intensifying people's awareness of it as a constant

danger, and this in turn created a further incentive to talk about it" (p.31). No. 21's rumors functioned similarly to simultaneously fortify and violate boundaries constructing adolescent bodies as both endangered and dangerous. Likewise, I wonder how my accounts of sexual improprieties on the school bus, in relation to regulating discourses of sexual harassment, might simultaneously function as harassment of disturbing school-bus sexualities that I do not fully understand.

Further, this unverified, thus "invalid," story blurs boundaries between data. Rumors point to dangerous discourses occupying vast chasms of hearsay, mostly impenetrable by the empiricalities of researchers, and inextricable from other more "valid" forms of knowledge. Encapsulated in such discourse, school bus rumors pointed simultaneously to the vulnerabilities of youth constructed as endangered and dangerous, and to my own similar vulnerabilities as a researcher: Endangered by sometimes-nebulous boundaries of adulthood, subjectivity, and research ethics, and simultaneously dangerous in my capacity to violate such borders (Foucault, 1978).

Concluding Comments

This chapter's discussion of spatial regimes, power structures, hierarchies, rumors, gossip, tough talk, and sexual harassment demonstrates that the process of coming to know in the kid-mediated space of school bus culture is often a rough road. Knowledges beyond the boundaries of formal curriculum emerge on the bus in sometimes startling ways that disturb taken for granted assumptions about social class, gender, race and age. Yet such knowledge (which often presents difficulties for educators) also functions more routinely to compose the "abrasive potency" of passenger's daily

commute. Examinations of difficult knowledges—featuring broken rules, teasing, sexual harassment, and other moving violations—are not intended to overshadow the seemingly more pedestrian joys and difficulties of "just getting by" on the bus (Britzman, 1998, p.39).

CHAPTER FIVE

Construction Ahead

In this, the final chapter, I engage ethnography in a bit of creative cartography. I do so by configuring (and reconfiguring) school bus culture in multiple positions along the uneven surfaces of childhood's landscape, in relation to a tangle of curricular trajectories shot through with safety-talk.

Starting with school, I examine school bus culture along a trajectory of extension in relation to the boundaries of education. School bus culture is then configured along the overlapping curves of interpenetrating spheres where public and private geographies merge. Next I explore school bus culture in relation to the discourse of safety, and wind up in the risky liminal space on the outskirts between school and home. This section concludes by mapping multiple points of departure along which further research might travel.

School Zone

The previous chapter reveals that there is a lot to be learned on and from the school bus. The bus provides a mobile intersection where common and difficult knowledges merge and circulate across spatial and social boundaries. Learning that occurs on the bus is considered "extracurricular." As has been discussed, such definition places school bus learning outside the "formal" curriculum while positioning the school bus outside traditionally defined school spaces. Further, the ride to and from school might be situated temporally as "out-of-school" time (Schubert, 1981, p.1). Yet literature

specific to the school bus is driven by the notion that the school day begins and ends, not at school or home, but rather on the bus (Debruyn, 1985; Engel, 1999; Huffman, 1999; Thomas, 1984). This discursive collision at education's edge causes me to revisit Nespor's (1997) question: "What do we talk about when we talk about schools?" (p. xi).

In order to orient school bus culture in relation to education proper, I begin by expanding and then contracting elastic notions—prevalent in school bus discourse—of the school bus as an extension of the classroom. In terms of discourse, spatiality, driver authority, passenger management, and student bodies: how does school bus culture converge with that found in school? And at what points do they diverge?

As noted in chapter two, very little academic research examines issues of school transportation exists. Further, despite its integral role in school consolidation, school desegregation, and school inclusion, the school bus is conspicuously absent from scholarly accounts of educational histories. While school ethnography enjoys an increasingly rich tradition, other ethnographers have yet to embark upon explorations into the lived experience of school bus culture. With the exception of Coles (1971), Fox, (1996), Franklin (1983) and Johns (1928), school transportation remains mostly beyond the boundaries of educational discourse deemed academic.

Conversely, literature specific to pupil transportation situates the school bus firmly within an educational context. Aimed at school administrators, periodicals such as *School Bus Fleet*, and *School Transportation News* discuss issues specific to the school bus, ranging from driver retention and passenger management to gas prices and brake repair, as part of broader educational discourse. Whether conceptualized as the foundation of the classroom (or a component or extension of), in "industry" periodicals, school

transportation is portrayed as "a necessary part of a sound educational program" (Davis, 1998, p.4). Some articles go farther. Vail (1984) asserts: "The bus is a classroom too" (p.36).

