

Discipline & Caring

The Cultural Politics of Youth Work

Erik Paul Reavely

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Approved by,
Chair, Dorothy Holland
Norris Johnson
William Lachicotte Jr.
George Noblit
Donald Nonini

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Abstract

Erik Paul Reavely, *Discipline & Caring: The Cultural Politics of Youth Work*
Under the direction of Professors Dorothy Holland, Norris Johnson, William Lachicotte Jr.,
George Noblit, and Donald Nonini

This dissertation examines the cultural politics and social conflicts that have and continue to shape the relations and practices of youth work. Based on ethnographic participant-observation and interviews in a non-profit alternative school and a for-profit day treatment program, I describe how youth workers in “Alston,” North Carolina, negotiate relationships with young people, their co-workers, and the uneven social contexts of their work through contested and culturally informed understandings of “what should be done” about troubled or at-risk youth. Using discourse analyses of public hearing transcripts, policy statements, media accounts, and youth work literature, and an examination of the cultural history of social-work, this research situates the local contentious practice of youth workers in Alston within ongoing social struggles in the United States and capitalism at-large. These struggles and conflicts involve the role of the state in relation to the market economy, the social distribution of resources, and the conduct of social welfare and control. I examine these struggles as they emerged through and shaped the character of youth work in both the 19th century child saving movement and in the neoliberal privatization and withdrawal of the state at the close of the 20th century. Historical and ethnographic analyses illustrate how these conflicts not only concern the substance of youth work, but also social divisions and inequalities including the gendered implications of social labor, the moral valuation of poverty, crime, and violence, and the relationship of these to racial, ethnic, and class

difference. Drawing on social practice theory and the idea that the language and practices workers express are shaped by their “history-in-person,” this dissertation describes how youth workers employed varying rhetorical narratives of ‘professionalism’ and what I call “organic expertise” to define “youth” and the moral conduct of youth work. Finally, I consider how the cultural resources workers bring to practice converge with the conditions of their labor to shape what they actually *do* with young people.

For Rod

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Introduction

The questions that lead to this dissertation research derived from my experience as a youth worker. During the late 1990's, as an alleged "crisis" of youth violence was provoking sweeping legislative and cultural changes across the United States, I began working as a counselor in a group home owned by a for-profit, corporate chain in California. There, I observed while my fellow "frontline"¹ workers and I negotiated the conditions of our jobs. Everyday was a bargain between a range of interests: what I thought I would be doing there, what the "clients" wanted to do, what I was required by the job to do, and whatever my coworkers decided their role in all of this would be.

The job was difficult, but not necessarily because of the teenage clients in-and-of-themselves; they could be as difficult or as easy-going as the range of adults I have met. No, the job was trying because of the recognizable imbalances across these interconnected relationships. Between administrative demands, "the boss," and the demands of external but contingent agencies such as the courts, law enforcement, school systems, mental health and social services – all these variably impinged on both "the kids" and the work. The demands of the workplace derived from multiple sources: the financial interests and objectives of the

¹ "*Frontline*" is a labor category used to differentiate those who work directly and primarily with "clients," "students," or "patients" from those who primarily manage or administer those workers and service-subjects. Considering the term is almost exclusively used to refer to human-service workers, the combat inferences of "frontline" workers (often described as being "in the trenches") suggests a decidedly antagonistic, if not violent relationship to the client/patient/student. This seems an odd characterization for an occupation ostensibly involved in human care and service and provides the first symbolic clues to the tensions and conflicts these relations engender.

organization, the protocols for on-the-job conduct and interaction, the state's interest in the welfare or discipline of the client, cultural conflicts about the moral interpretation and treatment of the "troubled" youth, and not least of all, the expressed interests of the client – a real and particular human being. All these contingencies affected the conditions of the work, and the relationships that workers developed with the young people they encountered in manifold ways.

When youth workers I have met and observed talk about their work, they do not limit their view to the young people before them. When they consider the troubled kids they engage from the poorest neighborhoods in the city, and the challenges both of them face as they struggle against the low expectations the police, the schools, and the city have for them, they refer to and consciously act within a history of inequality experienced through race, class, gendered, and age-graded relations. During my fieldwork in "Alston," North Carolina, some youth workers engaged these forces head-on, in the racially divided school board, the city council, and the public dialogue of the city. However, even those who worked with the grain of the status quo also recognized inequality, in its many forms, as a *condition* of their work. As one youth worker explained to me, youth work includes confronting "generations of hardness, generations of not having."

Corresponding to the sociological and historical perspectives these workers brought to practice, and my own experience of the multiple interests bearing on the workplace, this dissertation attempts to present an anthropology of youth work. An anthropological study of youth work would include examining the relationships between the cultural meanings and

social patterns of youth work, and to connect the human experience of the work to sociological and historical struggles over the meaning and ‘proper’ arrangement of social relationships. In order to take such a holistic perspective, I have incorporated a variety of methodological approaches including ethnographic description of local practices and relations, discourse analyses of media, literature, and policy, as well as a historical examination of the social and cultural premises of youth work in the United States.

An Ethnography of Youth Work

This dissertation attempts to track several questions about the imbalanced relations I have observed. It is my argument that these imbalances, and their contested interpretation, are central to the structuring conditions that shape practices youth work. From the point of interpretation closest to the “client” – the “frontline” worker – I begin with what might seem a rather simple question; how do youth workers understand their jobs? How do they understand themselves, their occupational identity in relation to what they do and who they do it with? How are the understandings youth workers bring to the workplace informed by cultural knowledge learned from social experience? How is this knowledge and experience reflected in the working relationships they create with young people? What are the objectives and effects of these practices?

I will address these questions primarily through an *ethnographic* account of my experiences and observations as a student of, and participant in, youth work. While the definition of exactly what a youth worker “*is*” will be the subject of analysis in later chapters,

“ethnography” is a term used by anthropologists to describe both a method of field research for gathering data about human cultural groups (ethno-), and a written narration of that data (-graphy). Van Maanen described ethnography as “the peculiar practice of representing the social reality of others through the analysis of one’s own experience in the world of these others” (1988: ix). As a method of data collection, ethnography employs what anthropologists call “participant-observation,” which requires long-term immersion in a field setting. This first-hand experience “enables the field worker to directly and forcibly experience... the ordinary routines and conditions under which people conduct their lives, and the constraints and pressures to which such living is subject” (Emerson et al. 1995: 2).

To this end, I have been “immersed,” over the past ten years, in a range of settings oriented toward young people – particularly youth identified as “at-risk.” From group homes, to day-treatment facilities, alternative schools, community organizations, and clubs, I have worked full and part-time, as a paid employee and a volunteer. In the role of both youth worker and ethnographer, I have attended training-seminars and workshops, city council, school board, and community organization meetings, field trips to political rallies, zoos, museums, wilderness areas, and prisons. I have also endured the low pay, lack of resources (never mind health benefits), overwhelming worker to client ratios, near absence of promising career advancement, the feeling of being degraded to what is called a “glorified babysitter,” and the phenomenon known as “burnout.” I have also listened closely as my colleagues on the job have gone through these experiences along with me, offering advice, their own theory of the situation, and their worldview.

In each of these settings and experiences, either as an employee or as a volunteer, I introduced and oriented myself as an apprentice to the people with whom I worked. Guided by the fundamental proposition that the way youth workers understand their labor affects the way they conduct their work, their practice, I assumed that my co-workers were experts in their own cultural practices of youth work. Beginning from the axiom that “Language is practical consciousness” (Marx 1978: 158), much of my attention in these settings has focused on how people describe their work, their relationships with others, and the conditions in which it occurs in order to learn, interpret and communicate the meanings they assign to these experiences.

In order to record this narrative data at the local level, I have conducted three basic methodologies: participant observation, informal interviews, and formal, recorded interviews. I conducted participant observation as a youth worker in several different youth work settings and in the process observed the practices of approximately² 30 youth workers. I conducted formal interviews with a small sample of participants (12) whose practices and descriptions of youth work were representative of variations I have encountered during my career in the field. I structured these more formal interviews in the form of ‘occupational life histories,’ which I collected in order to understand how participants’ brought experiences from their own social history to practice. I have directed my focus toward workers and the workplace because while there are libraries full of texts describing youth and “what should be done

² Because of rapid labor and volunteer turnover rates, observation could vary from a day to several years with any given worker. Because of this, there were workers whom I observed on the job once or twice, but before I was able to speak with them about participation in the project, they would leave the job and not return. An inability to keep up with everyone revolving through the job is what of what plagues the literature of professionals, but for different reasons we will explore in chapter two.

about them,” there is scant knowledge about what people actually think they are doing when they engage youth as a form of “social-work.”

I say “social-work” not in the professional sense (Social Work) but in the anthropological sense. By this, I mean that youth work is labor directed at the cultural construction and modification of a categorically defined social group. What’s more, because youth workers frequently work with youth in order to affect social conditions at-large, whether it is to change or maintain them as they are, youth work is literally labor that participates in “visions” of human social order. This is what I call “social-work” in the anthropological sense.

In addition to written notes from the many informal interviews that occurred as conversations in the workplace, I have also recorded observations of the production of situated knowledge of youth work through “talk-in-interaction” (Emerson et al. 1995: 133). That is, the production of meaning through dialogue with others in relation to specific contexts. This requires attention not only to local talk, interactions, and practices of youth work, but also to how the contexts and conditions of various forms of youth work are themselves brought about. The second range of questions provoked by my experiences as a youth worker concerns this relationship between the conditions of youth work and ongoing social conflicts and cultural change. How do policies and programs that construct youth violence in terms of “risk” and “accountability” affect the conditions of the workplace? How do cultural conflicts, social change, and economic shifts condition what kind of “work” gets done, to which young people, and who does it?

These lines of inquiry have led me to collect and analyze a range of materials relevant to the cultural and structural conditions bearing on the workplace. These have included documents and media produced by youth work organizations, congressional hearings, national, state, and local legislation, press releases, media representations as well as professional, historical, and critical literature. These materials contribute to the analysis of youth work by informing my varied local experiences and observations of the relationship between longstanding social institutions, structures, and change, and the conditions within which local laborers co-construct meaningful practices of youth work. How does the discourse of policy about youth condition the organization of state agencies and the redistribution of resources? How have historical struggles over the meaning, rationalization, and privatization of youth work affected the social division of labor? How do these social structures of labor condition the labor process, the requirements of the job, and the practices that engage young people considered “at-risk”?

For example, school districts where I began youth work in California, and conducted the fieldwork for this dissertation in North Carolina, were undergoing contentious processes of school desegregation. These conflicts were the contemporary face of longstanding inequalities and struggles at the intersection of race, gender, class, and age-grade social divisions. In Santa Rita, California, Latino immigrants were segregated in under-funded schools while their rights to citizenship and public services were restricted by increasingly discriminatory policies. When young Latinos participated in public protest of these policies on school grounds, representing them as “disruptive youth” enabled the administration to

take a law and order approach to “school safety” and the police were called to put down the protest. As in Santa Rita, the “crisis” of youth violence circulating in national media and policy discourse intersected with similar ongoing struggles at the intersection of race and class in the North Carolina city of “Alston.” There, “Safe-School’s” legislation overlapped with contentious desegregation process, provoking hyper-vigilance about “disruptive” students, the use of “zero tolerance” policies, and skyrocketing inequalities in suspension, expulsion, and drop-out rates in the bused student population of inner-city black youth. Not surprisingly, the social complexion of these conflicts and inequalities was reflected in the demographic patterns of the clients, students, and laborers of the group homes, treatment programs, and alternative schools in which I have been a worker and an ethnographer. Throughout the dissertation, as I trace the changing cultural discourses produced in the social engagement of youth, I also follow their relationship to these patterns of inequality and the way they converge in the youth work place.

At the same time that shifts in the cultural interpretation of youth as “at-risk” were intersecting with these enduring struggles, other ongoing processes were affecting the workplace. In fact, through the legislative hysteria of the crisis, which I will outline in chapter four, a longstanding effort to change the structure and character of the state was taking place. The privatization of social services including group homes, treatment programs, juvenile facilities, and alternative schooling for poor and delinquent youth populations has been going on for decades. But as the popular response often called for boot-camps, treatment, or even the death penalty for “minors,” I ask; how has the “crisis” of youth violence legislation facilitated the processes of privatization? How has privatization

intersected with enduring cultural understandings of human difference, with ongoing social conflicts, and how have these intersections produced new forms of organizing, or contesting, inequality?

This brings me to my third set of questions about youth work; how do youth workers' understandings of their work and the manifold contingencies shaping their workplace intersect to affect what they actually *do* with young people in practice? How do workers negotiate the conditions of their work? What does youth work look like where these various interests and conditions converge? Through what activities, programs, projects, processes, and language do they engage young people? Through ethnographic description this dissertation will describe the way that youth workers navigate the contexts of their work and how that process shapes the practices and relationships they develop with young people.

Imageries of youth workers circulating in the media and popular lore tend to construct binary characters, such as the heroic altruist or the abusive zealot. However, ethnographic experience with youth workers has indicated that altruism and abuse, discipline and caring, moral practice and professional conduct, were dimensions of practice not so easily separated. Youth workers who claimed to “care” were frequently labeled by their coworkers, employers, or the media, as neglectful, abusive, and immoral. These politics of meaning, or “cultural politics,” are at the heart of what I call the “moral economy” of youth work along which access to resources and class privilege is distributed.

Finally, my ethnographic and occupational experience of youth work prompts me to question how contemporary discourses about risk, accountability, privatization, and professionalism, reflect a reversal of the welfare orientation of state social service. How does the shift from needs to accountability, reform to risk, and public to private reflect an ongoing struggle over the principles of organizing the state, its relationship to market processes, and to the regulation of social relationships and trajectories? In other words how does the struggle between the rehabilitative ideal and market oriented managerialism correspond to centuries old conflicts attendant to capitalist societies: the conflict between status and achievement, between caste and classed social orders, and between fixed social positions and social mobility? In other words, how can youth work be viewed as a microcosm of historic social, cultural, political, and economic conditions, struggle, and change in the United States in general?

To address these questions, and to situate the cultural politics of contemporary youth work in the history of these social struggles, I describe in chapter three the social and cultural struggles of late 19th century reformers as they professionalized the gendered and morally imbued practices of social-work with young people. Through an examination of the ethnic and gendered cultural politics of the “child saving movement,” and the “civilizing” discourse of middle-class reformers, I outline the meaningful bases and conflicts upon which traditions of Social Work (in the professional sense) and Juvenile Justice, such as the “rehabilitative ideal,” were produced. I do this in order to highlight changes affecting these traditions, but also to situate youth work in long standing struggles over the relationship between the state, the market, and the social order. Finally, the historical perspective, both at the local level of

individuals in their daily lives and at the level of global processes, contributes an informed perspective on the social meaning of symbolic terms like “glorified babysitter,” but also on the ways in which shifts in the ideological structuring of youth work correspond to shifts in the conditions of social labor in general.

To apprehend these dynamic processes of historical intersection and convergence, this research employed Holland and Lave’s (2001) conceptual structure of “history-in-person,” “local contentious practice,” and “enduring struggles” to guide both the collection and interpretation of data. “History in person” is described as the “past experiences upon which one improvises, using the cultural resources available, in response to the subject positions afforded one in the present” (Holland, et al. 1998:18). This is comparable in some respects with Bourdieu’s concept of “habitus,” which he described as both a product of our life-long enculturation, and a generative structure of interpretation and action (1977, 1984). However, history-in-person also provides a framework for understanding how “enduring struggles” over gender and racial inequality, the state or market’s role in social welfare, and the proper socialization of youth, for example, are drawn into, expressed and reshaped in the space of “local contentious practice.” Considering identity formation as a process of dialogue, between the socio-cultural experiences of agents and the socio-cultural conditions they encounter, history-in-person provides a framework to describe the relationships between the intimate expressions recorded in ethnographic fieldwork and ongoing processes of cultural, social, political, and economic struggle.

A Multi-sited Ethnography of Youth Work

Because of the questions I have about the relationship between intimate, local and, perhaps, global scales of data, this ethnographic account is a “multi-sited” ethnography in several senses. The first is that I intend to illustrate relationships between local, contemporary practices and intimate relations of youth work, and the historical, political-economic, and social contexts in which youth work occurs. This requires attention to the presence of effective conditions that originate elsewhere such as policy demands for “accountability,” or school desegregation, and debates about the role of the state or community in social inequality and welfare, which in turn are part of ongoing struggles over the social distribution of resources. These sorts of inferences also require attention to divergent expectations about race, class, gender, and age-grade behavior that are “institutionalized” as common sense but are products of contentious historical relations that have gone on for centuries and are not reducible to local or contemporary peculiarities.

While I have been attentive to the way these political, economic, and cultural contexts constrain or make possible local social conditions, practices, and relations, I have also examined the ways in which participants express what Marcus called “system-awareness” (1998: 96) in everyday talk. How do youth workers make sense of the social conditions of their labor? How does this expressed understanding indicate the position they attempt to stake out in relation to youth, co-workers, employers, community interests, public institutions, the state, and longstanding conditions of inequality across race, class, gender, and age divisions? How do youth workers negotiate institutionalized social and political

structures in relation to local, intimate relationships with youth and the community in which they live and work?

The second reason this dissertation is a multi-sited ethnography is that I have also conducted participant-observation at a number of local sites, providing the research with several ‘cases’ to be drawn from and compared. As either an employee or a volunteer, I have worked in a variety of programs for at-risk youth, expressing a variety of approaches to prevention: from behavioral treatment, to political activist, to educational, to entrepreneurial training and some that blended all these approaches. Though I draw on my experiences in various contexts, the ethnographic accounts represented in this text are primarily based upon two years of employment as a “facilitator” at a day-treatment facility, and from two and a half years of volunteer work in a non-profit alternative school, both in the city of “Alston,” North Carolina. The advantage of drawing from these varied and widespread experiences is that it lends the study several cases for inferring generalizations about common patterns and linkages, as well as putting into relief variations in practice at the local level and their relation to ongoing processes of struggle and inequality.

The Silent Subject, and Making Youth Work Visible

Of course, not everything I have experienced in the field is included in the dissertation, and in that sense, it is “biased.” As Johnson and Altheide point out in *The Ethnographic Ethic* (1993), ethnographic authors choose to focus on specific issues and patterns drawn from field experience *but also* those relevant to their own interests, scholarly

discourse, and advancement. Authors, including myself, employ particular concepts to interpret those issues and patterns, and organize these interpretations in such a way to bring the reader to understand the *significance* of the author's conclusions about what they have experienced in the field. While it pains me to do so each time, the process of writing and constructing particular arguments, in due time, demands that other issues, and the stories of individuals who experienced them, must be put aside for later work. In this sense the account is *partial* as well.

There is much I have had to do in order to protect the identity of not only the co-workers, administrators, and community members I have written about, but also the young people with whom I have worked. Because of the protected status of minors, I am in fact required to maintain the anonymity of *all* local research participants. In other words, some of the cultural notions about “youth” this dissertation will examine have served to silence, for “their own protection,” the subject of youth work. Because the young people that youth workers generally engage are considered “at-risk,” if not legally criminal, the descriptive element of ethnographic research was deemed by Human Subjects committees as putting these already stigmatized youth “at-risk” of public identification. As a result, I have had to change the place and personal names of those private and public individuals that participated, or had relatively close contact with participants, in the research. Sometimes this has required obscuring sources, of local newspapers that could be searched to identify informants for example, and even obscuring data (such as the precise location and timing of events) that are specific to the field site and could lead to informant identification. The names of public

individuals at the regional or national level, who cannot be linked back to places or persons who require anonymity, are not changed.

However, what this ‘protective’ requirement really affects is the research’s ability to examine all of the outcomes of the convergences I have generally outlined thus far. While I am able to examine youth work practices as an outcome of these convergences, which included the interaction of youth workers with youth (variably called “clients,” “kids,” or “students”), I was not allowed to interview young people in these programs as individual participants – only as they responded to youth workers in-situ. Needless to say this is a tragic loss of not only important data, but a significantly silent voice in the human spectrum of youth work. What did they think about what workers were doing and saying to them? What did they “take home” with them into their own sense of self, their own practices of everyday living? In some ways, the life history of many youth workers *themselves* reveals this information, but as of now, these are limited inferences that cannot be relied upon as conclusions. In many ways, as a youth worker, this research was conducted on behalf of youth – to interrogate the structures of power and practice also claiming to be acting in their ‘best interests’ – though without their voice, it seems unlikely we will know precisely what those are.