Spatial Relations

In attempts to examine the school bus in relation to education, a glimpse at the spatial relations within the specific geography of Cimarron Public Schools proves revealing. Cimarron's school transportation department, as described in chapter three, is located in the Mann Educational Service Center. This building also houses the district shipping dock, the school-wide mail office, the building and grounds department, a technology training lab, the district's school nurse and, until recently, the school lunch program's administrative offices (the lunch program was relocated to a prefabricated metal building just inside the Cimarron city limits). Besides these services, the building houses a Title I video conference center and a professional development center that serve in both district and state capacities as regional bases for programs administered in conjunction with the Oklahoma State Department of Education. Additionally, the Mann Service Center is home to the Cimarron Alternative Academy, serving high school dropouts, students expelled from "regular" junior or high schools, and a limited number of "at risk" middle-schoolers.

The Mann Service Center is located a little less than half a mile away from what is known in Cimarron as the "board building." Located on Main Street, this modern building houses the district's superintendent and his assistants, as well as administrators in charge of federal programs. Additionally, the school board meets in its "board room"

the second Tuesday of each month to hash out policy and other important educational issues affecting Cimarron Public Schools. The services housed in this building on Main Street are defined as "central administration." The vast array of activities that take place (down the road on a side street) in the Mann Service Center are lumped together and termed "auxiliary."

The processes through which district space is divvied-up in relation to wider spatial strategies represent an important consideration (Massey, 1998). Material realities often determine what and who goes where. For instance, the location of the Mann Service Center, nestled as it is between two major thoroughfares, makes it a convenient space to launch the school bus fleet. Other architectural realities make the Mann Service Center conducive to the other services it houses. But as Massey (1998) suggests in regards to the distribution of space:

> Fencing off space may also, on the other hand, be an expression of attempts to dominate, and to control and define others. What is clear is that such strategies of spatial organisation are deeply bound up with the social production of identities. (p.126-127)

School transportation's spatial location in relation to "central" administrative services, not only reveals its peripheral position. As Massey (1998) might argue, it is in part through this marginal spatiality that the school bus' identity as auxiliary actually becomes constituted. Defined as "auxiliary services," realities central to students' daily educational experience—such as school transportation and school lunches—are situated on the margins of educational matters considered central in Cimarron Public Schools. The status enjoyed by central administration does not extend to auxiliary services.

Lanes of Authority

Authority looks different—perhaps even casual—on the bus. Drivers dress much like their passengers. They wear mostly jeans and T-shirts. On several particularly hot days, I saw drivers in cut-off shorts. On No. 21, passenger authority—embodied by a mostly African-American, low SES, female group—looked different than it often does in classrooms that are often still racist, sexist, and classist. Kids generally call drivers, unlike teachers, by their first name. When a college-aged substitute driver requested that passengers on No. 21 call her Miss G., riders were indignant: "Hel-lo. . . . She's like a driver. I'm not calling miss anything, except maybe Miss Bitch." Other differences exist as well.

Unlike teachers, drivers cannot easily use their body to enforce authority. Physically and spatially absorbed in the act of driving, the driver is effectively fixed in place. In order to reprimand passengers "discreetly," drivers have to call passengers to the front. In order to make themselves heard, drivers have to yell. The discursive limits of authority are also broader on the bus than those found in schools. Passengers say things to drivers, and vice versa, that would not be tolerated in a classroom setting. It was not uncommon for passengers to share dirty jokes with drivers. On more than one occasion, I heard passengers tell racist, sexist, and heterosexist jokes to drivers as well. Passengers also asked drivers questions that pushed boundaries of authority. For example: "What's your phone number?"; "Are your kids fat too?"; "Do you have sex with your boyfriend?"; "How old do you have to be to buy condoms?"; and "You used to be a pill-head, right?"

Once in a while drivers pushed discursive boundaries as well, such as this exchange between a driver and a fifth-grade boy following an altercation:

Perry: "I hate you. (adds under his breath) Motherfucker."

Driver: "Well I don't like you too much either right now, you little shit."

Upon arriving back at the bus barn, this driver immediately (and sheepishly) informed the transportation director what had transpired. Though I sensed the driver's very genuine remorse, I also sensed that he was not too worried about the consequences. On the school bus, discursive license beyond that typically allowed in classrooms is extended to both drivers and passengers.