Out of respect for all of the participants, I have attempted, for better or for worse, to “keep it real.”³ In this spirit I have endeavored to remain visible throughout the text to keep intact my position and agency as a participant in youth work practice and the research

³ For direct quotations taken from documents or recordings, and for phrases or terms commonly used in the settings I studied, I will use full “quotation marks.” ‘Inverted commas’ demarcate speech handwritten in field notes that I recorded in-situ, but should be regarded as paraphrased speech.

process. This is not a matter of subjective introspection but of being transparent and even-handed as well as communicating the experience of youth work through my partial, yet multi-sited and multi-disciplinary perspective. Skott-Myhre (2006), a practicing critical scholar of youth work in Canada, described how relations of power in the practice of youth work are aligned along boundaries of visibility and invisibility. Reflecting similar concerns raised by anthropologists about the power relations of ethnographic representation (Clifford 1988), Skott-Myre writes of the participatory role youth workers play in the power relations of their labor;

To the degree we see ourselves as “adults” different from and perhaps even developmentally superior to the youth and children within our care, we become working elements of the diagrams of status incarceration. In this diagram, through which youth become visible as objects that we categorize, taxonomize, observe, diagnose, chart, discuss, and attempt to alter, we become invisible. Our invisibility is a product of our privilege within the diagram as an element of extension and proliferation. In other words, to the degree we extend the mechanisms of power within the diagram, by becoming the eyes, ears, and tools of its discipline, we escape its gaze. [Skott-Myhre, 2006: 225]

Analogous to the conflicts and conditions my coworkers and I often faced on the job, Skott-Myre also admits, “we know it is dangerous to become visible within the diagram of power that constitutes the institutions within which we work... where there is no guarantee of employment or actual job security” (2006:226). Hence, in conducting this ethnographic reflection on youth work as a visible and critical participant, this dissertation is an unveiling and intervention in the imbalanced relations of the practice and politics of youth work.

Chapter One

The Moral Economy of Discipline & Caring

When youth workers are represented in popular discourse or in the media, we are often presented with narratives of caring, altruistic martyrs who, despite insurmountable challenges and opposition, step in (or “step *up*”) and save youth who would otherwise be “lost.” Describing the administrator of the “Alternative Path” non-profit alternative school, a sympathetic writer in the largest paper in Alston, North Carolina illustrated this familiar narrative of the local social hero: “She works with a population that most people are afraid of or just don't want to work with, to be blunt,” says [the] Chief District Court Judge. “[She] fills a gap nobody else is willing to.” Many times we hear the testimonials of youth workers’ “product” – the reformed youth – such as this passage from the New York Times; “ALL of us kids' lives would've gone down the drain if we didn't get help. I'll always remember the dedicated people who were there when we needed them. ...At a time when most people turned their backs on me, you gave me a chance” (Fink, 1985:20).

At other times, media stories of youth workers are of brutal violence and abuse. While military style boot-camps for juveniles have become popular across the nation, praised in G. W. Bush's 2000 presidential campaign and routinely broadcast on day-time talk shows, allegations of physical and sexual abuse in Texas and Florida juvenile boot-camps throw into

relief the “other” side of caring and discipline. One (of many) such cases involved the recent national-media attention on a pastor arrested in Texas in 2007. The pastor had been arrested for tying-up and dragging a teenage girl from behind a van at a Christian boot-camp because she refused to continue running. A report about the incident in Reuters stressed the pastor’s self description as “commandant” and emphasizes the camp’s relation to another program within the “Love Demonstrated Ministries” where “children spoke in tongues and were urged to become Christian warriors.” (Reuters 2007). The allusion to expressive religious indoctrination and the already established scene of violence situated youth as passive victims of irrational discipline. Here the abusive zealot imagery communicates the opposite of the altruist mythology and represents these caricatures as distinct and mutually exclusive *personalities* of exceptional individuals. In the first the youth worker *gives* the self, selflessly, in the second, the youth worker *extracts* from the dependant subject power over its own body through physical violence. In either case, youth workers are represented in mystical ways inaccessible to rational comprehension; youth workers are either saints or demons, altruists or self-interested. The first is a gift, the second a theft. In both cases youth are passive, dependant subjects.

In the workplace things are not so clear cut. My first job working with youth in North Carolina was at a “day-treatment center” for youth classified as “BEH” (Behaviorally-Emotionally Handicapped) that I will call “Adventure LLC”.¹ Chris, the program’s administrator, seemed eager to allow me to conduct my research while employed and rushed my consent forms through the company’s legal offices within two days of my hiring. Chris thought that an evaluation of the way workers understood their jobs would improve their

¹ “LLC” stands for “Limited Liability Company”

ability to implement the program, which he described to me as utilizing an approach called “Adventure Based Counseling” (ABC). He seemed to ignore my interests in labor conditions and social context.

Though at the time he was vague about this concern, he would later reveal to me that he thought the ABC program was not being thoroughly applied by the frontline workers of the program – the “facilitators.” Very generally, he explained that ABC was premised on the notion that successfully completed “positive risk” encounters in a peer-group context would lead to increased social skills and thus, better behavior. As Chris suspected though, I soon found out that this belief was not shared by everyone in the program. As one facilitator



Figure 1. A 15 year old client leaps from “the pamper pole” as a “positive risk experience.” This was called the pamper pole in reference to the many who allegedly ‘cry like a baby’ once they’ve reached the top of the pole and are forced to jump to the trapeze or climb down in front of their peers. (Photograph taken by author)

remarked, blowing through his lips in a dismissive way ‘Pff, these kids walk out their door everyday and see their neighbors, their *mothers*, out selling crack, selling themselves. These kids see risk everyday! Jumpin off the pamper pole (see Figure 1) may be cool and all, build up their self-esteem, but what does that mean when you bring it to the hood? Nothin! Jumpin’ off the pamper pole don’t compare to staring down the barrel of a gun.’

In those early, increasingly hot weeks of Adventure’s summer program, I became more aware and drawn into these tensions. As a facilitator, I was faced with negotiating the kids’ behavior, the administrative demands to follow program procedures, and my coworkers’ expectations about how to conduct oneself as a youth worker. I had come to the job with hopeful expectations of Adventure Based Counseling, having had positive experiences in or leading ropes-course field trips in the past. But as the summer wore on I became somewhat distraught over my growing awareness that the program wasn’t what I had imagined, that there was little ground for the kind of “social processing” I had hoped to practice as a reflective youth worker and anthropologist, and that I was relentlessly addressed by the adolescent kids I was assigned to “facilitate” with the phrase; “fuck-off ya white mutha-fuckin cracka.” Tolerating and confronting the dissonance created by this verbal abuse was something I figured I would have to get used to and get over if I were to make any progress with the kids. But what made dealing with the kids’ violent abuses more difficult was that the options for confronting this behavior made available to me at Adventure LCC were not ones I was comfortable, or had envisioned myself making a difference with.

As I soon found out, the experienced Adventure LCC staff did not tolerate these sorts of verbal abuse by the kids at all. One way of dealing with defiance, profanity or even a hint of aggression was nearly demanded of me. At one point, one of the facilitator's advised me that 'when a kid talks to you like that – *drop 'em.*' Although I did end up on the ground, restraining kids when they got physically aggressive, this wasn't a route I particularly liked to take. In fact, I almost left the program several times, frustrated by my constant involvement in physical engagements officially called "therapeutic restraints" - sometimes for reasons I couldn't even remember at the end of the day.

"Therapeutic restraint" is the officially approved way of physically intervening in a "client" behavior such as a fight. It is done by taking hold of the clients arms above the wrist, then while swinging around behind them, crossing their arms over each other and forcing them to the ground, face down, where you can hold them still – 'pinned down.' Ideally this occurs with another staff assisting by holding the client's feet together so he/she cannot kick, and to act as witness to your "professional conduct" during the incident.

Another, more common way staff handled the blaring profanity, defiance and aggressiveness was to send the offending kid to Brent, a facilitator assigned to the bigger, older kids. Even as an adult, to me Brent's size and presence could be intimidating. Paired with an ex-sumo wrestler dubbed "Mr. D," whose size required he remove the back of the driver's seat in his car to fit in it, simply the stare of these large, muscular men was often enough to mellow-out most defiant kids. If that didn't do the trick, Brent would take them into the very back of the building and have the defiant subject hold a heavy log over his head,

raising it and lowering it like a set of dumbbells while Brent verbally scolded him. If the defiant boy (this kind of military style discipline was reserved almost exclusively for boys) could not be controlled, Mr. D would simply sit on him.

When Frank, the “intake coordinator,” noticed kids being sent to Brent he asked me what was going on ‘back there.’ I reluctantly told him ‘I think he’s having them do push-ups with a log.’ Frank rolled his eyes and replied in a disappointed tone ‘Pain is not therapeutic, you know.’ This was not the first time I found myself at a loss for a position in the scheme of things at Adventure LCC. I wasn’t a big advocate of the discipline and punishment method that was routine for a majority of the workers with whom I spent my day and depended on for support, safety and standing with the kids. Neither was I a big advocate of the “therapy” approach to behavior, which in my view was pretty much the same as what Brent was doing but with medication and “therapeutic restraint” instead of explicitly punitive consequences. For example, on this particular day, Frank had taken me aside to talk to me about Brent’s practices and to advise me about my handling of a confrontation earlier that day.

The confrontation began as Martin, a 14 year old boy with an amazing gift for poetry, consistently antagonized his fellow group members (as he did nearly everyday) by throwing wood chips in their hair and making various “Your Momma” comments. I had asked Martin to stop the behavior several times and explained that the longer he continued to antagonize the other kids (who were getting pretty angry by then), the longer we would be stuck in the same activity. Martin wasn’t interested in moving things along however. He did not even

particularly care to be there in the first place, so my requests were met with the usual racial epithets. This time however the comments were extended to include physical threats like ‘I’m gonna *stick* yo white ass!’ and worse. Following the guidelines I had received in training and some common sense, I tried to separate Martin from the group as his behavior was disruptive and even more interesting to the rest of the group than the activity they were supposed to be engaged in. Martin did not want to leave. As he continued to lash out threats, I continued to pursue him, positioning myself between him and the group while keeping a distance and a low tone of voice that I thought would convey the notion that I didn’t want to physically engage or even touch him. But the more I blocked him the more hostile he became, clenching his fists and hopping around like a boxer ready to swing. For every threat he made I simply responded, ‘If that’s what you want to do, go ahead, but you know what the consequences will be.’ At that point Martin was infuriated, his voice began to crack and I could see him grinding his teeth as his eyes began to water. Sensing that he was near a breaking point, I asked him to go have a seat outside the group and calm down. When he refused I gave him an ultimatum. My voice now raised and taking on an imposing tone I threatened, ‘*Sit down and calm down or spend some time with Brent*’ – and at that he grudgingly sat in the shade by the wall of the building.

While I was relieved that the situation had not escalated to a physical engagement, it was at this point that I noticed Frank watching the scene from a distance. When I went up in the front of the building later, he confronted me about what sending kids to Brent meant. Then he began to explain that instead of getting engaged in an escalating challenge, possibly traumatizing the “client” or threatening to send the boy to Brent, I should have

‘therapeutically escorted him to another area where he won’t disrupt the group.’ Frank modeled this approach as he explained, taking me by the forearm and the armpit and steering me across the room. This was part of the “non-violent intervention” procedure that had been reviewed during the brief training sessions earlier in the summer where I was told ‘these kids aren’t healthy ... don’t challenge them.’ But here Frank, a self-proclaimed ‘positive rewards behaviorist,’ was telling me to physically take hold of a client who is already enraged that I would have the audacity confront his behavior at all – never mind put my hands on him! It was a course of action that in my experience had invariably led to the violence of full “therapeutic restraints” when the client resisted and fought his/her escort. I had seen and been involved in this chain of events so many times – too many times already – that Frank’s solution was less than an encouraging lesson. Frank however insisted that if done ‘correctly’ this was the proper way to calm a client down and avoid causing a stir with the rest of the group. He added by advising me NOT to talk to the client during the period of restraint, that this was a time for ‘cooling off’ and that I should process the event with the client at another time. I could feel myself burning out as I walked back to the circle of cursing and constantly instigating boys.

Later that day, when Chris (Adventure’s administrator), Brent and myself were standing around Frank’s office having our lunch, Frank commented on Brent’s punitive practices with the log to Chris and Brent responded by calling Frank a ‘pacifist hippie.’ At that point Frank looked to me and said ‘Can you imagine what this place would be like if I weren’t here? There’s got to be some balance.’ Incensed by the insinuation that his own

approach was like that of Brent's explicitly punitive approaches, or at least not part of "the balance," Chris quickly retorted, '*Fuck* you Frank!'

This hostile exchange made me realize the deep divides between the ways youth workers (in administrative or frontline positions), at least at Adventure LCC, related to and handled the kids' behavior. These contentions and variances reveal the way they orchestrate their practices through divergent conceptions of human behavior and relationships, as well as their conceptions of themselves – their identity. The way in which these workers (including myself) positioned themselves in relation to the kids and other workers formed a constellation of relations that was strategically negotiated on a daily basis. Contentions about the value of risk or pain as 'therapy' expressed varying perceptions of the moral status of youth work practices. However, the moralization of these varying practices of youth work intersected with hierarchical economic relations in which they were embedded and illustrated contentions about the "moral economy" of youth work.

E. P. Thompson used the term "moral economy" to describe a complex of cultural ideas about "the social norms and obligations [and] of the proper economic functions of several parties within the community" (Thompson 1971:79). James C. Scott (1976) used the term to describe the collective ethical values oppressed peasants ascribed to economic relations of class reciprocity and solidarity. In other words, moral economies are collective cultural expectations about how people should behave in relation to one another within (or in relation to) the realm of economic interaction. They are schematics about the proper economic place or class status of moralized behaviors, as well as the moral status ascribed to

particular economic acts and actors. Moral economies situate people and their actions across a spectrum of value; they align the moral and economic value of acts such that some acts could be described as “low class” while others are often unspoken as “high class” behaviors, though these are contested categories. Economic superiority does not always equate to a perception of moral superiority.

For instance, many times my fellow co-workers and I engaged in conversations that compared the money the company collected for each client (as much as \$18/ hour for 50 to 70 clients per day) and how little they were willing to spend. Remarks about client-overcrowding and understaffing in the program, during the work day and in staff meetings, were often coupled with comparisons to what the company took, how many clients had been through that week, how many of ‘us’ there were ‘in back’ working with the kids. These equations often sparked angry retorts as they marked the moral effect of administrators’ participation in ‘a scam.’ Once as Chris came back from the front office to take the morning ‘head count’ he yelled at one of the morning van drivers who pick up the clients from their homes. Demanding to know why he had not brought several of the clients on the roster, Jerry, the driver that morning, shrugged his shoulders and said; ‘I blew the horn, they didn’t come out!’ Then he immediately turned and, in a lowered voice to the facilitators standing to his side (myself among them), said ‘Not like we ain’t got enough already.’ Chris returned to the front office to call the homes of absent clients and sent Jerry back out after them.

Another example of this ‘upward’ critique illustrates a most fundamental element of the moral economy of youth work. Each Friday, well behaved kids were supposed to be

rewarded with an outing, one beyond the daily reward-trips to local public parks. During the hot summer months in North Carolina, most of the kids would ask to visit amusement parks with water rides. But often Chris would complain that there was not enough money in the budget and we'd have to come up with less expensive outings. At one of these times Brent, who had been at Adventure LLC the longest of all the facilitators, looked Chris right in the eye and called him a 'cheap bastard.' Brent also disparaged coworkers who, in an effort to reduce the number of kids taken on any given outing, would make them wait intolerable periods of time in line without moving from a wall. As each boy and girl were caught talking, poking, or moving away from the wall, they'd be picked off the line and sent into the classrooms where they would remain for the day. 'They make 'em wait so long they never get to go anywhere' Bret complained, *'They don't care.'*

"Caring" in fact was the "lynch-pin" of the moral economy of youth work. All these contentions, from 'pain is not therapeutic' to 'cheap bastard' reflect allegations of violation, violations of the normative and expected *ethics of practice*; the practice of discipline and caring for youth. The moral assertion being made by these common workplace contentions hinged upon the distribution of caring and discipline – that to care for youth the capitalist should discipline their greed, or, to be professional the laborer should discipline their practice, not youth. Noblit describes the way in which teachers negotiate ethics of caring and discipline in the classroom as a negotiation of "the ethical use of power" (Noblit 1999:206). Following this insight, I would argue that the politics of caring and discipline hinge upon conflicting interpretations about the ethical use and restraint of power in relation to contentions over "what should be done" about youth. Hence, relationships between various

agents in the hierarchy of the workplace were negotiated and rationalized through a moral understanding and relationship to power and youth.

Youth Work as Emotional Labor

Hochschild (1983) coined the term “emotional labor” to describe the sort of expressive work that service employees are required do to affect the consumer experience by ‘managing’ their own emotional disposition, which is (at least) part of what’s being sold. Hochschild’s classic example was the ever-smiling flight attendant who, though perhaps frustrated at an irate passenger, is trained and required to employ reflexive ‘anger management’ techniques toward him/herself while at the same time expressing a calm, concerned, or friendly demeanor in order to produce ‘happy passengers.’ Hence Hochschild’s oft cited definition of emotional labor as work that requires the laborer to “induce or suppress feeling in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others” (1983:7).

Hochschild also proposed that as intimate emotional expressions are sold (or I would add, volunteered) as labor they become *acts of exchange*. Indeed, as Steinberg and Figarts (1999) review of research on emotional labor notes “To perform emotional labor...employees must *give something of themselves* to others...” (12, emphasis added). But this is not a one-way relation. A key aspect of youth work, as a form of interactive human-service labor, is the dialogic character of the labor; “In these kinds of jobs, it is impossible to draw clear distinctions between the worker, the work process, and the product

or outcome, because the quality of the interaction is frequently part of the service being delivered” (Leidner 1999:83). In such interactive service work, “by definition...customers, clients, patients, respondents, and so on...are not simply observers; they are generally *coproducers* of the interaction, whose cooperation *is required* for the work to go forward” (Leidner 1999:83). Not only do human-service and care workers engage in a dialogic relation with the subjects as the labor process, but because interactive service workers are required to “make use of their emotions and personalities in carrying out their work, their employers generally take a direct interest in more aspects of the workers’ selves” (Leidner 1999:83). Hence, the moment of emotional labor practice is a highly co-constructed one as interests and obligations from beyond those of the worker and subject are also impinging on their relation.

Describing the “problem” of developing personal *versus* professional relationships with youth, professional youth work scholars Walker & Larsen (2006) maintain that youth workers “face situations where competing objectives, values, and warrants come into conflict...these situations can pit the developmental needs of youth, ethical concerns, administrative requirements, and other considerations against each other” (2006:109). Hence, even in their own understanding of the labor process they recognize that social influences beyond the individual ‘participate’ in the material practice of youth work on the ground. As what is often termed a “frontline” human-service position, youth workers, and their attendant relations to youth, are caught in the crossfire of clients’, employers’, communities’, even national and state interests and conflicts. In an examination of youth

workers' news media statements, Sercombe illustrated how youth workers in Australia represent youth, and public relations toward them, in contradictory ways;

The youth sector...makes use of images of youth as deviant and as victim, as well as at the same time attempting to deconstruct common discourses of youth as alien, as Other. Portraying youth as deviant is necessary to convince a public of the severity of social failure, and of the urgency of intervention. Portraying youth as victim maintains a construction in which the problems of youth originate in the failures and injustices of social institutions... Portraying youth as 'just a young person' works towards deflecting the processes of demonization, which frequently involve discussion of the problems of youth in the public sphere. [1997:6]

These observations illustrate how youth workers form meaningful relations with youth in the context of, and in dialogue with public interests, social and economic constraints, and the symbolic cultural material by which youth are often made a problematic subject. However, without taking the cultural constructs of professionalism for granted, how do *youth workers* understand their relationship to youth? What cultural materials and practices do youth workers themselves bring to the workplace to make sense of their labor and express their relationship toward youth? While volumes of literature exist on the social history and culture of professionalism, how can we understand the 'personal,' emotional expressions, narrations and performances of youth workers as meaningful, historically and socially *informed* practices as well?

The “Personal vs. Professional Conflict” in Youth Work

The binary construct variously known as the “conflict,” “dilemma,” or “balance” between developing “personal vs. professional” relationships with the clients of youth work

is widely recognized both in workplace relations and, of course, in professional youth work literature (c.f. Beker 2001; Bekerman & Tatar 2005; Sherraden 1992; Walker & Larsen 2006). Phrases of advice from co-workers, training leaders, and supervisors like ‘*Don’t take it personally,*’ or ‘*Don’t get too personal,*’ or ‘*Don’t take it to heart*’ signaled a collective practice of emotional ‘splitting,’ of both carving out an alternate, or ‘anesthetized’ emotional disposition from oneself, and the birth of a self-other relation.

At one staff meeting I attended at Adventure LLC, a co-worker was reprimanded by a superior when he continually referred to one of the young boys in the program by his nickname, or ‘street’ name as the administrator called it. “Ken,” the facilitator, was also the boy’s ‘CBI Worker,’ an individual “Counseling and Behavioral Intervention Worker” who meets with the ‘client’ outside the hours treatment program. But as it was revealed throughout the course of the meeting that the facilitator was inviting the young man to his home for a family barbeque the coming weekend, the facilitator was told to refer to the young man as ‘client (last name)’ and not to meet with ‘clients’ at his home – it was ‘too personal.’

The binary tension of the ‘personal vs. professional’ has also been a central concern of professional youth work since the 19th century Reform Era in debates about the ‘efficiency of charity’ (Lubove 1965) and the ongoing specialization and class-status of human-service careers (Kirschner 1986; Lowe & Reid 1999; Platt 1977). The construct, the “problem,” that the binary represents, is symbolic of the class struggles of *professional* human-service workers, including youth workers, to distinguish themselves from “common” or “folk”

practices over the last century and a half (Bledstein 1976; e.g. Beker 2001; Bekerman & Tatar 2005; Sherraden 1992; Walker & Larsen 2006). The binary of “personal vs. professional” is therefore a cultural construct of professional discourse about itself. The tension provides a framework for defining boundaries and identities, for delimiting the oppositions of the “balance” in the workplace, and aligning them along moral values.

In their discourse about the “conflict” between the personal and the professional in the field of youth work, Walker and Larsen (2006) use an anecdotal character “Linda” to frame “appropriate boundaries” of professional-emotional conduct with youth.

She described how some adults divulge to youth for *shock value* or to prove, “Well, I’ve had experiences, or I’ve done this or that.” Linda felt that these were not appropriate reasons to share something, and set an internal rule not to divulge in these ways. [113, emphasis added]

These “feeling rules,” as Hochschild (1983) called them, frame emotional expression within the discourse of professionalism as “other” – as a realm of consciousness to be rationalized, ‘managed,’ and according to Linda, censored. The ‘othering’ of these emotional practices extends into workplace relations that can be vehemently contested, as the “pain is not therapeutic” conflict demonstrates. The framework of the personal vs. professional provides a bifurcated lens for delimiting class and gender relations in the workplace through interpretations of emotional practice as excessive “shock value” (Lutz & Chivens 2000).

In practice, these relations were often cast in medical terms. One evening I was introduced to a clinical youth worker (she made sure to tell me about her newly achieved psychiatric credentials) by a friend at a dinner party of graduate students. As I told her about

my research on the relationship between youth work and work-identity, and described how some workers really empathized, even identified with the kids they worked with, she seemed appalled and suggested they had psychiatric problems of their own. Personal, emotional relationships with youth were, from her freshly trained perspective, suspect, and even pathological. They violated the personal/professional, private/public divide like ‘matter out of place.’

While Walker and Larsen do acknowledge that “To improve the quality of programs, research, policy, and training needs to give more attention to what happens in the thick of practice” (2006:117) their use of “the conflict between the personal and professional” as *category of analysis* illustrates only their unquestioned acceptance and reproduction of this professional construct. By constructing emotion as excess and as oppositional to, always subordinate to, and even the subject of professionalism, the practice of “professionalism” itself is taken for granted. By uncritically endorsing middle-class moral interpretations of emotion as “shock value” the class “boundaries” discourse of professionalism names these emotional practices as irrational and empties them of any value, meaning or purpose. Hence, by virtue of their categories of analysis, Walker and Larsen have written off a wide range of meaningful practices as “personal” without considering the “teaching purpose” or how these practices of self-expression could be conducted with “the best interests of youth’s development,” indeed their very lives in mind. By framing the labor relations of youth work in the discourse of individualist, “personal” struggles and boundary making, professionalism obscures the relationship between cultural struggles for meaning (pain is not therapeutic),

the “competing objectives” structuring the workplace, and the uneven social relations that are central to youth work.

Altruism & Economic Interests: Caring and the Moral Economy of the Gift

A 2001 report from the Indiana Youth Institute (IYI), a non-profit organization conducting research and providing professional development support for youth workers in Indiana, declared; “Youth work isn’t child’s play,” and in contention with the claim that youth work is an exaggeration of ‘make believe’ domestic labor, argued that youth workers are a “specialized workforce” (1; see also, IYI 2002). These contentions assert the “use-value” of youth work as labor with “exchange-value” in the public sphere. This is evident as the IYA report went on to list its first strategy “to strengthen the youth work field” and “Enhance youth worker salaries, benefits and workplace incentives” (10). Research by the Next Generation Youth Work Coalition and the National Afterschool Association, which surveyed collectively more than five thousand youth workers across the U.S., reported that “only one-fifth of those surveyed said their organization formally recognizes or rewards” training or certification in the form of pay raises, bonuses or promotions (Boyle 2007:9; see also Beker 2001). Nationally, “frontline” youth workers suffer from salaries of \$9 to \$10.99 median hourly wage, poor benefits, and turnover rates at nearly 30% (Boyle 2007:9). The IYI report on the labor conditions of the youth work field in Indiana, where supporting professional structures do exist, reported that “7 out of 10 full-time youth workers earn less than \$30,000 [annually], and more than 20 percent report salaries under \$20,000.”

Furthermore, “while 44 percent are their families primary wage earners, close to 40 percent have no retirement plan” (1).

In fact, the moral economy of caring and discipline is also the cultural material drawn from to attest to the social value of youth work, which, as protagonists and analysts argue, has exchange-value as a form of social-service labor with public benefit (England & Folbre 1999). Looking at the IYI study, which surveyed youth workers and organizations to outline the challenges and career incentives that would “keep compassionate and qualified individuals working on behalf of our children,” (2001:10) one can observe that built into their the survey is the notion that youth workers are, and should be selfless and self-sacrificing. In a graph representing respondent’s answers to questions under the heading “Most Satisfying Aspects of Youth Work” (Figure 2) the response “Personal Growth” is listed first (highest) on a vertical (Y) axis, with the least (38) responses. Below this are seven more response options, each that increasingly emphasize benefit to others, and have increasing frequencies of response. The last on the list, at the bottom of the Y axis, and furthest from “Personal Growth,” with the most responses (265) was “Seeing Youth Grow” (9).

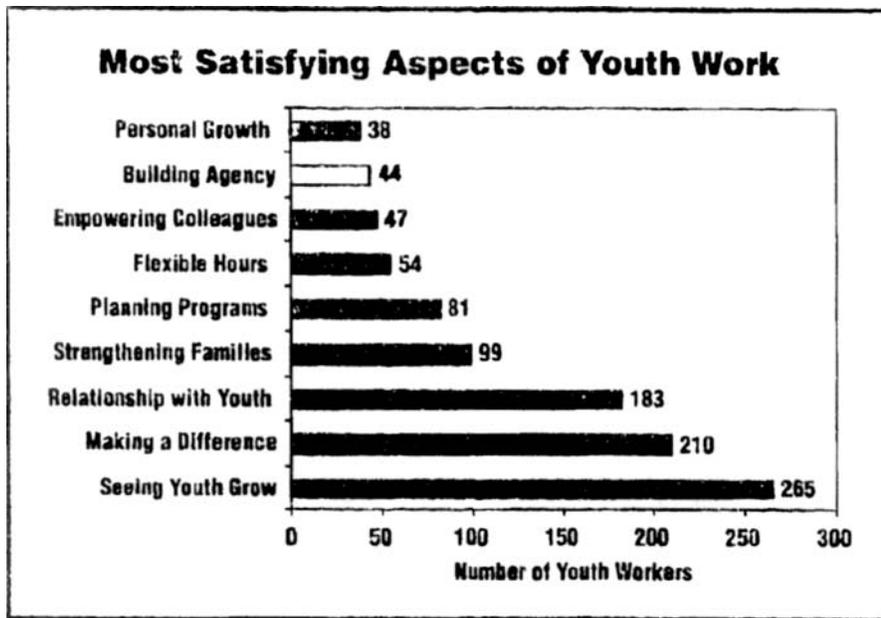


Figure 2. From Personal Growth to Seeing Youth Grow, the range and distribution represents a moral spectrum of interests. From *Youth Work: More than Child's Play: A report From the Field*. Indiana Youth Institute. Indianapolis. March 2001. p. 12.

Placed on either end of a range, the interactive relations of youth work are polarized into separate spheres of moral value. “Personal Growth” and “Seeing Youth Grow” were represented by the survey as opposing poles of interest; self-interest and altruistic disinterest. That youth workers overwhelmingly chose one end of the spectrum provided by the survey illustrates the collective accord of assigning moral value to agents through a sacrificial/caring relationship to youth, and decreasing ascription of moral value toward self-interest. The survey represents moral youth work as ascetic discipline of the self for the sake of the other. Moreover, the graphic representation of “compassion” as the distinct and required character of “individuals” participates in the moral economy of discipline and caring as an injunction on the self.

What all kids need most are positive relationships with caring adults who are passionately committed to their very existence...youth workers at community

based organizations...play a strong role in making a positive impact on children.

As this report demonstrates, however, their work with youth is not child's play. It requires a selfless commitment to young people, regardless of many challenges. These challenges should be viewed as opportunities for all of us to take action. [IYI, 2001:16]

The altruist narrative hinges on caring as an extension of ascetic discipline from the virtue of the individual for the sake of the child, and the "community." The rhetorical use of pronouns "us" and "our" implicates the reader in this sense of community, moral selflessness, and obligation – a moral economy of youth work.

In "The High Passion and Low Pay of Youth Work," Boyle (2006b) also employs the narrative to propose public, economic obligations to youth workers. Quoting a youth worker as anecdotal example, Boyle draws on the theological symbolism of a 'mission of faith' to construct the selfless saint;

I would only look for another job if I was told we had to shut the door," writes [the] director of the Friend2Friend mentoring program...who sometimes pays the office rent instead of paying herself.

Discussing pay with youth workers around the country, and reviewing recent studies about salaries in human services, produces a picture that is both uplifting and depressing. The picture shows workers motivated by faith in their mission, but routinely contemplating leaving in frustration. As the Brookings Institution concluded in a 2003 study of people who work with low-income children, youth and families, "The human services workforce pays a penalty for it's commitment to helping people." [Boyle, 2006b:2]

But how can such saintly work, represented as “critical to National well-being” by national leaders² be simultaneously undervalued socially and economically? In *The Cost of Caring* (1999), England and Folbre outline how people who perform caring work pay a socio-economic “penalty” directly related to the cultural gendering, personalization, and mystification of caring labor;

Caring labor creates public goods – widespread benefits that accrue even to those who pay nothing... Because caring labor is associated with women, cultural sexism militates against the value of the work. Also, the intrinsic reward people receive from helping others may allow employers to fill the jobs for lower pay... Finally, the fact that people feel queasy about putting a price on something as sacred as care limits the pay offered – as paradoxical as it is to pay less for something when it is seen as infinitely valuable! [England & Folbre 1999:39]

Hence it is not only the symbolic gendering and devaluing of youth work as play labor (babysitting) that presents a challenge to the status of youth work, but the symbolic characterization of caring as a sacred *personal* virtue (and ‘intrinsic reward’) that also, ironically, contributes to the class struggles of youth work.

Feminist economists (c.f. Folbre 2001; Himmelweit 1999) argue that market rationalities of social life, which have long been dominant in public discourse since the writings of Adam Smith and John Locke, construct labor as done only for the sake of self-interest in *extrinsic* rewards. In such rationalizations of labor-exchange activities and relations of caring are conceived of in terms of *intrinsic* moral sentiments and naturalized as

² Endorsing George W. Bush’s proclamation of January 2, 2003 as “National Mentoring Day,” House Representative Tom Osborne declared; “The mentoring initiative is critical to our Nation's well-being. I think most of the great nations of the world that have fallen apart have disassembled from within. I think we need to address the problem what is going on with our young people, and mentoring does this...” (Congressional Record 2003: H148).

feminine, banishing both caring and women to the domestic, 'private' sphere. Key to the bifurcation of caring and labor is the notion that market exchanges, including the sale of one's labor, are anonymous, *impersonal* and non-relationship forming encounters; "Sellers don't care who buys from them, and buyers don't care from whom they buy." (Folbre 2001:xiii) Hence, the suggestion of *caring as labor*, as a "specialized workforce," implies a breach of these boundaries, depersonalizing care in terms of labor to be bought and sold for self-interested gain and threatening the moral sanctity of caring as an intrinsically motivated yet disinterested relation.

Mocking the rationalist view of 'the gift,' which insists that it be necessarily disinterested and freely given, Godbout (1998) played the voice of the 'modern ethos of utilitarianism.' This pessimistic, modernist view of the gift, Godbout argued, reduces all exchange to economic self-interest and simultaneously elevates the gift, understood as *authentic caring*, to a mystical, even theological plane;

If you reply that the gift is not love but a form of exchange, they exclaim: 'But then you're denying the existence of generosity, disinterestedness. If there's an exchange, then there's no gift. A gift must be unilateral, with no hope of recompense.' ...The gift is burdened with the impossible task of embodying absent hope and the lost soul in a hopeless, soulless world... And so the gift is not of this world. This is where the utilitarian notion of the gift joins forces with the religious interpretation which has prevailed since the reformation. [Godbout 1998:16]

The rationalization of the field of market-exchange in terms of utilitarian interests gratification inversely mystifies the field of "personal" exchange; emotion, altruism, and caring become the antithesis of the market, while the abuser, demon, and the zealot represent the antithesis of caring; either way, neither should be paid. The ideological tension that

divides self-interests and altruism, discipline and caring is a fundamental nexus across which a spectrum of culturally divided spheres of social life are morally defined, including public/private, professional/personal, rational/emotional, male/female, adult/child, work/play. As a category of practice then “youth work” in particular, with its passively constructed subjects and aspirations to both moral and exchange-value, crosses, and perhaps even transgresses these culturally defined intersections.

The “Glorified Babysitter,” Gender, and the Cultural Politics of Youth Work

Summarizing the various studies conducted on the media representation of social workers doing child welfare work over the last century, Valentine & Freeman (2002) illustrate how the imagery has historically portrayed these workers in the dualistic framework of either saint or folk devil;

“Hiersteiner’s (1998) analysis of films and plays...concluded that social workers are portrayed either as “young fallen angels” or as “older spinsters or misguided mother types” (p.14). Siporin (1984) explored the varied portrayals of social workers in films, novels, plays, and television drama and concluded that “they are generally depicted as of low status” with “many [in] denigrated roles as humorless villains or as fools to be laughed at (p.459), although they were occasionally portrayed as heroes [*sic*] or heroines.” [Valentine & Freeman 2002:456]

While this observation illustrates how social-laborers for youth are depicted through binary lenses, it also illustrates how both of these representations emphasize and remain within personality, or emotional characteristics: angelic, misguided, foolish, humorless, heroic. Like the gift or the theft, work and worker are represented as non-rationalized idiosyncrasies of emotionally involved individuals. Furthermore, the “mother” and

“spinster” imagery of the youth worker alludes to the symbolic gendering, domestication, and correspondingly marginal social and economic status of caring labor in the public sphere. Citing a spokesperson for the New England Network for Child, Youth & Family Services, Patrick Boyle in *Youth Today* points out that “youth work is still considered to be ‘*glorified babysitting*’ to many outside the profession” (2007:9-my emphasis).

Throughout my career as a youth worker the idiom of the “glorified babysitter” has been a widely circulating metaphor through which workers expressed their felt lack of autonomy in the labor process. Working in a group home in California I often heard counselors complain they were like “*soccer moms*” carting the young residents to and from appointment, to court hearing, to outing, to house, to GED classes, to visitations, etc. As we were required to cook for the residents as well as make sure they had done the chores listed in their “structured milieu,” the sarcastic idiom of “the glorified babysitter” came to signify not only our dissatisfaction with our routinized job tasks, but also the notion that we were less than the active agents of “counseling” we had entered the career to be. This feeling of being no more than an unskilled chaperone was formally expressed as condition of the job when as “counselors” we were excluded from group-therapy sessions the residents attended weekly because we lacked the required professional credentials. When I complained, the home’s director said to me; ‘We’re just glorified babysitters,’ and then returned to his office to write the day’s “notes.”

One day a twelve year old boy who was new to the day-treatment program in North Carolina asked me; ‘Reggie says this isn’t summer camp, that its behavior camp...*is that*

true? I was rather stunned, but I told him the truth, in his own language, ‘Yes, it’s behavior camp.’ I was surprised by this question because I was told that during intake, when “clients” were diagnosed with a behavioral disorder and referred to the Adventure Based Counseling treatment program, they and their legal guardians participated in constructing their “treatment plan.” “What plan?” retorted Josh.

In disbelief, I began reading the treatment plan to Josh. I showed him the “Supports/strengths” section: “Sports, family support, helpful at home.” The “Preferences” section: “behave better, be more cooperative.” The “problems/ needs” section: “Impulsive, easily frustrated, decrease fighting, improve peer interactions.” Then the “Goals” sections: “Improve anger management skills as *evidenced* by decrease in temper outbursts and aggressive behavior. Improve peer interactions skills as *evidenced* by decreased conflict with peers.” And “Decrease signs and symptoms of impulsive behavior as *evident* by asking permission before leaving area or engaging in activities.” Finally, I showed him what the treatment plan begins with, the diagnosis: “Oppositional Defiant Disorder.” ‘*You just made that up!*’ Josh exclaimed. ‘No’ I told him, ‘this is why you are here, and as long as you continue fighting, being aggressive, and disobeying the facilitators, this is what will follow you around – this is how these people know you.’ ‘What does that mean?’ he said, pointing to the diagnosis “*Oppositional Defiant Disorder.*” I told him, rather clumsily that ‘You have been identified as having a behavior problem. That is why you were sent here, that is why this is not summer camp – this is serious.’ Josh was silent, dumbstruck with disbelief, his mouth hung open.