Passenger Management. When I asked drivers about discipline issues, it was not uncommon to hear them talk in terms of "passenger management." Driver language often betrayed links to educational discourse. This link is evident in Dan's (one of No. 21's drivers) comment regarding the common disciplinary practice of writing conducts: "I don't give conducts. Mine is more like an intervention strategy." Similarly, another driver told me: "You know, I try and model good behavior for the kids. Modeling is real important."

Such discourse is common in school bus literature as well. Advertisements and articles often appropriate educational discourse concerning "classroom management," extending it to include "passenger management" (Cannon, 1999, 1999-b; Engle, 1999; MacCartney, 1999; Resource, 1998 Stewart, 1989; Vail, 1997). Though the languages of passenger and student management often converge, the ways in which such management was embodied on the bus often represented a divergence from classroom practices. As

was established in chapter four, on the school bus rules are negotiated. Since empirical limitations make it nearly impossible to enforce rules like "no food or drink," such rules are often simply struck—either implicitly or explicitly—from the rule sheets. On No. 21, transgressions regarding proper seating, profanity, and others were often overlooked until they became what drivers considered "a problem." In the kid-mediated space of the school bus, the ways in which drivers and passengers wield and navigate authority represent a departure from practices of classroom management. Rules are under perpetual stretch.

Chapter four revealed technologies of power to be at work in the distribution of bodies to and from school, and in the distribution of bodies on the bus. District-defined routes, age segregation, and seating patterns unfold as spatial regimes aimed at regulating the flow of bodies. But school bus culture—like that of the classroom—also requires regulation of bodily ebbs and flows.

Like traditional schoolroom students, passengers are expected to discipline their bodies in accordance with the requirements specific to the space. Passengers have to endure heat and cold. Early in the school year, as bodies adjust to the sweaty heat and to the bus' choppy ride, puke is prevalent. Pukers are persecuted. Delicate equilibriums have to be trained to tolerate constant motion and endless bumps. There are no stops for bathroom breaks. Riders told to "hold it" often do so for over one and a half-hours (researchers even longer). Passengers, like traditional students, are asked to sit in their seats, facing the front where the authority figure is positioned. Unlike teachers, drivers lead in rear-view, eyes on the road and back to passengers. Despite the endless opportunities to sit improperly, at any given moment on the bus most passengers sit with

a remarkable propriety that embodies a "correct training" much like that found in the "docile bodies" inhabiting the classroom (Foucault, 1977). However, as discussions in chapter four also reveal, school bus culture is in constant motion.

Though "proper" seating is the norm, improprieties abound. As has been addressed previously, riders stretch boundaries of proper seating by stretching out or lounging in their seats. Or they simply "get away with," say, standing on their head or wriggling along the floor. Passengers, unlike classroom students, are also generally in a position to "get on" with whom they choose, or to "get away from" social discomfort by selecting their own seats and switching when necessary. Chapter four highlights the way social hierarchies—similar but not identical to those observed in schools—regulate such movements. The social mobilities that mediate school bus culture are embedded in and embodied by bodies in motion.

Stretching Space and Enveloping Off-Time

Though school-type discourse reaches into driver talk, and the correct training of student bodies travels, the concept of extension is a stretch. Riders do not experience the time spent on the bus as school time. They giggled when, early in my fieldwork, I asked them what they learned on the bus. As my nine-year-old niece reminds in this regard: "Remember this is kids off time."

In terms of space, Cimarron's educational geography is telling. In relation to Cimarron Public Schools (as well as in relation to the broader boundaries of educational discourse), school transportation, along with other "mundane' realities of school life, is marginalized. On one hand, the language of extension represents school transportation's

quite legitimate wish to legitimize itself as educational. On the other hand, such language represents an example of schooling's increasing attempts to lay claim on kid-mediated spaces and on "extracurricular" time (Adler & Adler, 1998-b). As Massey (1998) writes:

> If it is important to begin by conceptualizing spaces in terms of a complexity of interacting social relations, it is also important to recognize that within that open complexity both individuals and social groups are constantly engaged in efforts to territoralise, to claim spaces, to include some and exclude others from particular areas. (P.126)

Time spent traveling the complex, contested territory on the periphery of formal education reveals that important knowledges often dwell in the lacunae of "empty time" (Fox, 1996), and that passengers still learn plenty outside the grasp of "the extending arm of the classroom" (Mills, 1973, p.10).

Merging Traffic

> Perhaps our life is still governed by a certain number of oppositions that remain inviolable, that our institutions and practices have not dared to break down. These are oppositions we regard as simple givens: for example, between private space and public space, between family space and social space, between cultural space and useful space, between the space of leisure and that of work.
>
> (Foucault, 1986)

Even still, the school bus is positioned precariously. Unlike the curricular spaces described by Schubert (1981) as "out-of-school," or by Langeveld (1983) as "outside," school bus culture can neither be neatly contained inside nor situated as exclusively outside of the institutions whose peripheries it travels. Mapping this overlap is not easy.

Unclear boundaries make for complex cartography. But as Nespor (1997) writes regarding education: "The debate becomes less simple, but more constructive, when we focus on the dense interconnections among various actors and processes" (p. xi).

What follows is a brief discussion of overt conjunctions—shared narratives of conduct, material culture, social circles, sibling relationships,—that point to the often more subtle interpenetrations of public and private that converge to construct school bus culture.

Material Culture

The things riders carry with them on the bus reveal a material culture influenced by both home and school. In the morning, riders often entered the bus clutching remaining tidbits of breakfast in one hand and school lunches fresh from sleepy morning kitchens in the other. As this quote from Herkeesha—who usually enjoyed breakfasting on oranges and was constantly chided for leaving peelings on the bus floor—illustrates, the eating habits of riders often reveal more than preference: " Don't be lookin' at me. No orange peel today, all week. My mom can't afford em." Material culture points to material realities. Items such as cell phones, band or orchestra instruments, and elaborate leather albums for Pokemon cards—all prevalent on buses that traveled more affluent routes—were not part of the material culture found on No. 21.

Nearly all riders got on and off the bus with a backpack or school bag of some sort. Strapped squarely to bony backs, slung sloppily over one shoulder, or dragged behind weary bodies, these ubiquitous packs contained a melange of public and private items. "Personal" items such as hairspray, makeup, fungus creme, nail clippers,

toothbrushes, and deodorant were routinely pulled out of bags and put to use on the bus. While contents classified as school supplies took up considerable space, bags also contained items forbidden at school, such as candy, toys, Pokemon cards, Walkmans, cigarettes, and weapons. On No. 21, passengers "jammed out" with Walkmans, played with toys, traded Pokemon cards, sold candy and covertly showed off illicit materials. The school bus served as "safe-zone" to display and exchange material items that were central to peer culture but strictly off limits in school culture.

Additionally, I saw passengers smuggle more intimate bits of home-life—pillows, pets, siblings, and parents (only once)—with them to school via the bus. The school bus serves as a conduit of sorts through which the material and not-so-material cultures of private life penetrates public spaces.

Social Circles

On the bus, social and spatial relations swirl. For example, No. 21's "backseat bad-asses" are undeniably "tight." Per the discussion in chapter four, Herkeesha, Tonya, Tina, and Tabitha form an impenetrable social circle whose boundaries are not fluid. Social boundaries are maintained spatially, as backseaters use tough talk to put literal space between them and other riders, and to separate themselves from the authority of the driver. However, chapter four also reveals that outside of the bus, the circle does not hold.

School bus routes regulate geographical relations and reconfigure the spatial relations of social bodies. New propinquities, situated in space and time, take hold. Davies (1982) remarks in this regard: "Children . . . see proximity, or being with someone, as the first and basic element of friendships (p. 68). The inherent instability of

school bus populations turns proximity plural. The distribution of embarking, disembarking, and seat switching passengers gives rise to remarkable social mobility. Uniquely situated in space and time, the school bus serves as a mobile intersection in social space where circular configurations of friendship found at school and home give way to what Massey (1998) terms "constellations of temporary coherence" (p. 125). As the school bus navigates often incoherent borders, social circles merge, crash, and morph, often giving rise to new concentric configurations.

Irvine (1995) notes: "The family is the invisible but powerful presence in the classroom. Every lesson gets filtered through earlier messages from the family" (p. 144). As chapter four illustrates, the powerful presence of family is far more visible on the bus. Matters of family quickly become common knowledge. Indiscreet parents who dare stand on the porch in their bathrobes, or enter the bus momentarily to give the driver a plate of cookies or to deliver a forgotten lunch, quickly become voyeuristic objects of public consumption and are made the subject of jeers and taunts.