Soon after a staff meeting was called. After a contentious airing of the facilitators' frustrations with the arrangement of the new payroll procedures – which had withheld our already meager paychecks for three weeks and counting – Donna, the intake coordinator revealed the reason she had called the meeting. 'I just had to calm a parent down because a child told them that one of us told him he was 'sick in the head'. You have no business telling a child that he is sick or that there is something mentally wrong with him. Mental Health Services provides the counseling here and you all are to *facilitate* their treatment plans. Am I clear?' There was no response. I kept silent because of the way that what I had said had been twisted into abusive words I didn't (and wouldn't) use – and to admit it would have been a direct confrontation of what I saw as Donna's failure to follow "intake" procedures of enlisting the "client" in the preparation of their treatment plan. I was afraid for my job, of never receiving nearly a months pay, and, admittedly, of losing my fieldwork position. After the meeting ended Brent stood aside in the hall letting the other facilitators pass by. He was looking at me with a grin across his face, and as I approached clenching my teeth and looking toward the ground, he repeated what had now become a cliché to me; 'What, did you forget? *We're just glorified babysitters here!*'

While at times the idiom could be used to express dissatisfaction with understaffing and client over-crowding, or under-funding for outings and other "positive rewards," here the term's gendered and domestic connotations conveyed an acute sense of being "de-skilled." More than being disciplined, and unlike being unskilled to begin with, the criticism implied by the sarcastic use of "glorified babysitter" expresses an awareness of workplace as constructed in ways that *revoke* laborers' discretion to act on their own knowledge and

prerogative. Being directed to the passive nature of my position in the labor process as a “facilitator,” a vehicle or conduit of the program’s directives, I was learning the limits of my autonomy as a laborer. But, as critique, these symbolic idioms express a rejection of the invalidating *conditions* of the workplace, not the work itself. By associating the conditions of the job with the lowly-valued maternal, informality of the domestic laborer, the sarcasm of these gendered allusions also expressed the aspirations and class conflicts of frontline youth workers and, perhaps, caring workers at-large. The symbolic gendering of the work or the workplace signifies a space of contested meanings and relationships – a “cultural politics” – about the labor relations of youth work (Jackson 1991). The intersection of these cultural politics with economic inequality illustrates the gendered political-economy of youth work. The vehement rejection of being labeled a “glorified babysitter” illustrates how youth workers, men and women, in practice and in print (E.g. Indiana Youth Institute 2001; Boyle 2007), attempt to distinguish themselves from social activities and spaces of domesticity *symbolically marked as feminine* and therefore emotional ‘by nature’ and, most importantly, excluded from the public sphere as work. These cultural contentions and inequalities intersect with the moral economy of youth work, operating through allegations of abuse, “shock value,” greed and neglect, discipline and caring, interests and altruism. In other words, the “glorified babysitter” idiom reflects the cultural, classed, and moral contentions and conditions of youth work.

Moral Economy and Cultural Politics: Race and Youth Work in the American South

The intersections described above, however, are not often easily spotted in practice. Statistics that show disproportionately low pay corresponding with symbolically low status are one way of observing the widespread marginalization of youth workers, but in actual practice, these processes are not spelled out explicitly, and are often taken up in the context of local and historically informed relations of power. As a volunteer teaching assistant in an inner-city alternative school in Alston, North Carolina, I observed “Sarge,” the non-profit’s administrator, as her public and critical persona brought her into rather contentious relations with the school board and city council members.

In 1992, after a long struggle between city district proponents and county district opponents, the largely white middle-class schools of Alston County were merged with the largely poor black schools of the City. Under increasing pressure from the state, and the city districts insolvency, county commissioners voted to force the merger and dissolve the city district. While the county schools and the middle-class schools of the city perimeter were merged, long neglected schools in the poorest inner city neighborhoods were abandoned, and students from those districts were bused out to county schools where, as Sarge described it ‘there was no welcome party waiting for them.’ In a contentious ruling symbolic of longstanding racial hostility in the city, the school board voted to ban over-sized white t-shirts, symbols of ‘gangsta-rap’ pop-culture among poor black and white youth, after a fight in the cafeteria of one of the cities more affluent high schools. With recently popular Zero Tolerance policies³ and a ban on white tees in force, cultural conflicts across race and class

³ These policies generally mandate expulsion for offenses such as fighting and carrying weapons, but also for threatening or even talking about acts of violence on school grounds.

resulted in stratospheric suspension, expulsion and drop-out rates – particularly for the poor black youth of the inner city.

Seven years after the merger Alston's school district had stratospheric suspension rates; in one year 412 students out of the 868 who attended one middle school received 1,697 out-of-school suspensions; in another high school, 687 students out of 1,536 who attended received 801 suspensions. In both schools more than half of the student body had been suspended or expelled during a single year. But these rates were not evenly distributed. Black students, who comprised two-thirds of the student population, served 77.2 percent of the out-of-school suspensions, as well as 92 percent of the long-term suspensions, meaning for the rest of the year. Drop out rates soared as well; in 1997-98, the school system reported 681 dropouts, increasing in 1998-99 to 723 dropouts. Other schools in the district had high and disproportionate rates of suspension as well; highest among them were schools along the "county rim" of the city where most of the busing of inner-city students took place.

Sarge, named for her tough-love, no-nonsense and rather aggressive disposition in the classroom and the public at-large, was then working in the community center of a public housing project. She began to notice increasing numbers of the young residents receiving suspensions and dropping out of school. Concerned about the young people she called "*my kids*," she began taking them into the center, which led to the eventual development of her non-profit alternative school. Since then, Sarge has developed an "in-kind-services" relationship with the Alston Public School System, which provides her with a teacher and a teacher's aid in exchange for keeping expelled students, who cannot attend the public

alternative school, “up to speed” with their grade level while they are out of school. She also irregularly received block-grant funding from Safe-Schools and Juvenile Courts delinquency prevention grants, as well as various city grants to provide gang-prevention programming.

While Sarge was a participant in the formation, and eventual board member of the school district’s own alternative school, she was also an outspoken critic of the merged district’s race and class inequities, as well as the city government’s administrative bureaucracy. She often accused both of callous disregard and neglect for poor inner-city black youth; ‘They were just leaving them out on the street’ she told me – ‘I had to do something! You *know* what’s gonna happen if they’re just hanging around in the projects all day...Children are *dying* out here!’ Referring to a contentious and racially divided school board task-force she had walked-out on, Sarge played on the moral economy of discipline and caring. In Alston’s largest circulating newspaper, she claimed she wouldn’t “waste any more time with ‘politicking.’” “Kids are dying in the street,” she was quoted as saying, “This time should be used for directly addressing the task.” Along with sympathetic reporters and local community leaders, Sarge continuously situated herself in the moral position of caring for youth that “others” were neglecting, and routinely chastised the self-interested “politicking” of school board and city council members. Sarge had a general mistrust of the city’s political community, white or black, rich or poor, even when they seemed to be on her side, she often told me to ‘*Watch ‘em*, you’ll see who they’re in it for.’ Recalling the opening example of the heroic savior described in the Alston Herald; “She [Sarge] works with a population that most people are afraid of or just don't want to work

with, to be blunt,' says [the] Chief District Court Judge.... '[She] fills a gap nobody else is willing to.'”

Rebecca Allahyari (2000) offers the term “moral selving” to describe the process by which volunteers and care workers attempt to shape their self-concept through human-service labor constructed along virtuous ideals of selflessness. She also describes how this selving “brings the actor into particular working relationships... as well as local politics” (2000:5). The interactive character of moral selving corresponds with what Holland (et. al., 1998) outlined as the Bakhtinian concept of “self-authoring” which they describe as the “orchestration of voices...situated vocal-images within inner speech, and thus possible ideological standpoints for responding to the problems that confront practitioners. The authoring of [youth work], as an activity and an understanding that are one’s own, is composed, in Bakhtin’s terms, by the relations among these situated voices” (Holland et al., 1998:180). Holland’s fusion of Vygotsky’s concepts of semiotic mediation and Bakhtin’s dialogism situates symbolic cultural resources, such as binaries of altruism and self-interest, discipline and caring, within the realm of dialogue that informs self-authoring and practice-relations. But, as the ethnographic examples provided here illustrate, “Sorting out and orchestrating voices is much more than sorting out neutral perspectives in some rationalist’s argument [e.g. game theory]; the voices, after all, are associated with socially marked and ranked groups” and with “particularly potent individuals” (Holland et al., 1998:183). Because the moral economy of discipline and caring operates through the negotiation and orchestration of these uneven and marked “voices,” as the ethnographic evidence presented

here illustrates, the contentious identity relations of youth work represent what I would argue is a form of “moral-self-authoring.”

Throughout my field work the moral-self-authoring youth workers conducted through negotiations of caring and discipline was constructed in direct relation to perceived conditions of youth, but also to working conditions like low pay, being de-skilled, perceived abuse or neglect, and socio-political conflicts such as gender, racial, and class inequality. Sarge’s continued public criticism of the city’s bureaucratic bumbling and racial inequality, often conducted to create pressure on officials that led to financial support, is exemplary of this relational process of moral-self-authoring. But, as Sarge situated her moral self as an altruist in relation to undisciplined and self-interested city bureaucrats, an inversion of her play on the moral economy of discipline and care was launched by city officials in terms of professional conduct, financial accountability and self-interest.

Three years into her “in-kind” service relationship with the school district, which also enabled her non-profit to apply annually for a large federal grant, the superintendent of the racially divided, but white dominated school board announced to the general public that the district would ‘cut ties’ with her non-profit alternative school.⁴ The announcement came a month after the decision was made, according to the superintendent’s own statements, but only a few days before the federal grant deadline – a loss that accounted for more than half of the alternative school’s budget. In a very public and heated debate, school board officials accused Sarge of not complying with “policies related to employee criminal background

⁴ Because students expelled under Zero Tolerance policies cannot set foot on public-school property, and many suspended students who could attend the public alternative school opted not to attend for fear of gang conflicts, Sarge’s non-profit school provided the only alternative drop-out prevention program specific to these students.

checks, sound fiscal management, maintaining student records and documenting student achievement.” Though no evidence of such mismanagement was ever presented, accusations of “disloyalty” to the school district and “pervasive and disturbing attitudes and behaviors” circulated along with the allegations of non-compliance. The conflict cost Sarge the grant, as well as threatened the existence of the program. In the following weeks, black school board members supportive of Sarge and her program exonerated her during an evaluation of her fiscal and administrative procedures, and the in-kind services relationship was restored with no apology from the superintendant.

Two years later, as the state and city tightened waning social policy budgets, the school’s funding came under fire from a conservative member of the city council. This time, in an allusion to Sarge’s “interests” in the program, attacks were launched directly at Sarge’s salary. Councilman Black was annoyed by accusations of racial discrimination launched against the city and he supported the school board when it ruled, in a racially split decision, to ban open commentary (criticism) during its public meetings to “minimize disruption” and “maintain order.” Having proposed closing the city’s Equal Opportunity Office in favor of hiring more police officers, he also used a school board meeting to denounce an editorial cartoon which had been drawn of the board and sent to him; the cartoon depicted the majority white members of the board wearing Klu Klux Klan uniforms – this in a city where cross burnings continued to occur during my fieldwork. Needless to say, Councilman Black was no fan of Sarge’s routine criticisms of the city and, according to Sarge, had been behind a year-long audit the city had been conducting into the school’s finances.

When the school received a low score on a grant-programs finance-evaluation conducted by Black, he recommended to the council that the program be dropped because too much of the grant was going to pay for Sarges administrative salary of \$50,000 per year, including taxes and benefits. The accusation of over-payment came alongside assertions that she was unqualified for the salary or the position in her program since she had no professional degrees directly related to educational administration. Despite the fact that her salary was set by the non-profit's board of directors, Black's accusations through the press repeatedly insinuated that Sarge was not only over-paid, but that she *paid herself* out of the city's diminishing discretionary budget, implying that her practices were based on self-interests rather than altruism, and that she was doing it underhandedly. In other words, Black, and the litany of financial accusations that had piled up and fallen down over the years, were attempting to reverse the moral-economic relation between Sarge and what she often called "the powers that be." Black's accusations attempted to subvert the altruist image by emphasizing Sarge's economic interests, and by repeatedly emphasizing the proportion of the \$62,000 grant that paid her salary, to recreate her image as that of the thief – the anti-market, anti-moral subject. Although he did not have enough votes on the council to deny the alternative school's application, Sarge, in order to keep him from continuously threatening her funding, told me she had agreed to Black's insistence that she use some of the grant money to hire an accountant who would audit the program's finances according to city budgetary rules. Over the years that I have volunteered for and observed Sarge as a public, community leader, I noted that her criticisms have quietly receded from public space as well.

Summary: Grounding the Moral Economy of Discipline and Care in the Cultural Politics of Youth Work

The conflicts between Sarge and the city of Alston reflect long standing racial and class conflicts indigenous to local history. From slavery to Jim Crow laws, to zero tolerance and high suspension rates, race has been a central division around which social inequality in the American South has been structured by the policy decisions of the ruling white elite (Bartlett et al 2002; Hale 1998). Sarge's identity practices of youth work and her moral selving, both in the program and in local politics, were informed, if not structured by the contentious relations of this ongoing history.

Within the struggles of this ongoing history, the moral economy of discipline and care provided grounds for variably situating selves and others as virtuous altruists, or "disruptive" thieves. Hence the moral economy of discipline and caring is rhetorical material employed to assign virtue or villainy to the normative practices of social others in the cultural politics of youth work. For city officials, Sarge's moral-self-authoring in relation to the "the powers that be" was a continual encroachment and public challenge to the authority, autonomy and discretion of the ruling elite. But the act of moral selving as a practice of public identity within the market economy also provided the grounds for undermining Sarge's autonomy, leaving her vulnerable to perpetual audit, oversight and silence by "the powers that be." The more Sarge appeared the ascetic altruist and used her moral platform to make visible the structural inequalities of the city's policies, the more control the city has sought to enforce over her program.

These observations suggest that the lack of autonomy and economic entitlements experienced by youth workers is directly related to mythologies of altruism and gendered symbolism and how these mythologies create ideological tensions and contradictions about intimate relations and market-exchange. The moral economy of discipline and caring is the cultural material used to constitute a meaningful social world of valued people in the context of deeply felt human conflicts about “what should be done” with young people - conflicts that reverberate through everyday relationships in the workplace.

What ethnographic perspectives bring to light is how historically situated actors, in the context of ongoing political struggles and interests, employ these structures of meaning and negotiate relations of power in practice. Going beyond the binary representation offered by popular imageries of youth workers, ethnographic research reveals that youth workers are negotiating conflicts, contradictions, and struggles that inform the production and distribution of these one-dimensional representations. Struggles over access to occupational and market capital, economic development, racialized social control or justice, all these are brought to bear on the occupational, even social identity, relationships and practices of youth workers.

Chapter Two

The Cultural Politics of Discipline & Caring

As the ethnographic descriptions of youth work in chapter one illustrate, a central tension in the construction of youth worker's identity is not only what a youth worker "should do" in relation to the moral economy of discipline and caring, but the social and cultural constraints on their capacity to act upon those convictions as well. Notions of moral being and "professional conduct" don't always coincide, in fact, they clash routinely. But as I will argue in this chapter, this conflict is not a "natural" outcome of having to decide between personal interests and professional ethics, but a process of actively constructing these two concepts as opposed to each other. Through this and the following chapter, I will demonstrate the way that the very construct of professionalism itself, derived from specific historical circumstances and imposed over a range of varied social activity, chops up the experience of social life into divided categories of meaning and value; professional and personal, public/private, rational/emotional, male/female, adult/child, work/play, or work/not work.

Through a reading of youth workers' language, in practice and in print, this chapter demonstrates how professionally aspiring youth workers and researchers engage, negotiate and mediate the struggle of naming, defining, and disciplining the nature of youth work. As

illustrated in chapter one by Frank's contentions about "balance," the sarcastic lore of the "glorified babysitter," and the moral-political struggles of Sarge, assertions about what knowledge, experience, and disposition is required to work with youth are informed by conditions and relations beyond the worker-to-youth-relationship. Taking a holistic perspective toward these specific conditions, I situate youth work as a contentious category that is open to symbolic and moral interpretation, appropriation and performance, and subject to social, political and economic change and contingency. In the process I will continue to examine the spectrum of dilemmas, power relations, and inequalities that intersect in and affect the cultural politics of youth work.

Troubles and Struggles of Defining the Field

Since public and popular knowledge of youth workers is often constructed of, and also limited by, socially consequential mythologies that render youth work either fantastic, or fanatical, domestic, and finally, of marginal worth, it might behoove us to see first how youth workers define themselves as a "specialized workforce." Looking to the professional literature on youth work we find, however, that to describe the field of youth work, or even *to describe it as a field at all*, is a slippery project – even for those who have worked within and studied the range of activities that could be called "youth work."

Citing the wide range of variations in practice and context, and the reluctance of many youth workers to produce definitions which might limit their practices, researchers in the United States as well as abroad have struggled with the problem of "*Defining the Nature*

of Youth Work” (White & Omelczuk 1991). Who *is (or is not)* a youth worker has been in question, and hotly debated for at least the last three decades (c.f. Becker 2001; Boyle 2007; Sherraden 1992). Even in western European countries, such as Germany, Norway, Sweden, France, Australia, and the United Kingdom, where central government policies have for many decades explicitly structured or coordinated variously oriented youth-services agencies, “educational standards defining youth work training... remain largely undefined” (Sherraden 1992:37). Describing similar conditions in Australia, Sercombe claims that “youth work is...‘undisciplined’” (1997:2). This is both a social fact, and a constructed problem for professionalization.

In an attempt to explain the “state of flux” and variation in the field of youth work and to advocate for what he entitled “*The Emergence of Clinical Youth work as a Profession,*” Beker (2001) cited the following passage describing “educateurs” in France as an example of what he called the “generic core” of youth work;

...to encourage the development of the character of maladjusted youths, while helping them to mature socially, through activities or situations that he [the youth worker] shares with them, either within an institution or service or in their [youths’] natural environment, by means of his influence over both the youth and his environment. [Beker 2001:364]

Telling of the fluid boundaries of youth work however, Beker then admitted that

This model is just as applicable to [work done with] youth who are not classified as maladjusted; some readers may recognize that they or some of their close associates – scout leaders, etc. – are functioning very much like educateurs. [2001:364]

By proposing such a “generic core” Beker asserts that clinical and “traditional, community youth workers” should “begin to recognize each other as close *professional* colleagues and members together of a more broadly conceptualized youth work *profession*” (2001:375 – my emphasis). Beker’s generic category releases youth work from attachment to any specific category of young people, or particular youth work encounter, and opens the possibility for including a wide range of adult-youth relations in the consolidated terrain of a youth work profession.

Sherraden, whose Carnegie report advocated for a normalization and professionalization of youth work also dismissed the possibility of identifying youth work by any specific ‘target group’ of young people when he claimed; “there is no conflict between providing services targeted toward ‘at-risk’ young people and, simultaneously, orienting the content and delivery of those services toward general developmental goals” of all youth (Sherraden 1992:29). He seems to agree with and reinforce Beker’s notion “That the core of the work, properly understood, is generic or applicable with all youth...” (2001:365). That is, when “all youth” are understood as a coherent category, anyone “not youth” who engages young people as “youth”, could be doing *youth work*. Therefore the universalizing tendency of childhood development discourse, while extending claim to the domain of childhood development as a labor process, also presents problems for the definition, or specialization of youth work as a profession. First because the generalized category is so inclusive and overlaps with existing fields – such as education, cognitive as well as physical, psychology, and juvenile justice – the “generic core” concept could be interpreted as an encroachment on domains of childhood development to which various professions have already laid claim. It

could also be interpreted as an attempt to encompass, professionalize and commodify a spectrum of volunteer activities – such as Boy Scout leadership. Finally, because professionalization necessitates some level of specialization to construct standards of practice that would provide professional identity, the generic core concept provides little exclusive ground to which an emergent profession can lay claim.

As a result of this problem, the view from the professionalists’ encompassing and specializing objectives, “the field” of youth work is a chaotic scene. For example, a 1997 report produced by the National Collaboration for Youth (NCY), a coalition of national non-profit organizations, investigated existing *Credentialing Activities in the Youth Development Field* across the U.S. in an attempt to “establish mutual goals” in the field of “positive youth development” – which is again a single, but formalizing approach to youth work. The NCY report described “youth work education, training and credentialing efforts [as] *fragmented*, lacking a coherent vision and widely varying in their utilization.”¹ In a 1992 Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development report, which compared (state and civil) structures of youth work in western European nations (and some in Asia) with those in the U.S., Sherraden also concluded that the field was “fragmented”; “This study gives no clear picture of what youth workers should know and be able to do. And doing something distinctively well is, after all, the primary rationale for the existence of a profession” (Sherraden 1992:24, x).

¹ The report identifies NCY as an “affinity group of the National Assembly of National Voluntary Health and Social Welfare Organizations” with funding from the DeWitt-Wallace-Readers Digest Fund. 1997. The NCY website can be located at <http://www.connectforkids.org/node/3236> (2/18/08).

When I scouted the range of youth programs and organizations I could pursue as field sites, or for employment, I found that “youth work” happens in a range of contexts; professional and non-professional, government and private, public and civil, for-profit and non-profit, formal and informal. Youth work is often done by adults occupying positions in social work, juvenile justice and mental health work, law enforcement, counseling, education, coaching, mentoring, collective and individual religious missions, community development organizations, vocational and entrepreneurial training programs, after-school programs, social justice activism and political movements, and parent organizations. Even when focusing on one specific, yet universalizing approach of “youth work” – “Youth Development” – Ellen Gannett, director of the National Institute on Out-of-School Time concluded; “It’s a big mish-mash of people playing in this field... To get a handle on who they are is a little bit challenging” (Boyle 2007:1).

These “mish-mash,” “undisciplined,” and “fragmented” conditions reflect what Jerome Beker observed nearly thirty years ago, that

Most current practitioners... even those in the position of professional leadership, have come to the field through other routes, frequently before any, if any, of these [credentialing] programs were in existence... Some began their careers in clinical youth work without formal training in any of the helping professionals [sic] and have been able to advance with or without acquiring professional credentials along the way. Thus, those in the field at present represent a wide variety of backgrounds, reflecting the state of flux in which the entire field of child treatment now finds itself.” [Beker 2001:372]

Recent studies cited in *Youth Today* describe similar conditions. The National Afterschool Association, which surveyed more than 4,300 youth workers, covering every state, reported that only 55.2 percent of youth workers had a bachelor’s degree, and 67% had

2 year degrees (Boyle:2007). Moreover, their research found that the college degrees youth workers reported were “only marginally” related to youth work. As has been my experience in *every* context of frontline youth work labor in which I have been employed or conducted field work, many youthworkers have little to no professional training at all. Perhaps because of the lack of institutionally enforced gate-keeping requirements that accompany the notion that youth work is “child’s play,” many laborers have come to the field from a broad variety of backgrounds and interests. *Youth Today’s* Patrick Boyle pointed out these conditions as he described “A youth care coordinator with a residential treatment center [who] majored in community planning and plans to pursue a master’s degree in architecture. ‘I’ve never taken an actual class in specific youth work,’ he says” (Boyle 2007:8). “Others” noted Boyle “entered youth work as a way to pursue other objectives, such as community change” (2007:8).

The field of youth work is highly varied in terms of workforce social backgrounds and interests (see also NCY 1997; Sherraden 1992). The “state of flux,” and “fragmentation,” Beker and more recent reports perceive in the field of youth work is directly related to the lack of available, recognized, exclusive and required credentialing structures that would themselves define youth work as a profession and limit this variation. It is also directly related to the ambitious project of universalizing the construct of child development, indeed, human development, as a specialized labor process. This ambition positions interests in professionalization, with its concomitant orientation toward specialization, standardization and credentialing structures (Bledstein 1976; Kirschner 1986; Lubove 1965), in direct conflict with the conditions of the workforce that professional literature has described. This

is in addition to the problem of uncritically and ethnocentrically enforcing the consolidation of “youth” into the euro-western, unilinear cultural vision of “development” (Fleer 2006).

Since “the monopoly of a special skill is the essence of any occupational group’s claim to professional status” (Lubove 1965:118), the variation described in the literature and observed in the field form the very conditions against which professional ambitions must construct definitions, identity and status. Both Beker and Sherraden’s discourses on youth work identity and status, nearly thirty years apart from each other, make this historical and relational struggle very clear as they attempt to carve out space for a professional subculture of youth work.

The expertise of the youth worker is unique and not organically part of any other discipline; it is not social work, education, psychology, occupational therapy, or recreation, although it draws on all of these and others. Nor has any of the established professions shown itself as able and appropriate to encompass youth work. [Beker 2001:365]²

What is and who are youth workers? It is generally accepted that youth workers are not community development workers, not community educators, not social workers, not probations officers, not psychologists and not political agitators, but it is not always clear exactly what they are. [Sherraden 1992:22]

Bourdieu (1993) defines a “field” as a “veritable social universe, where, in accordance with its particular laws, there accumulates a particular form of capital and where relations of force of a particular type are exerted” (164). But by youth worker’s own accounts youth work lacks both “laws” for accumulating forms of capital and “relations of force” that maintain those standardized laws. Scholars claiming to be youth work professionals themselves have found no distinct symbolic capital, no defining skill or

² This passage was originally part of a keynote address delivered to the Annual Conference of the Texas Association of Child Care Workers, San Antonio, November 17, 1978.

monopoly on knowledge to set them apart from those professions already engaged in youth's "development" in a variety of specialized ways. What's more, these scholars also point to the fact that when credentialing programs do exist they are not widely recognized with career advancement or economic entitlements. By these observations, youth work can not be defined as a "*field*" *at all*.

These ongoing struggles to define and formalize the practice-relations of youth work in the U.S. (and abroad) indicate that youth work is not a formal, professional or disciplinary field, but a broad category of practices. Across these wide ranging activities, some who struggle for public recognition and exchange value may seek to create such a distinction; to consolidate and monopolize the authority to define standards of practice and the structures for accumulating capital. In fact it is "distinction" that most singularly defines the practice of professionalism.

Professional Turf, Categorical Identity and the Heteronomous Character of Youth Work

In accordance with a degree of distinction and monopolization, a disciplinary field is characterized by "having its own laws of functioning independent of those of politics and the economy" (Bourdieu 1993:162). Attempts to distinguish youth work as a profession illustrate how it has historically been contingent on, rather than independent from, contentious political, social, and economic struggles.

Though there has been a history, perhaps even a tradition, of philanthropic, civic and professional associations focused on ‘troubled’ or ‘maladapted’ youth in westernized and industrializing countries dating at least to the mid 19th century, youth work in the United States has never been consistently supported (or limited) by a centralized state or civil institutional structure. An exception to this history was the National Youth Administration (NYA), a program created under the Works Progress Administration of the Roosevelt presidency during the Great Depression. As what would later be called an ancestor of the Great Society programs of President Lyndon Johnson, the NYA was conceived to provide remedial education, training, employment, community-service, and recreation for school drop-outs and unemployed youth (Boyle 2004). But in the context of public criticism of the office of education from the Roosevelt administration, increasing war costs, and decreasing budgets, it was the proximity of the NYA’s mission to the prerogatives of the leaders and administrators of professional education that threatened its political longevity.

As George Strayer of Columbia University’s Teachers College put it to the New York Times: “The president has not only deliberately ignored the office of education,’ but he ‘has deliberately denied the competence of school people with their years of experience and has set up a dual administration dealing with youth guidance’” (Boyle 2004:3). Along with NEA and other professional teacher’s associations, Studebaker, the Education Commissioner, vehemently opposed the competitive agency and labor market and engaged in a symbolic campaign that eventually lead to the NYA’s dissolution.

Opponents of the agency charged that local NYA Centers were nothing more than expensive ‘social clubs,’ which signified entertainment and consumption rather than economic production. At a time when many in the country were unemployed and hungry, these were significant allegations. Furthermore, public allegations played on widespread racial conflicts and stereotypes to drum up fears about interracial sex. Indicating the social and political significance of the charges, the NYA released a statement denying that “...Negro boys are encouraged to court white girls or that the center is a negro-white socializing institution” (Boyle 2004:7). Finally, in the context of WWII and popular anti-fascism, the allied campaign of educational associations, competing agencies, and republican politicians set on rolling back New Deal initiatives drummed up anxieties of a national system of centralized social *control* and likened the NYA to “propaganda systems [like] those of Hitler, Stalin and Mussolini” (Boyle 2004:7). Six years after its creation the embattled NYA was discontinued when it was left off the budget of the WPA.

The formation and dissolution of the NYA exemplifies the way that youth work, as a generalized and varied range of public activities engaging youth, is hinged to historical contexts and conflicts, as well as the political hierarchies and relationships of society at large. In a similar way, Sercombe (1997) has illustrated how youth workers in Australia employed images of youth in the media, as dangerous or as victims, to affect public perceptions and thereby increase public funding for youth-related programs that depend on private and state finances. Using these examples of contingency Sercombe (1997) characterizes youth work according to Pierre Bourdieu’s (1993) concept of the “heteronomous principle.”

Bourdieu described the distinction of a “field” of production as characterized by the degree to which producers could act independently from a need for patronage, and thus from the economic field at-large. The notion of “art for art’s sake,” like codes of “ethics” and standards that professional associations produce, largely to police themselves and their boundaries, typify the degree of autonomy by which a range of activities might constitute a “field.” However, “The specific, and therefore autonomous, power which writers and artists possess *qua* writers and artists must be distinguished from the alienated, heteronomous power they wield *qua* experts or cadres – a share in domination, but with the status of dominated mandatories, granted to them by the dominant” (Bourdieu 1993:273). Heteronomous power is characterized by contingent relationships to *audience* (Bourdieu 1993:46). Such contingent relations are visible in the case of Sarge who, like the media savvy youth workers Sercombe described in Australia, played on public fears and sentiments about youth to draw attention to her program’s needs as well as her moral authority. Moreover, the very existence of Sarge’s program was itself derived from the ongoing intersection of racial discriminations and class inequalities which produced both the ongoing struggle for school desegregation via civil rights, and the *resegregation* of schooling through Zero-Tolerance. Her program, like all programs that work with “disadvantaged” youth was an outcome of these ongoing social relations of power that functioned indirectly as the *requisition* of her work by the dominant relations of power.

Youth work, as I will continue to illustrate, lacks economic, cultural, and political autonomy not only from other fields of cultural production (such as education or psychology), but also from the broader field of power. Youth work, I argue, *reflects* the

political and economic struggles, the social and cultural structures and relations found in *everyday* life. This is reflected in the condition Beker identified as a “state of flux” found in youth work, a condition in direct contradiction to the proposition of “youth work” as a specialized and autonomous workforce. But beyond the problem that youth work lacks specialized, monopolized, and *unifying* standards to distinguish itself as a profession, the ethnographic and historical examples provided up to this point also illustrate that youth work is constructed in relation to economic policies and collapse (real or feared), political movements, and socio-cultural change.

The Political Contingency of Meaning & Categorical Slippage of “Mentoring”

Another more contemporary example of the heteronomous character of youth work is visible in the relationship between changing political contentions about the role of the state, the distribution of resources, and the definition of just exactly what a mentor ‘is.’ Throughout the 1990’s a moral panic concerning rural and suburban school shootings, expressed in widespread media converge, public debate and congressional hearings, infused Federal and State Juvenile Justice agencies and departments with new streams of policy backed funding. These policies, however, also entailed the restructuring of the state according to emerging neoconservative law-and-order policies like “Zero Tolerance,” and neoliberal consolidation, localization and privatization of the state in terms of ‘free-market-democracy.’ Since 1995 the U.S. Justice Department’s Juvenile Mentoring Program (JUMP) dispersed more than \$50 million to 261 community programs via 100 available grants (Boyle 2006). But, despite the President’s declaration of “National Mentoring Day” in 2003, more recent budget and program cuts reveal the Bush administrations larger agenda to restructure and reduce the

funding of public assistance programs. The Bush administration's subsequent budgetary cuts and spending caps proposed, with startling success, to eliminate funding for vocational education, Safe & Drug Free Schools, Community Development Block Grants that fueled youth programs, employment training for youthful offenders, and the JUMP mentoring programs in juvenile justice. In fact, the JUMP program was 'discontinued' after 2003, leaving programs to scramble for increasingly limited resources.

While the Bush administration attracted both praise and critique with its early tax cuts and rebate checks, the long term policy structures initiated by the administration have undermined and set local youth work programs in competition with each other for decreasing funding. Faced with unprecedented budget deficits that resulted from equally unprecedented war spending, the Bush administration has forced congress to impose spending caps on entitlement and discretionary programs that go to state housing, juvenile justice, mental health and child welfare agencies in the form of block-grants. The administration's Pay-Go budget rules required spending increases in these areas be offset by cuts elsewhere in the budget, which set human-service agencies against each other in competition for decreasing funds. And, as concerned youth worker/writers in *Youth Today* point out, the administration's 2007 budget "give[s] states greater flexibility for Medicaid and foster care spending, in exchange for lump sum payments from the federal government. To many advocates, this opens the way for states to shift funds away from many needy youth, while freeing the federal government from obligations to increase its financial contributions if more children need services." (Boyle 2005:1).

It is under these conditions that the very category of mentor has come both into popularity, and into question, illustrating once again the politically contingent and heteronomous character of the field of youth work struggles. A 2006 article in *Youth Today* opens with an anecdote of this categorical tension;

There's this guy, a writer. Coaches a boy's baseball team. He sees the kids three times a week; they have a great time. He gets to know a few of them and their families beyond baseball, but his relationship with most of the boys ends with the three-month season.

Is Patrick Boyle a mentor?

"Yes," says Lisa Dougherty, mentoring services director at The Arc of Omaha, in Nebraska.

"Probably in some way," says Alayn Shoenfeld, partnership development manager at the Memphis Mentoring Partnership, in Tennessee.

"No, I think you're a coach," says Roxanne McCright, executive director of Big Pals-Little Pals, in Columbus, Neb.

Anyone see a problem here?

[Boyle, *Are You My Mentor?* 2006:1]

Part of this interpretive confusion might be explained by its relationship to changing resource structures and availability. The rush of youth violence prevention policies churned out in the 1990's dramatically increased funding for localized, community programs and, based on claims that mentoring reduced risk behaviors in teens, created what has been termed a "mentoring bandwagon"(Boyle 2006). With the departments of Education, Labor, Health and Human Services, and Housing and Urban Development all channeling grants earmarked for local mentoring programs "'First tutors, coaches, scout leaders, etc. became 'mentors.' Then *mentoring lite* programs, including electronic 'e-mentoring' jumped on board.' 'Everybody today is calling their organizations mentoring organizations,' says McCright,

whose Big Pals – Little Pals didn't even use the that term when it began 34 years ago. 'I think it's gone overboard a bit'" (Boyle 2006:1).

Perhaps the point at which it went "overboard," in the eyes of some, was precisely when the expansive funding sources were threatened by an expanding "bandwagon" of grant competitors. Certainly as the Bush administration has radically cut grant funding programs (despite it's celebration of "Mentoring Day") defining who is or is not a mentor has become more contentious. Allegations of "mentoring lite" illustrate that as an expanding range of activities were claimed under the rubric of "mentoring," the more the authenticity of emergent practices were questioned and ranked. These shifts and struggles of meaning over the category of mentoring have come about because conditions external to practices of youth work and their conceptions of the term. The shifts illustrate how political reorganizations in the field of power, reflected in the relationship constructed between the state, the market, and civil society, directly affect the conditions for defining practices of youth work and restructuring the meaning of everyday practices. These problems also illustrate how the conditions of variable practice across the range of youth work and "interest bearing" interpretation make terms like mentoring, even "youth work" – as a categories for grouping, studying and evaluating practice – problematic to say the least.

Categories of Analysis/Practice Problems

At this point, it may be useful to distinguish between "youth work" as a category of *analysis*, and "youth work" as a category of *practice*. As I have shown, there are many problems with defining the meaning of youth work. Simple variation and an inability to find

consensus on what constitutes a practice, a body of knowledge or theory, has raised the problem of constructing a category within which knowledge, such as definitions of practice, statistics, descriptions, and analyses of its occurrence, could be produced. One problem then, as in the case of contentions over the meaning of “mentoring,” is the taken-for-granted category of “youth work.”

Following Pierre Bourdieu’s theory of *practice* (1977) scholars of “identity” have distinguished between the use of terms such as “race,” “nation,” or “identity” as *categories of analysis* (i.e. as *constructs* used to organize and make observations about descriptive information) and as *categories of practice*. Brubaker & Cooper describe categories of analysis as “experience-distant categories used by social analysts” and categories of practice as derived from “everyday social experience, developed and deployed by ordinary social actors” (2000:4; see also Loveman 1999). People use categories of practice, such as ethnic, gendered, or occupational identities “to make sense of themselves, of their activities, of what they share with, and how they differ from, others” (Brubaker & Cooper 2000:4). They are used “to persuade people to understand themselves, their interests and their predicaments in a certain way, to persuade certain people that they are (for certain purposes) ‘identical’ with one another and at the same time different from others, and to organize and justify collective action along certain lines” (Brubaker & Cooper 2000:4-5). My point is not to examine “what fits in” a particular category but *how* meaningful categories of practice (e.g. the “glorified babysitter”) are socially produced, circulated, and contested; *how* they are the medium and effect of *relational* processes of group-making, identity, division, and collective action. Brubaker and Cooper’s practice approach to identity points us to the *positional* and

rhetorical character of categories of practice – that they are persuasive, contentious claims about meaning, relational identity and status.

Professionalization: the Cultural Politics of Class Mobility

Many of the reports, essays and newsletter articles we have so far observed using “youth work” as a category of occupational analysis (despite being undefined) have also, even by their use of the term “youth work,” attempted to consolidate the “flux” of observed variation into a formalized professional identity. In other words, they reify claims about the meaning of practice and convert their definition of youth work, which is a category of practice, into a category of analysis. These interpretively defined categories of analysis then become the positions from which writers represent the varied and fragmented field of public labor engaging young people. But this is not necessarily unintentional, nor is it “intellectual sloppiness.” Rather it reflects what Brubaker and Cooper note is the tension in identity studies; that many people who study identity (such as an occupational or professional category) are both “*analysts* and *protagonists* of identity politics” (2000:6).

For instance, the 1997 NCY report on credentialing structures in the U.S. is as much a categorically descriptive analysis of “individuals, organizations, and universities...working toward professionalizing the youth development field” (1) as it is a polemic and rhetorical document, *itself* attempting to consolidate a “wide range of settings, titles, and functions” (1), establish credentialing standards, and promoting professionalization. For example, by way of an introduction to a definition, the authors of the NCY report equate the “youth development” approach with the general term of “youth work”; “For the purpose of this

report, youth work and youth development work is defined as ‘focusing on the development of personal, social, and citizenship competencies’”(1). The authors highlight that it is the provisional nature of the definition we should pay attention to, not the equation of a particular (Youth Development) with a general and undefined term (Youth Work). Though it is subtle, the appropriation of the generalized term is an implicit way of claiming authority over a category of practice. If this seems like analytical hair splitting, consider the tension and stakes involved in whether you can authentically represent your practice as “mentoring,” or “mentoring lite.”

Despite Sercombe’s critical approach to youth work practice and his appreciation for the dynamic character of this “undisciplined” field of practice, his own polemics attempt to consolidate those “innovative, spontaneous, local level” dynamics of youth work into “a particular kind of professional relationship with...young people” (1997:18). Seeing a lack of consensus about what constitutes that relationship, Sercombe then attempts “to put a skeleton framework in place” (1997:18). In his opening paragraphs of an article titled *The Youth Work Contract* Sercombe asserts;

While there is now a broad range of professions concerned with young people, it is important to try to clarify the practice of youth work specifically, not only for the benefit of youth workers themselves but also to help other professionals understand what youth work is, who youth workers are, how they can be used and when it is appropriate to refer a young person to a youth worker. [Sercombe 1997:17]

Note how Sercombe already has a preconceived notion of a singular “youth work” and its specialized distinction – an identity – through “appropriate referral” from “other professionals.” Note as well that his proposal, perhaps unwittingly, excludes non-

professional, informal activities from the category of youth work all together by limiting his relational world to “professions” and “professionals.” In such a symbolic equation, where the conditions of possible meanings and relations of youth work are so fundamentally limited to a “particular kind of...relationship,” doing youth work is either professionalized (meaning specialized) or it is not youth work at all. What’s more, this is made a moral gesture by pointing out that professionalization is to the benefit of others, at least as much as it is to professional self-interest.

Sherraden’s 1992 international report on youth work credentialing structures, upon concluding that youth work is largely undefined, spells out the process more clearly: “the concept of informal or experiential education must be clearly defined”(x) – the undisciplined must be disciplined. After claiming what youth work is *not* (quoted above), Sherraden asserts the necessity of youth work as a specialized category of professional identity: “Advocates of youth work maintain that ‘youth work demands a specialist level of training, appropriate to the particular tasks it attends to, to its proper skills, and to the contexts within which youth workers must operate’” (Sherraden 1992:23). But he also soon reveals the problem of conflating the informal, experiential and contested category of practice with the presumed stability of a category of analysis; “the specification of these tasks is sometimes unclear and varies from country to country” (Sherraden 1992:23).