Likewise, siblings cannot escape familial bonds on the bus itself. Private meets public as brothers and sisters separated during school hours reunite. As chapter four reveals, this is rarely a wholly harmonious convergence. Riders' social identity is a tangle of trajectories intertwined with family ties that often seem to function much like fetters—though not always. Some siblings carved out space for themselves on the bus by ignoring one another.

Some siblings, as in the following example, got along quite well. My second day on No. 21, as the route headed to its last stop, I watched the last two remaining passengers playing together in the front seat. The six-year-old girl and seven-year-old boy

were wrestling and laughing hysterically. These played like this for nearly five minutes before they got off the bus and chased each other, squealing, down their long driveway. "It must be nice," commented the driver, "to have your sister for a best friend." Two days later, I witnessed the idyllic siblings mentioned above engaged in a wicked scratching fight. Such juxtaposition points to the complexity and variance both within as well as among family networks.

Much of the knowledges—both common and difficult—on No. 21 were indeed, as Irvine (1995) suggests, filtered through a complex network of family knowledges. The epistemological elements of such family networks—particularly in regards to sibling relationships—remain largely uncharted by educational thought. According to Irvine (1995): "Families are an important social context in which individuals learn about risk" (p. 141). Likewise, the risky social context of school bus culture provides an opportunity to learn from the dense interconnections of sibling relationships and the interpenetration of private and public spheres.

In certain circumstances borders provide security and comfort (Sibley, 1995, p. 32). Take for instance, chapter four. Divided into two parts, its analysis is separated into concerns labeled structural and curricular. While such bifurcation gives shape to narrative, it does not accurately map the chaotic, concentric configurations of school bus culture. Matters of spatial distribution such as routes, and seating, merge with structures of social distribution such as age-stratification and social hierarchies. Both are inextricable from the common and difficult knowledges which compose the everyday curriculum of school bus culture. Likewise distinctions between common and difficult knowledges rapidly dissolve on the school bus.

As this study illustrates, school bus culture poses multiple challenges to common oppositional assumptions. Discursive practices, self-regulation, surveillance, social hierarchies, and adult authority emerge on the bus in ways identical, similar, unique, and in opposition to the ways in which such practices manifest themselves in other milieus. As Sibley (1995) writes, "Problems arise when the separation of things into unlike categories is unattainable" (p. 32) Positioned betwixt and between—in the overlap of interpenetrating spheres—school bus culture emerges as a risky liminal space defined exclusively by neither school nor home.

Dangerous Intersection

"Everything is Dangerous."
Michel Foucault

"Safety is everything," reads the heading of a nationally distributed brochure on school transportation (DeBruyn, 1985). Indeed, review of school bus literature does reveal issues of safety to be a central component of school transportation discourse. Likewise all the bus drivers I encountered expressed genuine concern for the safety—physical and otherwise—of their riders. They proved to be good, careful drivers who were conscientious in their attention to details of safety. During my fieldwork, no rider suffered seriously physical injury—yet risk remained. The following sections briefly situate school bus culture in relation to risks associated with liminality, by looking at issues of bodily harm, cerebral purity and other uneasy elements of potential peril.

Liminality

The school bus is a space/time of many minglings. Private and public geographies—mediated by salient landscapes of power, themselves saturated with fusing arrangements of race, social class, gender and age—converge in the mobile transitional space/time of school bus culture. Holman (1992) describes a similar space/time in his definition of liminality: "The state of being on a threshold in space or time; a place where many social meanings congregate" (p. 266). In his explorations of rites of passage, Turner (1967), characterizes liminality similarly as a social zone situated betwixt and between powerful systems of meaning "which is neither this nor that, but both" (p. 99). In my exploration of the daily rites of passage embodied by school bus culture, I use this notion of liminality to describe a risky transitional ride between school and home where public and private knowledges intersect.

According to Sibley (1995): "For the individual or group socialised into believing that the separation of categories is necessary or desirable, the liminal zone is a source of anxiety" (p.33). Fox (1996) expresses this sort of anxiety when he describes the bus as an "unnatural social setting" (p.27). As previous chapters have discussed, the mostly kid-mediated and age-integrated culture on the school bus travels the "neither" regions between notions of school and home, public and private, and curricular and extracurricular. Such a liminal trip is riddled with risk.