Beker, while holding to the claim of a generic core that is inclusive of all youth categories or “target groups,” advocates for a similar *distinction* from the undisciplined – the “*common.*” By reference to the signs of professionalization in his own writing, i.e. by

quoting other published professionals, Beker argues that the emergence of occupational associations and bodies of specialized literature indicate that “it has become clear that *common sense* is not enough to make an adequate child care worker” (Toigo [1975], in Beker 2001:367 – emphasis added). Rather than interpreting the production of specialized literature and associations as contentions for professional status and prestige, Beker interprets *these developments, not the complexity of the labor itself* (which has thus far gone undefined by these protagonists), as signifying a necessary distinction from ‘*common*’ interactions with, or thinking about, young people. Beker’s reference to Toigo’s observation of referential networks implicitly operated to illustrate, by way of its practice, his assertion that professionalized associations were evidence of “professionalization.” As I stated earlier, the process of professionalization is primarily concerned with distinction, but not simply from other professions. Professionalization is also about class distinction and therefore, class mobility.

As Bledstein (1976) remarked in *The Culture of Professionalism*, “words [were] the primary social currency” (70) distinguishing the middle-class professional as a class distinct from common, folkloric practices and “quackery.” These cultural politics are projects conducted in the interest of social mobility, status and security by the double process of specialization and exclusion. Sennet and Cobb (1972) point out in *The Hidden Injuries of Class* that “badges of ability” such as the credentials of a college degree, are represented as self-evident signs of an individuals’ ability and serve to naturalize the unequal arrangement of *socially constructed* relations – such as the exploitation of untrained laborers. The discourse of credentialing in youth work literature attempts to distinguish “skilled” and

“common” laborers in the field by standardizing and normalizing “appropriate and particular tasks” and “proper skills” (Sherraden 1992 [above]), and by access to publication and the literary field.

The specialization of words, of disciplinary languages and texts – the literary field – enabled professional youth workers a measure of social distance and identity as members of a privileged cultural class. As I spoke with the manager of Adventure LLC, the day-treatment program where I would later be reminded of my passive role as a “facilitator,” he explained why he thought there were differences in what the program “envisions” and what he saw as actually occurring;

Chris: “Being that there are hiring limitations ...staff requirements are not extremely high. It doesn’t pay enough to afford to hire staff that have had real formalized training so a vast amount of the training comes from experience on the job, supervision. *So you have people who don’t necessarily have the book kind of understanding or training about child development and psychology.* So it’s kind of an economic situation, so some of the people when I got here had a kind of different philosophy about working with kids and I think we’ve started looking more at investing in the kind of people-like some of *the more recent employees that have four-year degrees and book knowledge experience-because I think it’s easy to look at the kids and see the obvious cause of behavior instead of realizing that there are a multitude of things going on underneath.* And I think that shapes it. In my case, I work with these kids and *I had seven odd years of supervision working with psychiatrists, so I really got to see that sometimes what you’re seeing isn’t really what’s going on.* I think that some other people that work with these kids think that, you know, kids with social problems, are really grandiose and they need to be knocked down a few levels but really just the opposite is true. There really hurting, emotionally insecure people who really need to be built up in a sense. So they don’t have to throw out the kind of false stuff like some of these kids will say-“I’m going to kick your ass”-it’s really not because they’re tough, it’s because they’re scared shitless. They can’t totally overcome their fears because they live in environments where they can’t show fear but these are coping mechanisms-but having an understanding of that, *some staff members think that “hey this kid is challenging my authority”, some of the staff have their own insecurities about their authority, and they*

come back in a sense like the kids do. To me I think that's a bit at play at times. And I think that will always happen anytime you have relatively new people in the field, its part of the learning and supervision that you'd grow and develop along those lines."

Erik: "I think I found myself in that position several times. When a kid would whip off his belt and hold it at me, threatening me with it - it's hard to just step back a little bit when you're confronted with that on a daily basis."

Chris: "And that's the bottom line, these kids are mentally ill. And it's interesting to, *there are cultural differences, how different cultures within our country view it as something personal weakness and others see it as brain disease and all the things that people view it as-I think that comes into play to.* When I look at these kids I think well he's depressed, because he's depressed he's prone to do that, some *other people look at this kid and say "well he's a punk-I grew up with kids like that out on the street, this is what you need-just an old-fashioned ass whooping to put the kid in line"*. What they don't realize is that the parents of this kid of probably spanked him. Everyone comes to it with a different philosophy." [Emphases added]

What Chris described in this explanation is not the just the difference in the program's vision and action, but a class-culture distinction between privileged "book knowledge" and the low-wage workers who "grew up with kids like that out on the street." The metaphor of "cultural difference" also enabled Chris to employ color-blind language for implying the intersection of class and race without directly speaking the language of race – tabooed by liberal discourses of equality and aversions to explicit power (Delpit 1995). Chris had mentioned to me on various occasions that 'being the only white guy, it takes some time to fit in with the other (all African American) workers' and he scornfully rejected a facilitator's assertion that he just 'didn't get it' when he criticized the rap music the workers and clients enjoyed for its profane language. The "cultural difference" metaphor allowed Chris to veil the language of racialized difference in relation to class, and diminished the social fact of unequal access to professionally recognized "badges of ability." In the process

Chris asserted that knowledge about “what’s really going on” is socially distributed according to “cultural” identity and social entitlement.

The cultural politics of this class distinction are expressed not only through the book/street differentiation of knowledge, but primarily as a moral relation of discipline and caring that, as I argued in chapter one, operates through contested perceptions of youth. Chris depicts youth as passive *victims*, *involuntarily* prone to violence, equates the facilitators and parents of his low-income clientele in a cycle of violence, and positions himself as caring by means of professional “vision.” “What you’re seeing isn’t really what’s going on” he explains, “the parents of this kid probably spanked him.” The cultural politics of difference expressed by Chris privileges the morality of the psycho-medical vision through recourse to “the book” (the literary medium), which reveals the unseen internal wound of the passive, innocent victim; “They’re really hurting, emotionally insecure people who really need to be built up in a sense.” In other words, it is through the relationship workers construct with youth that they align themselves in relation to other youth workers, and, in many aspects, to the social world at large.

Discipline, Caring & the Moral Economy of Professionalism

Chris’s explanation of “cultural difference” on the job illustrates how the discourse of professionalism also serves to construct specific relations between the skilled professional and “client.” Like Chris, authors describing the fragmentation of youth work assert the necessity of professionalization not only for the benefit of youth workers, but also for the client’s benefit. Drawing on the moral economy of discipline and caring, Sherraden’s

international NCY report calls for ‘unification’ (a euphemism for disciplining the undefined, fragmented and varied labor his report describes) as an act of rationalized or *disciplined care*;

Coming together as a united voice would bring greater attention on the importance of quality service delivery in enhancing the positive development of young people. Professionalizing the youth development field could enhance the status, professional recognition, and public awareness about the expertise required to do this work. [Sherraden 1992:2]

As Beker concurs; “Certification...serves workers by providing feelings of competence, recognition, and identity...They serve clinical youthwork clientele by establishing and directing attention to standards of competence” (2001:373). The deployment of professionalism here acts to *mediate the relationship of discipline and caring* between laborer and young person; a “client’s” attention, as well as public attention are to be directed not to the person, or personal relation to the youth worker, but to certifications, degrees, “standards of competence,” “appropriate tasks,” and “proper skills.” These competencies, by their insertion between the subjects of the caring relation, displace the subjective identity of any particular individual laborer and their self-interests. Professionalization discourse attempts to observe the modernist personal/public dichotomy by displacing the personal; the laborer becomes a vehicle – a “facilitator” – of standard and “proper skills” and the young person, a “client.” Such discursive tactics also attempt to bypass altogether the modernist sanctity of the intimate gift-exchange relation (discussed in chapter one), which inhibits the exchange-value of caring as paid-labor in the public sphere.

Symbolic of the mediating character of professionalization is the importance and prominence professionals and degree programs place on *management* training. Sherraden’s

1992 NCY report, National 4-H Council reports, and more recently, authors in Youth Today point out that most youth oriented curriculums and certification programs – when available at the college or professional level – are more oriented toward organizational and case management than ‘face-to-face’ practice of youth work (Alexander 2002; Boyles 2007; Sherraden 1992). Program administrators in Boston and in Minnesota illustrate the value placed on management skills and how these values are constructed by the production of a standardized labor-language that is both institutionally recognized and economically rewarded;

[The] training director of Twin Cities and Minnesota BEST, places a premium on degrees because they teach people ‘to think critically about planning and organization. Money is the bottom line’ she says.

‘My staff who have been through the program have adopted a common language and terminology, both with their peers in other agencies and the youth they serve. They feel they’re no longer working in a vacuum’ and she believes in rewarding degrees. A combination of training, experience and a degree, she says, can boost a salary ‘by as much as \$2,000.’ Now she insists that her staff participate in the program. [Alexander 2002:2]

Similar to Beker, who identifies a network of inter-referencing literature as evidence of professional status, these statements privilege a shared, specialized, and economically rationalized language of management skills to assert the exchange-value of youth work as a profession. These recent emphases on managerialism correspond with shifting structures of social service provision from previous administrative agencies of the institutional state to the competitive economic orientation provoked by block-grant funding structures and for-profit contract bidding. Chris, who had previously worked in a county treatment clinic, told me how the shift for him had not only increased his salary and exposed him to the ‘management side of things,’ but had enormously increased his autonomy and discretionary freedom. He

often attended and hosted lunches with local mental health, probation, and social service agency representatives and told me he enjoyed the social interaction of ‘being like a salesman’ for the program. But as much as he authorized himself through a moral relationship to the clients via literary vision, money was often “the bottom line” for Chris, too, as these representatives found a growing number of private partners in Alston, and across North Carolina, from which to choose.

Without acknowledging that participation in these discursive networks requires access to institutional resources, guarded by the requirements of credentials and a language recognized by admissions committees and peer-reviewers, professionalists assert exchange-value through reference to, and circulation of technocratic language. As Delpit illustrates in her classroom ethnographies, middle-class teachers often name *external* sources or cite professionally supervised education experiences, drawing their practices from technologically specified codes of “book knowledge” as Chris plainly stated (Delpit, 1995:116). Thus, to assume an authoritative role, they rely on reference to external sources of legitimation, “badges of ability” and mediating standards of abstract knowledge.

A key element in this mode of thought is the status given to the power of abstract ideas expressed in the form of theory. The belief that abstract ideas should guide social experience has become basic to our³ natural attitude toward everyday life; and with this idea has come the acceptance of the unique social role of those in possession of expert knowledge. In the hands of liberal-technicist educators, theory has become the talisman for centralizing authority over the decision-making process and increasing the efficacy of control and predictability. [Bowers 1984:16]

³ Here Bowers uses the term “our” to signify the academy, an institutional structure of western society that is dominated by and reproduces elite, upper and middle classes.

These “professional experts” occupy a position of power both in the system of authority and knowledge generally acknowledged in the larger society and here in the capitalist enterprise of Adventure LLC. They have access to the positions with the discretion to hire, fire, dissolve and create positions of employment, and police the limits of practice under their charge. They are hired for such positions because the “treatment plans” administered to the clients must be recognized by the state as “tested approaches” to legitimate “community interventions.” They are the liaisons between the state and the labor process practiced toward clients. State agencies require such liaisons not just so they can exchange clients through those lines of intelligible communication, but so that in the local space of Adventure LLC the agency of the State can be assured of disciplinary standards across the descending ranks of technicians. Chris, in fact, performs this bio-political operation in his equation of the facilitators with the “clients” and his frequent framing of the facilitators’ disciplinary practices in the moral terminology of “abuse.” In this way technocratic abstraction of the interpersonal is understood as morally disciplined care.

Like “art for art’s sake” such networks represent the emergence of autonomous discourse that, as I have illustrated (above), plays on the moral economy of *disciplined care*. Managerialism, theory consciousness, and technological mediation are described and understood by protagonists of professionalism as “youth work for youth’s sake.” Such mediation obscures the human subject from visibility, visibility that can be, as Skott-Myer (2006) has argued, and Chris evidenced, dangerous to those caught in the institutionally sanctioned and class-informed gaze of technocratic knowledge. Through the depersonalizing abstractions of managerial and administrative professionalism (Bledstein 1976) symbolically

“personal” practices of caring and altruism are marginalized if not forbidden. The promotion of technocratic and management languages as the defining “skills” of youth work attempts to sidestep the symbolically personal, domestic, gendered implications of caring labor as gift-exchange, which operates to exclude such labor from the public sphere by modernist discourses of the impersonal market.

Consequently, the production of this mediated relationship itself produces the central “dilemma” of professionalist discourse and subjectivity. Youth work protagonist/analysts have pointed out how “the conflict” between “the personal vs. the professional” forms an axis by which relations toward young persons and self-identity as a practitioner are negotiated. Walker and Larsen’s (2006) discussion of this process provides an allegory of the individual production of this mediated relation;

“One frequent class of daily dilemma puts youth workers’ professional versus their personal relationship with youth into tension. In response to this repeated dilemma, Linda had developed internal rules to guide her decision making. First, she would ask herself whether divulging a personal experience had a teaching purpose or was an opportunity for her to model something that would be useful to the youth. Professionally, Linda had developed a sense of what she saw to be appropriate boundaries.” [Walker & Larsen 2006:113]

Professionalism is a strategy that mediates relations between laborers and subject, and by doing so attempts to mediate and diffuse the gendered and domesticated, symbolic constructs that undermine the public status of caring as rationalized skill. This strategy attempts to displace the notion and practice of caring labor as intimate gift exchange in order to gain entry to public exchange relations in the marketplace of social and economic status. Youth work professionalism is a bid to reorder commonly held meanings and relations of

caring labor and to reassign these relations from the private/domestic/informal/street sphere to the public and economic spheres.

Following Jackson's (1991) definition of *cultural politics* as "the domain in which meanings are constructed and negotiated, where relations of dominance and subordination are defined and contested" (200), I propose that youth work is a domain of social-labor driven by cultural politics about the moral construction and social distribution of discipline and caring. The cultural politics of youth work extend *through* visions of youth to include contentions about the orchestration of moral-selves, relations of practice, the relationship between government and the market, and the social distribution of entitlements, privileges and responsibilities – the moral order of society itself. Youth work, I argue, is a microcosm of social history and change, collective cultural struggles, and the configurations of identity and inequality that arise from them.

In the chapters that follow, I will chart a cultural and social history of the symbolic and contentious relations I have outlined thus far. Examining late 19th century "child-saving" and a "crisis of youth violence" in the late 20th century as periods of historic comparison, I will also illustrate how changing cultural discourse about history and human nature affects the perception of youth, the formations and orientations of the state, the labor relations of youth workers, and the structures of practice that shape those relations.

Chapter Three

A Cultural History of Social Labor

The previous glances at the moral economy of youth work, in popular and academic dialogues, national and international, illustrate that it is a range of labor extending from heterogeneous and contentious relations of social conflict and cultural change. Even brief reflections on the emergence and demise of the National Youth Agency in the 1930's, and the "mentoring-lite" conflicts of the Bush era informs us that "youth work," as a category of practice, is characterized by historically informed cultural politics over the authoritative and moral treatment of youth. These examples also illustrate how youth work is a space of public conflict over categories of professional identity that lay claim, by right of such status, to economic entitlement.

In this chapter I extend the historical focus in order to outline several interrelated, enduring patterns of cultural and social struggle, negotiation, and change that continue to inform the widespread local politics of contemporary youth work. These involve struggles over the status of both youth and those who would 'work' with them. However, I will illustrate how these struggles also occurred as part and parcel of historic conflicts over the natural and moral order of society. These include conflicts over the relationship between the state, the individual, and the market; the demarcation of public and private activity, space,

and moral being; and the assertion of an ideology that would properly frame, naturalize, and “civilize” the manifold inequalities of social life. All these struggles bear on the possibilities of what “work” should or could be done with “youth.” To be clear, *I do not intend to draw a historical or evolutionary line from a point of “origin,”* but to draw on history for purposes of contrast and comparison, to illustrate both change and continuity with the conditions of youth work today. To understand youth work as it is today, we must reckon the history of ideas and relationships that shape the contours of contemporary conflicts. At the same time we reckon with these inherited patterns, we must also recognize how contemporary discourse, dominant in youth work-places, imply significantly different social effects from the time and implications of the era of “reform.”

The social origins and history of the Juvenile Justice System in the United States belie the cultural politics, political economy, and historical contingency of the youthwork field. The Reform Era “child saving” movement of the late 19th century has been largely credited with the political and moral impetus for the first juvenile courts in Chicago, which were established in 1899 and became the model by which other states’ juvenile justice policies were based. Many historical accounts romantically narrate the origin and development of the U.S. juvenile justice system as a story of progressive, benevolent and humanitarian legislative reform – the so called “Reform Era” – which included (but was not limited to) the enactment of child-labor laws and the establishment of separate legal systems for young people (Platt 1998).

But again, the treatment of youth-related structures of policy and labor must be contextualized in broader social tensions. Platt's (1977) social history of a group of reformers widely dubbed "the child-savers" illustrates the relations between the movement and broader inequalities emerging out of the rapidly changing and globalizing world of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Platt (1998) critiques the way that the history of the child-saving movement is often told in a "gradualist" narrative as modernity's triumph over the brutality of child labor and disciplinary abuse. Though as he suggests, to accept such histories at face-value is to take for granted the way in which these reformers described themselves without taking into account the symbolic and relational context from which such mythologies of the self-in-history are told. To accept the mythologies of the reform and progressive eras as *history* rather than as *historical* is to miss the cultural and social significance of these tales, in their time and ours. In fact, deploying the gradualist narrative of progressive liberal, altruistic humanitarianism is to participate in, rather than examine the moral economy of caring and discipline.

In the latter half of the 19th century, several waves of immigration consisting of largely displaced and starving rural European peasants, whose inexpensive labor facilitated an expansion of industrial growth in the U.S. (Nash 2001). From 1846 to 1855, 1.3 million Irish famine refugees entered the U.S. (Levine & Levine 1992: 11), and between 1880 and 1895 nearly 3 million more mainly Eastern European and Jewish peasants followed. Platt argues that as a reaction to unbridled laissez-faire capitalism itself, laborers' increasingly rioted and unionized against worsening working and living conditions. In response, the middle and owning classes produced myriad and often contradictory ideological

rationalizations and counter-movements to explain and guard their privileged place in the existing social order. The child-saving movement consisted largely of middle-class and elite women and men that, as Platt illustrated, “were not utopians or revolutionaries [but] worked with the grain of the economic, social and political structures of their times” (Cunningham 1995: 135). Studies of the cases brought before the Chicago juvenile courts from 1899 to 1909 reveal that more than 72 percent of the young defendants were identified as “foreign born” Irish, Polish, Russian, Italian, Spanish, and Jewish immigrants (Abrams & Curran 2000: 53).

The central argument of Platt’s social history of the juvenile courts is that “The child-saving movement was not a humanistic enterprise on behalf of the working class against the established order. On the contrary, its impetus came primarily from the middle and upper classes who were instrumental in devising new forms of social control to protect their power and privilege” (Platt 1977: xx). Platt, who examines the reform era in terms of class-conflict, argues that reformers acted on class interests in maintaining the stratified social order of capitalism, rather than moral conviction. In later editions (1977) of *The Child Savers: The Invention of Delinquency*, first published in 1969, Platt admits to criticisms (see for e.g. Muraskin 1976, or Haskell 1985) that the “social-control hypothesis” which he employed in the text, while pointing to the uneven social effects of the child-savers work, has at least several shortcomings. Primarily, the argument fails to accomplish his own stated goal of attempting to “locate the social basis of humanitarian ideals and to reconcile the intentions of the child savers with the institutions that they helped to create” (Platt 1977: 4). To hear the problem out in his own words;

This book destroys the myth that the child saving movement was successful in humanizing the criminal justice system... if anything, the child savers helped to create a system that subjected more and more juveniles to arbitrary and degrading punishments. But why did this happen? Was it simply the result of good intentions gone wrong, or excessive idealism and naiveté, or even a well-orchestrated conspiracy among the child savers? This level of explanation, implicitly supported in this book, is reductionist because it underestimates the significance of structural conditions and depends too much on a subjective critique of the child savers motivation and professional ambitions. By placing the child-saving movement in the context of the political economy of Progressivism, its failures can be understood in a new light. [1977: xviii]

This chapter will situate the claims and actions of the child saver reformists as negotiations of the social relations of their time, but will also examine the cultural discourse of “civilization” that sustained the political economy of Progressivism. By reckoning the *cultural* basis of humanitarian ideals with the social history of their production and use, I hope to close the alleged gap between ideas, actions, and outcomes identified, or perhaps, missed by the social control hypothesis. Rather than discount the claims of reformists as propaganda because their ideals and policies reinforced capitalist social divisions rather than contesting them, I will explore how the progressive claims of liberal reformers directly corresponded with the policies, agencies, and degrading forms of social control they promoted.