As Irvine (1995) reminds: "Risk is not a universally shared concept. Risk is a set of ideas and beliefs about what makes us safe and what puts us in danger" (p. 135). The notion of risk varied among school transportation literature, school bus drivers, and

passengers. School transportation literature and drivers tended to focus on physical dangers posed by mechanical and design failures, unsafe driving, traffic, and violence. Drivers often framed these same fears in relation to the unsafe behavior of passengers or other drivers. Passengers themselves expressed some fear in regards to physical safety, but more often demonstrated uneasiness in regards to the difficult knowledges of gossip, teasing, and sexual harassment. The following discussions counterbalance threats to bodily harm in relation to risks less corporeal.

As was noted in chapter four, "unnatural" mixed routes demonstrated a greater degree of physical restraint than did those segregated by age. On elementary-only routes, passengers often stretched safety limits beyond capacity. In addition to the improprieties noted in chapter four, I watched first-grade passengers vault over bus seats while the bus was in motion, arrange themselves into passenger piles four people high, and contort themselves in such a way as to dangle their feet out the window. Also, young passengers new to seat-switching would often miscalculate pauses in motion and change seats while the bus was moving. Further, these routes were often sonically disorienting. High-pitched squealing, singing, and screeching were routine. This behavior was distracting to drivers who were busy trying to drive.

On mixed routes, older passengers curbed such behavior. Fueled more by impatience than benevolence, older passengers would often help indecisive youngsters find a seat, thus reducing the common occurrence of a driver pulling out before passengers were seated. Older passengers were also more adept than their younger counterparts at squelching squealing, correcting seating infractions, resolving minor conflicts, and in summoning help in times of genuine distress. In terms of the potential

for bodily harm, mixed (K-12) routes were much safer that elementary-only routes. This does not mean, however, that mixed routes were without risks.

While the presence of adolescent riders helped to make mixed routes physically safer, it delivered a different kind of danger. Elementary passengers often sat in rapt attention, listening to teenagers' tough talk. For instance, on No. 21, kindergartner T.J. (who was practically the back seat mascot) received rounds of applause for mimicking profanity on request. I listened in as fifth-graders Julie and Tasha received a lesson—complete with visual aid—about condoms from a junior-high girl. I also heard two boys, one in seventh grade and the other in fourth grade, amiably chatting about marijuana. One morning, I saw a high-school boy borrow a crayon from a second-grade girl so his friend could draw him a map to a "gentleman's club." As these examples illustrate, mixed-routes allow difficult knowledges to circulate across age in ways that threaten to contaminate childhood "innocence" with adolescent precocity (Adler & Adler, 19980-b). Knowledges that "education seems to place elsewhere" emerge in the overlap of interpenetrating spheres in ways that place notions of childhood innocence at risk.

(Britzman, 1998, p. 117). It is possible that such knowledges prove more difficult for parents, teachers, administrators, and other adults than they do for the passengers among whom difficult knowledges circulate. In addition to its threat to notions of childhood innocence, cross-age curriculum poses a challenge to the centrality of adult instruction. Traveling the outskirts in between both school and home, the mostly kid-mediated school bus culture offers children and youth opportunities to navigate an array of knowledges with minimal adult interference. Kid-mediated school bus culture provides children a space to negotiate familiar experiences that without adult interference, become

novel—and sometimes even strange. The presence of older passengers mediates risks concomitant to these emerging knowledges.

While many elementary passengers seemed to enjoy this inculcation into adolescent issues, such subject matter—and the profanity with which it was often delivered—frightened some young riders. Citing data from his study, Fox (1996) notes, "Virtually every household had at least one situation that placed the student in a stressful situation while riding the bus" (p. 27). My investigation, particularly in regards to difficult knowledge, proves likewise. Interpenetrating social spheres make for a risky ride. While public debates about issues of school bus safety focus on seat belts or threats of physical violence, such discourse rarely addresses the less tangible violences of teasing and sexual harassment that riders endure on a daily basis.

Beyond Safety and Danger

As the discussions of difficult knowledges illustrates, on the bus familiar societal conflicts such as racism, sexism, classism, and heterosexism intersect with private geographies to create a risky terrain of difficult knowledge. This learning is difficult, firstly because of its uneasy peer pedagogy of teasing, taunts, threats, and other "routine" violences. These threatening lessons are uncomfortable and sometimes harmful to riders. Secondly, such knowledges are difficult because they provoke questions about deeply embedded constructions of race, gender, class, sexual orientation, and age—for which there are no easy answers, but which as educators we must navigate.

Recent high-profile incidents of youth violence highlight similar social tensions as they manifest themselves at school. Besides focusing almost exclusively on boys,

investigations of the perceived-to-be-eternal war between the "in group" and "outcasts" (athlete and isolate) often construct such stratification as an inevitability (Adler & Adler, 1998-b, Adler, Kless & Adler, 1992). Viewed through a protectionist rhetoric of safety, the countless childhood cruelties necessary to maintain such social boundaries are reified as natural, while concomitant violences embodied by marginalized "others" are constructed as counter to deeply-entrenched notions of childhood innocence and therefore deviant (Best, 1994; Giroux, 1998; Jenks, 1996). Unwilling to examine the ways in which intersections of school and home help position categories like "student leader," "geek," or "queer," such discourse remains in a cul-de-sac: going nowhere, vacillating fruitlessly between binary oppositions working in concert with stereotypical notions of gender, race, class, sexual orientation, and age to construct children alternately as angelic or savage, and childhood as either endangered or dangerous.

The mostly kid-mediated landscape of power on the buses I rode was composed of neither angels nor savages. Rather, its population proved to be a complex mix of kids trying to navigate the dense social intersections of school bus culture. In looking at structural facets of school bus culture—routes, age hierarchies, seating patterns—mobile power structures emerge. It becomes clear that the trajectories (rules or gossip) through which children and youth generate and distribute common knowledges, and that are themselves distributed in relation to broader landscapes of power, often link up with other landmarks. School bus phenomena such as sibling violence, surveillance, and social stratification betray links to both school and home, but do not run wholly parallel. In its gender integration, cross-age relations, utilization of space, and omnipresent sex-talk, school bus culture ventures "off-road" from social and curricular configurations to travel

a risky liminal space between school and home. Discussions of school safety might benefit from similar ventures beyond the boundaries of binary constructions of safety and danger and into riskier, liminal zones of reconstruction, where the multiplicities of children's lives collide.

Points of Departure

In a school bus magazine I found an advertisement for a poster with the caption: "Proud to Transport the Future of America." It shows a small honey-haired kindergarten girl dressed all in white, lunchbox in tow, boarding a school bus bathed in golden sunlight. From behind the wheel, a male driver smiles at her as she embarks. A caption at bottom cautions: "Her safety is in your hands" (Resource, 1998, p. 83).

This poster is rhetorically significant. In two short sentences, this depiction of an everyday scene reveals, among other things, deeply embedded constructions of childhood. The female child in white surrounded by an aura of golden light is evocative of the purity associated with strongly sentimentalized and highly gendered notions of childhood innocence (Best, 1994; Jenkins, 1998; Zelizer, 1985). Text and picture work together to strike a well-worn discursive link between children (or certain children) and the future. The text also utilizes discourse of protection to remind drivers of the vulnerability inherent to their "precious" cargo. This sort of image permeates textual and pictorial representations of school bus culture.

The poster also demonstrates the discursive limits of rhetorics surrounding protection and the future. Pushing the boundaries of my imagination, I superimpose a few images of No.21's riders onto the poster. I try supplanting the child in the picture with

imaginary visions of very real riders: Skyler, the small, White second-grader rarely separated from his X-Men lunchbox; Unique, the sly-smiling, lanky African-American fourth-grade girl with ponytails and a pensive brow; Vicky, the chubby and taciturn Hispanic eighth-grader; Marcus, a teenaged African-American boy whose buoyant gait is weighted by a court-ordered, ankle-fitted transmitter that lets police know where he is; and finally, Ron, a six-foot-tall Pakistani high-schooler, perpetually silent and hunched. Further, I try replacing the poster's patriarch with a young, female driver like Amber of bus No. 21.

Lastly I try visualizing, in place of the honey-haired kindergartner, "backseat bad-asses" Herkeesha, Tonya, Tabitha, and Tina—spartanly adorned in jeans and T-shirts, talking tough, and strutting down the aisle to take their place in the very back. Such replacement is risky, as the image of childhood endangered melds with visions of children and youth who—in their various challenges to racist, classist, sexist, and heterosexist childhood norms—become constructed as "dangerous." This study's risky reconstructions of school bus culture attempts to present its own "dangerous coagulations" of childhood's multiplicities (Foucault, 1977).