The Cultural Politics of Poverty & Child Saving

Child savers such as Charles Loring Brace, Jane Addams and Louise de Koven Bowen were central, and typical, figures in the child-saving and settlement-house movements established in the immigrant slums of Chicago. Each came from affluent, privileged

upbringings in politically powerful and land-owning families (Platt 1977). In tune with many of the intellectual criticisms of modern industrial society that gave rise to movements as diverse as temperance, labor and prison reforms, settlement houses and eugenics, child-savers experienced the urban social landscape as human *degeneration*. The city signified a contaminating influence on the Victorian-supposed purity and innocence of childhood, Christian morality, and social progress - or 'civilization'. Founder of the Children's Aid Society Charles Loring Brace summarized these fears by claiming that,

As Christian men, we cannot look upon this great multitude of unhappy, deserted, and degraded boys and girls without feeling our responsibility to God for them. The class increases: immigration is pouring in its multitudes of poor foreigners who leave these young outcasts everywhere in our midst. These boys and girls...will soon form the great lower class of our city. They will influence elections; they may shape the policy of the city; they will assuredly, if unreclaimed, poison society all around them. They will help to form the great multitude of robbers, thieves, and vagrants [Brace in Platt 1998: 8]

In the ethnic urban industrial ghettos of the 19th century, most childhood 'recreation' took place in the street and child labor may have been as much a family survival-tactic as it was an exploitive and conscious strategy of the owning classes (Cunningham 1995:87-89). As many of these protestant reformers moved from the affluent countryside, where the privilege of a protracted and recreational childhood was imagined as a universal norm, and witnessed the life-conditions of the exploited laboring immigrants of the city, those like Addams and Brace experienced a moral geography of cultural difference that incited the way they engaged the urban poor.

Brace and his “Children’s Aid Society” adopted the “friendly visitor” and “placing-out” system as a way of investigating the home-life of poor urban families and removing children to homes of the ‘respectable classes’ in the moral geography of the countryside. Between 1853 and the mid 1890’s as many as 90,000 children were placed in rural homes where they were to work and learn Christian, middle-class habits (Sznaider 1997). Many of the children were sent to the western US where expansion and agricultural settlement had left farming families short on labor.

The words of our visitors in their ministrations have given the basis to our influence, which we sought to perfect, by what we regard as the great and special work of the society – the entire changing of the circumstances of the children, by sending them to new homes in the country. It is evident that no human power can save one of these street children, if it is left in its own circumstances. An unhealthy neighborhood, a squalid or a dissolute home, evil companions and vile parents, unite to surround the little one with such an atmosphere of poverty and crime that very few can escape the effects of it. [Charles Loring Brace in Schnaider 1997:229]

Critics of Brace’s “orphan train” claim that his agents aggressively swept children off the streets, put parents in the position of giving up their children by moral obligation, and intentionally placed Catholic children with Protestant families where they were often renamed as well as converted. Furthermore, critics alleged that “children were sometimes sold into slavery, or that the agents made money unscrupulously on the transactions” (Levine & Levine; 1992:192).

Many of the child-savers, like Addams and Bowen, pioneered the settlement house movement in which educated middle-class social reformers and activists lived among the urban poor in order to “serve” them directly with donations, but with behavioral, hygienic

and moral tutelage as well. With little reflexive attention to the social basis of their own privilege in the disparate class economy that produced the ‘squalor’ and poverty they encountered in the industrial-ghettos, child-savers positioned themselves as responsible for the moral reform of the working classes rather than the structure of exploitation itself. Poverty and crime were attributed to the family unit, to individual moral character and to intemperance rather than widespread structures of exploitive economics, European land dispossession, and political disenfranchisement.

It isn't money nor houses nor lands that make a man, it is character...the parents are the character builders for the child...they should see to it that the child as he reaches manhood does not find himself, because of their injustice to him in his youth, shattered in strength and dull in intellect. [Bowen in Platt 1977: 92f]

And while settlement house women such as Jane Addams exhorted the poor of the urban slums to abstain from the “wickedness” and ubiquity of “commercialized vices” (Platt 1977: 91) offered by urban life, their own privileged participation in the culture of consumption was deployed as a moral example and a model to which one should aspire;

The women wanted good clothes, they liked to see me dressed smartly, they liked to see me drive up in a motorcar and to see it standing in front of the club house on Polk Street. They would say, “We saw your name in the paper as being at the opera....It's a pleasure to know we have for a president a lady who goes so much into society.” [Bowen in Platt 1977:88]

Much like the temperance movement, from which the child-saving movement shared ranks and ideological ground, the moral politics of Christian piety, disciplined individualism, and middle-class consumption functioned as a standard of *acculturation* in the colonial

context of the settlement houses (Gusfield 1986). Speaking of the expectations of the worker's in a North Boston settlement house, William F. Whyte observed that,

The social worker's conception of his functions was quite evident. He thought in terms of a one-way adaptation. Although in relation to the background of the community, the settlement house was an alien institution, nevertheless the community was expected to adapt itself to the standards of the settlement house. [Cited in Gusfield 1986: 71]

Social workers of the settlement house and child-saving movement considered themselves the moral superiors of the exploited poor of the industrial slums. By illustrated virtue of their ability to traverse social worlds from slum to opera house, town to country, they presented their habits of conduct not only as worthy of emulation, but as a necessary disposition for moral identity and social mobility. The demonstrated prestige of the child-savers, combined with their self-fashioning as disinterested, altruistic benefactors of the exploited and demoralized poor, reproduced a tacit acknowledgment of their moral and cultural superiority. The moral economy of child saving and the settlement house functioned as social and cultural gate-keeping for defining the conditions of class mobility, cultural distinction, and moral identity.

Gender and the Political Economy of Professionalism

Platt illustrates that child saving and settlement house movements also occurred as an expression of middle and upper-class women's increasing demands for suffrage and participation in the public spheres of citizenship and economic status. As the roles and status of these women shifted with increasing education and leisure time, they still found limited

career choices in the professional world (Abrams & Curran 2000; Muncy 1991; Platt 1978). With their connotations of domesticity and benevolent maternal care, child saving and settlement house social-work presented an opportunity not only to assert the virtuous cultural identities of middle-class femininity in relation to the perceived moral degeneration of urban families and their children, but also to take up socially acceptable roles as ‘domestic’ professionals in the public sphere.

Here the way opens to the most ample opportunities for women’s transcendent influence. Here, then, in this system we give the boy to be *mothered* by giving him a *home*. [G. E. Howe in Platt 1977:80, original emphasis]

The public hysteria and criminalization of young and unmarried women’s sexuality as a “moral offense” was symbolic of the culturally informed gender and class relations that shaped the emergent fields of social work and juvenile justice. In the formative years of these occupational fields, middle-class anxiety over the status of women in the modern industrializing city fixated on girls’ sexual activity. The anxiety was so intense in some states “unwilling submission to sexual assault” was a punishable sex offense along with prostitution, illegitimate pregnancy, suspected promiscuity, and curfew violations (Abrams & Curran 2000:53). Some 90 percent of female juvenile convictions in the early court system were of such “moral offenses” (Abrams& Curran 2000:53). Apprehension about women in the modern world extended beyond sexuality to entail the morality of independence and education for women, creating a direct constraint on any professional aspirations women might have harbored. Respected male public figures like G. Stanley Hall¹ considered “education a threat to women’s health and well being and labeled unmarried educated

¹ The first president of the American Psychological Association, Hall coined the term “storm and stress” to describe adolescence.

women the ‘apotheosis of selfishness,’” (Abrams & Curran 2000:51). In this historical context, it is not surprising that in order to assert their moral place in public life, women social reformers “adopted a maternalistic stance toward delinquent girls, rooted partially in the Victorian morality of their upbringing and partially in their quest to uphold morality and justice in the industrial age” (Abrams & Curran 2000:51).

The socio-economic structures of the field of child welfare and juvenile reform reflect a history of not only the heteronomous and dependant character of the emerging professions, but also how these structures necessitated a more inclusive relation with clients and laypersons. As Muncy (1991) notes, the clients of the emerging welfare professions could not afford to pay for their services, and in the absence of a welfare state, this effectively tethered the educated, middle-class workers, of the settlement houses for example, to wealthy benefactors and political allies. “This peculiar position required professionals² to draw non-professional women [and men] into their work and to convince both client and patron their services were important. Under these circumstances, the female professions could not develop the exclusivity of traditional male professions. They had to be “popularizers” of their professional knowledge (Muncy 1991:20). Addams herself spoke of the settlement house as a place where workers should “translate knowledge in terms of life” (Muncy 1991:23). While the educative role as interpreter in addition to the maternalistic role of caring corresponded with Victorian ideals of womanhood, the very dissemination of emerging knowledge about health, poverty and crime, and particularly, child development,

² Muncie’s reference to these workers as “professionals” references their status both as educated and, perhaps, more experientially informed about poverty than their “non-professional” benefactors. However, the labeling of these workers as “professionals” fails to recognize the contested nature of the label and the struggle for professional identity Muncie describes.

reduced the opportunity for claims to exclusive privileges and entitlements for their profession.

This structural position also promoted an emphasis and dissemination of a discourse of self-sacrifice. “After all, the true object of the patronage of elite women was to aid the downtrodden – not to subsidize individual careers... these professionals were conduits of charity: their labor *was* the charitable contribution of one class to another, and this position required an erasure of the self on the part of women defining new careers” (Muncy 1991:22). Hence, while male professional groups, such as doctors, administrators, lawyers, judges and politicians, hierarchically limited, and at times denigrated women’s ambitions in these fields (G. Stanley Hall above), these women were also required to adopt self-deprecating roles in the labor process that diminished their ability to assume authoritative positions. The performance of such humility was both enforced by the structural conditions of their labor relations but also corresponded with gendered expectations of maternal servility. Ironically, even feminist reformers intent on asserting women’s moral value in the public sphere employed the very same symbolic gender associations of natural domesticity and maternal sacrifice that functioned to restrict their access to suffrage and public, professional life (Muncy 1991; Platt 1977, 1998).

The Professionalization of Domestic Governmentality, the Commodification of Care, and the Bifurcation of “the Personal”

Child-savers’ claims to the natural moral disposition of women was not intended to close the door to public life, rather it was to assert the *necessity* of their participation in

public life, as agents of *public* domestication. As Bowen would claim to a meeting of the Friday Club in Chicago,

If, on our charity boards, we had more women who were conversant with the daily lives of the poor, they would be a great asset in the work of relief and construction. If a woman is a good housekeeper in her own home, she will be able to do well that larger housekeeping. [Bowen in Platt 1977:79]

The use of the home as metaphor for the nation performs several rhetorical functions; first it projects dominant middle-class gender expectations from the increasingly circumscribed private sphere of the domestic family to the public sphere of the ‘national family’ and naturalizes women’s place in the public sphere, economically and politically, albeit in the role of ‘housekeeper’ and “mother.” Second it also asserts a *domestic governmentality*; a claim about the formation and responsibility of the state to promote the social order of domestic middle-class values about hygiene, labor, and consumption – the moral basis of the Protestant nuclear family. For Bowen and Addams, child saving was a matter of state intervention at the level of social hygiene and nationalized moral living.

What we need in this country...is good government, and good government means clean alleys and clean streets; it means safety on the streets and in the home; it means health and happiness for the women workers; it means fine schools and wholesome recreation; it means a well-ordered community life that leads to national well-being. [de Koven Bowen in Platt 1977:92f]

These contentions reflect class privileges and expectations of security, cleanliness as a sign of moral living, and childhood recreation as a right, but they also reflect widely circulating discourses about the state and its responsibility to practice class-informed notions of social order. Child-labor laws and separate juvenile courts were not simply a reflection of “moral progress” but a governmental projection of bourgeois divisions of status, discipline,

and economy in the home onto the population as a whole. As they became witness to increasingly violent labor strikes and riots, Addams and some more radical Hull House workers in Chicago lead various other campaigns to regulate work hours, safety conditions, and rights to unionize. These efforts to reform the workplace signified cultural values of discipline and restraint of the self, and of the market, through rationalized government, but also were the product of negotiations between the abuses of laissez-faire capitalism and radical socialist reformers, some of whom worked alongside Addams and Bowen at Hull House.

Given their concerns that the sons and daughters of the so called “dangerous classes” represented, potentially “influencing elections” and “poisoning society” in their adulthood, middle-class liberals endorsed child-labor laws, separate juvenile courts, compulsory schooling, and the regulation of the economy, as well as corporate capitalists. While corporate elites were as interested in driving out the competition of marginal manufacturers and tenement operators that more often depended on cheap, unskilled child labor, they also endorsed a brand of “liberalism [that] meant ‘the responsibility of all classes to maintain and increase the efficiency of the existing social order’” (Platt 1977:xxi). Consolidating industry, the labor force, and the labor market, corresponded with ongoing rationalized specialization and separation of labor from the home, “the private,” and contributed to the diversification of gendered, age-graded, and other ‘technologically’ specified subjects.

Progressives in business and industry, for example, developed the concepts of ‘scientific management’ that enabled managers to get more efficient performance from workers through such things as time-and-motion studies. Progressives in education developed intelligence testing and other means of

‘efficiently’ channeling young people into appropriate slots in the economy... progressive reformers created elaborate classifications of different kinds of criminals and of the different kinds of ‘treatment’ they required. All these reforms were designed to make these institutions work more smoothly and effectively in an increasingly centralized and tightly-knit economy. [Cooper 1975:20]

Descending from the moral economy of Adam Smith’s treatises on liberal capitalism, Reform Era capitalists followed in the notion that the increasing division of labor, production and consumption into more specialized and centrally controlled social units “leads, since it makes the development of skill possible, to a quantitative and qualitative improvement in production, and thus serves the common good” (Weber 1930:161). Along with the support of progressive allies in industry and local government, child-savers “conjured” the subject population of various and eventually specialized youth related work out of the construction of moral crises (of the broken home, child labor, the wayward girl, and dangerous ethnic immigrants for instance).

Progressive discourses of the era stressed not only the rationalization of government and markets, but also the rationalization of social life entirely – “a well ordered community life” as Bowen phrased it. Sociologist Charles Cooley was exemplary of this early reform discourse concerning youth; “When an individual actually enters upon a criminal career, let us try to catch him at a tender age, and subject him to rational social discipline” (Platt 1977:45). The rationalization of the home with the instructive ‘friendly visitor,’ the workplace through labor laws and industrial regulation, and of public spaces such as streets and schools in order to affect the emotional and behavioral disposition of an imagined

citizenry (of ‘dangerous classes’) exemplifies what Foucault referred to as liberal “governmentality” (1991).

Foucault conceptualized governmentality as “the conduct of conduct” (Gordon 1991:2). That is, the conscious and rationalized orchestration of the conduct of others, particularly with reference to categorical populations (deviants, immigrants, etc). Governmentality not only rationalized the relationship between state agents and society, as we might typically think of ‘government,’ but also “the relation between *the self and self*” as well (Gordon 1991: 2, emphasis added). Thus “social discipline” was realized not only in the way that the conditions of living were rationalized in order to produce “happy” (or obedient) workers and citizens, or to “save” children, but also in the way that citizens of all ranks were expected to subject their own conduct to rationalization for the “common good.”

The professionalization of work that had long been the domain of alms-giving and charitable philanthropy operated along the increasing division of linked binary divisions: emotional and rational; personal and professional; private and public. As Lubove (1965) observed about the professionalization of philanthropy, individual public charity was increasingly seen as haphazard and inefficient and in need of rationalizing governance;

The crusade to elevate philanthropy to scientific status... resulted in the repudiation of spontaneous or sentimental charity and the substitution of the social agency for the benevolent individual as the repository of philanthropic wisdom. The efficiency and effectiveness of the community welfare program required that the impulse of individuals be disciplined, channeled, and filtered through the agency. [Lubove 1965: 158]

Opposing alms for the poor as impulsive, instinctual and disorganized behavior, charity societies and the settlement houses divided and rationalized charity as a labor process of “scientific benevolence”(Lubove 1965). Reflecting widespread progressive faith in the practice of “scientific management,” early social workers applied circulating discourses of scientific efficiency not just to the rationalization of government and labor, but to the whole of social life. Administration, fundraising and lobbying, investigation, research, and treatment activities were subdivided and rationalized as standards of practice were generated to train the needed volunteers and patrons in efficiently servicing the needs of the poor.

Ironically, as all these practices separated public relations with the poor from emotional, affective relations with them as individuals, the focal point of the emerging social work apparatus in its early formation was the personal relationship; the “friendly visitor.” This only seems contradictory until one recalls that “Efficient charity was [seen as] a process of character regeneration, not social reform, and involved the direct influence of successful, educated, and cultured representatives of the middle-class upon the dependant individual or family” (Lubove 1965: 12). Nevertheless, detailed recording of the day’s activities and dispensations was already in practice.

The day of one such agent began with a refusal of aid for a sick woman in the district because of alleged intemperance. Then an appeal for fifteen cents from an ‘undoubted tramp’ was denied and the supplicant advised to earn his keep. Referrals from the Children’s Aid Society and a dispensary physician were brought to the attention of the agent who also sent two cases of her own to the officers in charge of vagrancy: a boy of eight caught selling newspapers, and a woman with a baby caught begging. [Lubove 1965:11]

While at the outset, enforcement of middle-class habits and self-proclaimed moral superiority might have been a viable rationalization of friendly visiting to legitimize the donations of philanthropists, class affiliation itself could not be justification for the exchange-value of the work in the market of professional specialization. Coinciding with the investigative practices of the friendly visitor there were other female dominated occupations developing specialized skills in the margins of an already established public institution – the hospital. Medical casework, a practice of written, client documentation and record keeping conducted almost entirely by female nurses, provided the specialized and institutionally recognized skill that could be used to gain a foothold toward recognition as a profession.

Nurses in the United States first practiced casework for post-discharge and recovery care. Documenting the events of a visit to a patient's home, in terms of their physical condition and their environment, provided volumes of patient histories that could be examined and abstracted to produce generalized rationalizations of health and illness, as well as corresponding labor processes. In attempting to isolate factors in patient's environment as causes of patients' symptoms, the spaces became discursively linked in the practice of not only patient health, but also public health at large (Lubove 1965:23-28). To legitimize their contribution as systematic and useful in terms of both patient care and administrative interests, social workers affiliating themselves with emerging institutions (such as schools, juvenile and family courts) developed standardized programs of training, techniques of interviewing, observation, documentation, and record keeping borrowed from techniques produced in the hospital (Lubove 1965:34).

The production of a literary skill was an important symbol of specialized technique. Facility with words themselves were valuable social currency and their growing use as means of public exchange had deep and lasting impacts on human relationships (Bledstein 1976:70-77). As a form of social exchange the written or printed word provided an ideally impersonal medium for “business contracts, professional recommendations [as opposed to personal], and abstract public relationships” (75). The written word provided the medium required in making generalizations about categorical populations, medical diagnoses of unseen microbes and disease, and the economic professional-client relationship. Written language distanced writers, subjects and readers,

The printed page exemplified detachment, calm consideration, order, permanence, and respectability for judgment. With the written word, for instance, an author could censor, correct, revise, and edit [their] thoughts. In a cerebral and detached environment, a writer could carefully structure the word, and plan the result. [Bledstein 1976:76]

The literary technique of case-work signified social work as distinct from the “impulsive” act of charity, the casual occasion of “visiting friends,” or an extension of domestic maternalism. The case-method became the mediating skill-device that distinguished the social worker from not only the folk and domestic, but in the process also participated in the historic division of labor from the domestic sphere, the public and private, the professional and the personal. As a mode of disciplinary surveillance it functioned to moderate and regulate the emotional labor of social work, to standardize the social worker, to discipline the subjects of social work, and finally, to align the relation between the two with the abstract relations of the market in general - as patron and client. In the process of abstraction from the personal relationship, the case method symbolically extended the

distance between “the personal” and the labor process and enabled social work to be exchanged as *currency* (an abstraction of value) in the public market-space of specialized labor. The commodification of social labor through rationalization contributed to the division of personal/ professional, private/ public, child/adult. These divisions corresponded with the notion that a rationalized market was itself a product of modernisms “triumph” over nature, over supposedly primitive, archaic, or non-rationalized forms of exchange – those we might call “personal.”