Kitzinger (1997) suggests similar reconstruction, and recommends that child activists, researchers, and children themselves should "consciously grapple with the deconstruction and reconstruction of childhood . . . thinking in terms of 'oppression' rather than 'vulnerability,' 'liberation' rather than 'protection'" (p. 184). Similarly, this study of school bus culture—situated on a mobile threshold—navigates among and between landmark notions of safety and danger in order to illustrate how riders deconstruct and reconstruct (make multiple meanings of) the landscape of their lives.

The specific route (No. 21) of my research as well as my ethnographic work on other buses revealed many opportunities for further study that might travel similarly along the intersecting trajectories that connect school and home, and that might make inroads toward exploring less unitary constructions of children and youth. As Nespor (1997) writes:

> the problem of inquiry is not to find patterns of intersection that generalize across settings but to trace flows of practice that organize widespread social relations, to expand maps of these networks, and to show how the intersections we be begin our analysis with are connected to other intersections across time and space (195).

With this sort of end in mind, fruitful further study on the school bus itself might include a more methodical mapping of spatial relations, an investigation into driver pedagogy, or research focusing on riders' peer-mediation strategies. Time spent on the bus also pointed toward a diversity of research needs regarding the relationship between curricular and extracurricular knowledges, the ways in which heterosexist language is employed in the regulation of gender, and ethnographic investigation into the shared knowledges of sibling relationships. Positioned in relation to protectionist discourse, discussions of safety and danger and interpenetrating public and private spheres point to further study at intersections of feminist theory and childhood studies.

These points of possible departure represent a few among many routes toward an understanding of the dense interconnections of school and home (Nespor, 1997). As I wrote earlier, mapping the overlap is not easy. Separating out influences and identifying wavering points of fluid fusions in the everyday lives of youth is an elusive process. Charting the "peculiar unity of the liminal; that which is neither this nor that, but both" is

an effort much like mapping the spaces where sky and horizon meet (Turner, 1967, p. 99 quoted in Bettis, 1996, p. 108). This study maps points of obvious intersection—curricular and "extra-curricular," school and home, public and private, rumor and data, and danger and safety—as they converge on the risky, mobile threshold of school bus culture. Massey, (1993) calls these discernable, sometimes ephemeral points of conjunction: "articulated moment [s] in a network of relations and understandings," (Massey, 1993, pp. 65-66, in Nespor, 1997, p. xiv). Similarly, this study represents moments circulating through the multiplicity of riders' lives as they converge and diverge in a culture free of institutionally imposed age stratification, relatively unmediated by direct adult interference, and defined exclusively neither by school nor home. However, for every spoken moment, an infinitude is left unsaid.

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APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A

OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

Date: September 1, 1999 IRB #: ED-00-147

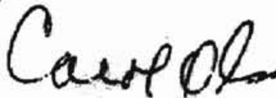
Proposal Title: "AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF SCHOOL BUS CULTURE"

Principal Investigator(s): Natalie Adams
Laura Jewett

Reviewed and Processed as: Expedited (Special Population)

Approval Status Recommended by Reviewer(s): Approved

Signature:



Carol Olson, Director of University Research Compliance

September 1, 1999
Date

Approvals are valid for one calendar year, after which time a request for continuation must be submitted. Any modification to the research project approved by the IRB must be submitted for approval. Approved projects are subject to monitoring by the IRB. Expedited and exempt projects may be reviewed by the full Institutional Review Board.

2

VITA

Laura Jewett

Candidate for the Degree of

Master of Science

Thesis: ON THE BUS: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF SCHOOL BUS CULTURE

Major Field: Curriculum and Instruction

Biographical:

Education: Received Bachelor of Arts degree in English from Oklahoma State University, in July 1997. Completed the requirements for the Master of Science Degree with a major in Curriculum and Instruction at Oklahoma State University in July, 2000

Experience: Employed by Oklahoma Higher Education Partners in Service-Learning; Oklahoma State University, Department of Education, 1998 to present. Employed by Oklahoma State University Department of Educational Studies as a graduate research assistant; Oklahoma State University, Department of Educational Studies, 1999 to present. Served with AmeriCorps VISTA as a regional Service-Learning Coordinator for the Oklahoma State Department of Education, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, 1997-1998.

Professional Memberships: American Educational Research Association National Community Education Association, National Indian Education Association, Phi Kappa Phi