Critical to the meaningful implications of the case method was not only how it functioned to transform charity into labor, the poor into clients, but also the discursive significance of the information collected and made subject to rationalization. Lubove’s social history of *The Professional Altruist* (1965) describes how in the decades before WWI Mary Richmond drew from the already established link between the new juvenile courts and the field of psychology to produce the first “technical treatise” on the case method. Attempting to locate the root causes of criminal behavior and poverty (presuming both were indelibly linked), Richmond asserted the social worker’s unique skill was the collection and analysis of “social evidence,” which;

she defined as “consisting of any and all facts as to personal or family history which, taken together, indicate the nature of a given client’s difficulties and the means to their solution.” In minute detail Miss Richmond analyzed the many potential sources: client, family circle, relatives, medical record, school, employer, printed documents, neighbors, and social agencies. Following her investigation and accumulation of social evidence, the social worker would subject it to a “critical examination and comparison” and from this devise an “interpretation and the definition of the social difficulty.” [Lubove 1965:47]

Analogous to Addams and Brace, who believed that to reform the delinquent they should “know the modern city...and then seek to rectify and purify it” (Addams in Platt 1978:96), Richmond’s rationalized case method “consisted of ‘those processes which develop personality through adjustments consciously affected, individual by individual, between men and their social *environment*’” (Richmond in Lubove 1965:48). The objective promoted by child-savers and other pioneering social workers was to *change* the individual through rationalization of the environment. In the case of friendly visitor and the early social work professional, this was alleged to occur through consciously structured observation, documentation, analysis, and manipulation of the subject’s social *environment*, or at least their relation to it. The difference between Addams to Richmond, the volunteer altruist and the professional social worker, illustrates the secular rationalization of the discourse as it was increasingly professionalized and commodified for circulation in the market. Both approaches advocate a distinct form of governance characterized not by direct rule and repression, but by the indirect orchestration of citizens, laborers, families, and children compelled to govern themselves by the cultural values implicit in the newly rationalized environment.

Civilization, the Class-Structure of Modern Capitalism, and the Rehabilitative Ideal

The distinction of rationalized professionalism from practices emphasizing emotional relationships occurred in part as a struggle against symbolic gender associations, but also as part of ideological contentions about human relationships. According to Dr Richard C Cabot, a turn-of-the-20th century promoter of rationalized casework in Massachusetts General

Hospital, the practice of personal altruistic, volunteer friendly visiting, without any mediating skill between the agent and subject, endorsed a “sense of shame on the one side [philanthropic guilt] or of condescension on the other” (quoted in Lubove 1965:35). To Cabot, such personal, subjective, and un-rationalized interactions overtly revealed the paternalistic, moral righteousness of middle-class charity. As a proxy for human relationships, the written text of a case provided the doctor with abstracted “data” and enabled the doctor to make allegedly disinterested decisions about “clients,” unattached to or “biased” by personal relationships.

In her critique of “the culture of power” expressed in North American public schools, Lisa Delpit (1995) notes that the acknowledgement of personal power violates liberal discourses of democratic, indeed universal human equality. Observing teachers’ relationships between themselves and with students, Delpit found that overt expressions of power, even making rules and expectations explicit was perceived to “act against liberal principles, to limit the freedom and autonomy of those subjected to the explicitness” (Delpit 1995:26). The production of professional skills through the development of specialized techniques and standards (as noted in chapter two) operates to mediate relations between agents and subjects. Procedural standards that discipline the laborers discretion and behavior function to minimize the recognition of the agent as a person with the privilege of discretion over another’s freedom and direct clients’ attention to the authority of an institutionalized, professional role (Delpit 1995; Henry 1966). As Beker hoped to direct clients’ attention to professional standards, the practice of the case method directed subjects’ (patients, caseworkers, and doctors) attention to the process of the investigation rather than the

relations of power between them. These liberal values and discursive strategies have a long history and are at the core of a bundle of western-enlightenment struggles about the natural order of the human world, as well as the social and cultural foundation of capitalist class-economies.

In keeping with the ongoing distinction of social- and youth-oriented labor from “the personal,” advocates of scientific benevolence and case-methodology characterized untrained charity as instinctual, arbitrary and arrogantly biased. This stance occurred in tandem with the circumscription of youth to the home, both of which, in Victorian visions of the youth and home, were divided off from the public and the market as agents/sites of production. According to Fredrick Taylor’s concept of Scientific Management, the untrained philanthropist followed ‘rules of thumb’ and folklore rather than systematic principles of science. Science, “as Taylor thought, was an oracle free from human bias and selfishness which would point the way to an elevating purpose” (Haber 1964: 29).

Indeed, for Taylor and his progressive contemporaries, ‘objective’ scientific management was not only a business strategy, not only a paradigm of social reform – of the state, of the hygiene of individual persons and places – but also an expression of western progress; of civilization itself. Taylor “asserted that ‘the one element which differentiates civilized countries from uncivilized countries – prosperous from poverty stricken peoples – is that the average man in one is five or six times as productive as in the other’” (Haber 1964:27). By privileging economic production as the most important sign of social value (for individuals as well as whole societies), both progressive and conservative narrations of

the past placed men and the industrial society of the West at the pinnacle of human history. Like many of his contemporaries of the Reform Era (progressive or not), Taylor understood the difference between rich and poor, west and “the rest,” objectivity and subjectivity, as expressing a dioramic snapshot of human history, as if “human history was working out of natural law and that the diversity of contemporary non-western societies provided a window on the past” (Brodkin 2001:376). The spatial orientation of Taylor’s “elevated purpose” and his Victorian peers’ upward worldview (Bledstein 1976) strung this unilinear path of civilization hierarchically along a vertical axis, placing the educated, capitalist, Anglo-Saxon male protestant at the pinnacle, with gendered, racialized, and age-graded states of “civilization” – including his own personal emotion – along “behind” him.

Narratives of human history, even of individual being, in terms of universal, unilinear progress were not only widespread, but also implicitly employed in everyday speech. Note the way in which an early “special-class” teacher ³ describes her young charges in her written reports,

These children were reported not only as being stupid, but “queer.” Among these children thirty-four were of Russian Hebrew extraction and four of Italian. When I had been with the class for one week I abandoned my scheme of memory and sense perception, training the intellect only as a side issue, and I determined to base all my work on the *development of the emotions*. The great need of those children as I read it then was to make them less like little *animals* – to *instill humanity into them*. ...They were subnormal or rather freakish, and all their shortcomings were rather glaring... With each child I picked out the moral defect or defects which were most emphasized such as selfishness, untruthfulness, stubbornness and temper, and determined to overcome them. ...I cared less that they should learn to write their names ...than they should learn truthfulness, obedience and promptness... I certainly agree with the educators who say that when once the real personality

³ Miss Devereux went on to found a private group of residential treatment centers that in 1992, long after her passing, was still the largest of its kind (Levine & Levine 1992)

of the *backward* child is revealed it is more *childlike* in its trust, kindness and simplicity than the normal child.

This class has in one year been a blessing to thirty three children, children who, though never doomed by nature to spend their lives in an institution would surely have drifted to one...had not some interest been taken in them. ...the success of the class, especially as far as the *regeneration* of the boys is concerned, has been achieved largely in through the woodwork which was the basis of manual, emotional and mental training...making useful men and women out of 'the least of God's little ones.' [Devereux in Levine & Levine 1992:23-24 – emphases added]

Civilization discourse, ethnocentric in its very structure, informed the narrative structure of the reformers “rehabilitative ideal” (as well as the narrative structure of subsequent “development” theories of children, and nations). “Civilization,” as a framework for delineating human variation over time and space, situated both immigrants and their children (and in the eyes of many men, women as well) as inferior subjects capable of triggering social disintegration if left uncivilized, unreformed, or undisciplined by their moral superiors. It is from these rather pernicious implications that Platt, Lubove, and other social historians of social control derive appropriate suspicion of professed benevolence. Nevertheless, these rationalizations of history, ethnic difference, labor relations, and discipline, were also part and parcel of the ideological grounds for potential class mobility and human equality *set against* theological and biological, caste-like notions of social cosmology.

In his history of the cultural production of emotion, specifically “shame” in relation to the construct of “civility,” Elias (1978) outlines how the concept of “the civilizing process” came to signify a growing distance between children and adults from, of course, the adults point of view. “Civilization” also came to embody a sense of collective history and progress,

and in this sense signified a contention about the *structure of class relations*. Tracing the origin of the concept to the German word *Kultur*, Elias finds the idea of Civilization was a value-claim of the emerging bourgeois class of merchants, proto-capitalists, and their educated sons, based on the notion of “achievement.” This was a claim in contradistinction to the claims of inherited or intrinsic social value made by the courtly aristocracy of regional princes and nobles (Elias 1978: 21). Elias notes that as middle-class intellectuals disseminated out of the university to all regions of the fractured German Empire, a growing social chasm opened between the isolated, landed aristocracy and the dispersed middle-class;

In this particularly sharp social division between nobility and middle class... a decisive factor was no doubt the relative indigence of both. This impelled nobles to cut themselves off, using proof of ancestry as the most important instrument for preserving their privileged existence. On the other hand, it blocked to the German middle class the main route by which in the Western countries bourgeois elements rose, intermarried with, and were received by the aristocracy: through money. [Elias 1978:21]

By way of the changing political-economic structures of the Empire, the rise of the German middle-classes occurred against the distribution of wealth by inheritance, resulting in an opposition “between the courtly-aristocratic models and values based on *intrinsic worth*, on the one hand, and the bourgeois models and values based on *achievement*, on the other” (Elias 1978:21; emphasis added). Between these contending visions of value were vastly different visions of social order; status by exclusive, even divine inheritance, as opposed to status by worldly achievement – what Max Weber called “The Protestant Ethic” and what we might today call “meritocracy.” In the former, a sovereign and caste-like system of fixed destinies, in the latter a(n ideal) narrative structure of progressive self-development and social mobility. Tracing these contentions to the monastic asceticism extended by Protestant

Reformers, Weber (1930) described how conflicts with the Catholic Church revolved around this very tension between the mediation of faith through preordained hierarchies, and the idea that “a life guided by constant thought could achieve conquest over the state of nature” (118). William’s etymology also describes how by the late 18th century, the “civilization” had “behind it the general spirit of enlightenment, with its emphasis on secular and progressive human self-development. Civilization expressed this sense of historical process, but also celebrated the associated sense of modernity: an achieved condition of refinement and order” (1983: 58). This was the cultural basis for concepts of “reform” or the “rehabilitative ideal.”

For Reform Era child-savers, who claimed that “When an individual actually enters upon a criminal career, let us try to catch him at a tender age, and subject him to rational social discipline” (Platt 1977:45), notions of “the civilizing process” explained the panoply of difference and inequality they saw around them. Civilization explained the distance between child and adult, city and country, immigrant, criminal and “citizen,” private and public, personal and professional, and most times, women and men as well. The notion of progress lay at the heart of theories of childhood development and the rehabilitative idea. Civilization provided a framework for organizing the means by which distances from ‘the least of God’s little ones’ to ‘making useful men and women out of them’ could be traversed. Civilization also provided for the idea that such social distances could be traversed at all.

Central to the experience of modern, industrial, capitalist social life was the structured feeling of movement, mobility; “Civilization describes a process or at least the result of a process. It refers to something which is constantly in motion, constantly moving forward”

(Elias 1978:5). As a central concern of the “Civilized” (recall Charles Loring Brace’s fears about the future), this “future orientation” was a value that translated directly into social discipline. “Teaching people the virtues of reflection and close attention to the distant consequences of their actions came to be regarded as a universal key to social progress, whether in the education of children, the ‘moral treatment’ of the insane, the cultivation of self-reliance in paupers, or the widely imitated incentive schemes of [penal reformer] Alexander Maconochie, which were intended to produce the same effect among prisoners” (Haskell 1985b:561-562).

What’s more, as a universalizing concept, “civilization” transcended difference. While unevenly stringing all of humanity along an incessant march “forward,” notions of achieved civilization also implied a sense of collective human equality. Perhaps to the dismay of men like G. Stanley Hall, who would himself coin the term “adolescence” as a stage of human development, discourses of “civilization” could be appropriated by educated Victorian women toward the ends of achievement as much as their male German predecessors.

Social Cosmology & Social Work in the Evolution Debates of the Reform Era

Aspiring social-work and juvenile justice professionals also had fundamental challenges to overcome vis-à-vis competing theories of social difference and inequality. Debates in late 19th and early 20th century criminal anthropology and penology surrounding the root causes of crime illustrate the historical persistence and significance of the cultural

struggle between social cosmologies of inherited or ascribed status and of civilization and achieved status. Platt, admittedly and mistakenly, reduced the child-savers' claims of altruism to pure class interests in the existing social order, himself leveling an allegation of the child savers' as 'collectively self-interested.' Attention to the cultural material of "reform" reveals that the ideological discourse of civilization, which sustained the child savers faith in the rehabilitative ideal and capitalist mythologies of meritocracy and achievement, also corresponded to the "degrading" social order of normalization and hierarchy characteristic of capitalist relations of production. Examining the antagonistic feudal relations from which the achievement oriented discourse of "civilization" derived illustrates that it was not necessarily the implied conspiracy of collective self-interest and propaganda critics have accused Platt and Lubove of constructing (c.f. Haskell 1985a; Muraskin 1976). At the same time the civilizing discourse provided grounds for the rehabilitative ideal and the possibility of social mobility through achievement, "civilization" also provided the structural framework that would reproduce the hierarchical class structure of capitalist exploitation.

In the closing decade of the 19th century, criminal anthropologists favoring hereditary theories of social inequality and crime, such as Herbert Spencer, Cesare Lombroso, Arthur MacDonald, and Robert Fletcher, dominated the literature and theories of penology in the United States. Fletcher defined criminal anthropology as "the study of individuals who are compelled to commit crimes as a consequence of 'physical conformation, hereditary taint, or surroundings of vice, poverty, and ill example'" (Platt 1978: 23). Anthropology played a key role in the production of popular evolutionary discourse and social policy regarding

immigration anxieties and the future of a ‘poisoned’ society (Baker 1998). While significant variations existed in the ways contending theories of evolution interpreted modern civilization as in apogee or decline, most supported the common ethnocentric assumption that those “other” than Anglo-European, American, middle-class represented earlier, primitive and “savage” stages of human history (Brodkin 2001). Theories that explained social inequality in terms of immutable and deterministic *biological* difference, typified by the “survival of the fittest” writings of Herbert Spencer and “phrenologist” Cesare Lombroso, buttressed notions that the “dangerous classes” had to be controlled by either life-long incarceration or forced sterilization. Reflecting later Eugenics sterilization policies, which were enacted in more than thirty U.S. states and in Nazi Germany, Nathan Allen bluntly spoke to the National Conference of Charities and Correction, “If our object, then, is to prevent crime on a large scale...the supplies must be cut off” (Platt 1978:25). As Platt noted, the idea of immutable hereditary pathology presented a challenge to the rehabilitative ideal and to professionally aspiring reformers.

However, what Platt did not go as far to explain is why in fact claims to environmental influence or rehabilitation would compliment their class interests, besides creating the space for individual careers. This is where the “class interests” thesis begins to look like conspiracy theory. A further look at the existing material, however, illustrates two important points: first, that reformers’ claims were themselves contentions in relation to determinist and caste-like configurations of human variation and inequality, and second that there is no necessary contradiction between the altruistic notions of the rehabilitative ideal and the collective class interests of the professional middle-class.

For example, reformers rejected inheritance models of social [dis]order not just on scientific grounds, opposing inheritance with Darwinist notions of environmental adaptation, but also in relation to secular privileging of worldly achievement over divine predestination. Platt cites the 1891 welcoming speech of W.P. Fishback, chair of the Indianapolis reception committee at the National Conference of Charities and Correction,

While you utterly reject the cold and hard laissez-faire philosophy of Mr. Herbert Spencer, you are no less opposed to the equally false and fatalistic pessimism of certain ecclesiastics, who affect to see in the great spectacle of the worlds misery a wise scheme for the edification of a few select saints who are to be caught up some day and whisked away from their cushioned pews to paradise. Disease, vice, poverty are not preordained. [Platt1978: 31]

Fishback's rhetorical description of Spencer's theories as "laissez-faire" a term synonymous with unregulated (read undisciplined) free market capitalism, and the elitist implications of church dogma (read as arbitrary), signals more than a bid for career advancement, but an engagement with ideological struggles central to the formation of a class society rationalized by the logic of achievement. Fundamental to the construction of a class society, where mobility is at least believed possible, as opposed to a caste-like society of explicitly fixed social groups, is the notion of progress through achievement – Civilization. Platt cites E. R. L. Gould's *The Statistical Study of Hereditary Criminality* (1895):

There is great danger in emphasizing heredity, and by contrast minimizing the influence of environment and individual responsibility. Consequences doubly unfortunate must ensue. Individual stamina will be weakened, and society made to feel less keenly the duty of reforming environment. [Platt 1978: 34]

If inheritance (divine or biological) ruled both behavior and the social order, then not only could the ‘dangerous classes’ not be expected to reform and discipline themselves, not only would notions of ‘rescuing’ or ‘saving’ the poor be fruitless, but the very idea of social mobility based on individual merit, self-discipline, even free will could not be sustained. Notions of inheritance jeopardized the moral grounds of achievement upon which the middle class justified their own position in the stratified conditions of modern industrial society. What’s more, if the modernist “reform of the environment” is abandoned, not only does achievement seem a moot concept, but the very basis of Civilization; progress, mobility, the history of humanity, all this comes to a halt.

A Cultural History of Social Labor

What I have outlined here are a few historical points. The first continued the illustration of the field of youth work as derived from and imbedded in historically and culturally informed social struggles. This brings to our attention not only to the political and economic contingencies bearing on youth work at any given time, but also the cultural material from which constructs of youth, understandings of inequality, and consequent actions are shaped. My second intention here was to illustrate some of the historical bases for the symbolically gendered and moralized economy of engaging youth as a public act of social labor and to show how emotion, the personal, the feminine, and “youth” themselves were cordoned off from and marginalized in relation to economic production. Keeping in mind current demands for professionalization of youth workers and the cultural politics they encounter and participate in, I also intended to show that the formations of professional

discipline that arose from the era of “Reform” were not at all contradictory with the language they employed to authorize their moral identity.

While illustrating the pernicious social effects of the discourses with which state apparatuses of social control were fashioned, I also have attempted to show how these same discourses obligated the regulatory control of arbitrary, abusive, and destructive whims of laissez-faire capitalism. The discursive of “civilization” provided grounds for the rehabilitative ideal, the removal of children from the abuses of the industrial workplace, as well as the kidnap of thousands of urban children to labor in the countryside and the demonization of “wayward girls” through the juvenile justice system. These were also the grounds that privileged and moralized the public over the private and the rational planning of government *over* an unregulated, laissez-faire market.

While reformers *did not* seek to change the structure of class relations, their actions were more toward governing the environments of the poor based on the notion that given equally rationalized social environments human beings could compete equally for positions on the hierarchical ladder of civilization. The proposition that status is achieved by merit on an allegedly equal “playing field” is at the core of liberal governmentality. Civilization discourse naturalized the positions, the “badges of ability” held by wealthy as earned by virtue and merit in competition, not by biological or theological principles of inheritance. In this way, the professed altruism of child saving *was in fact* directly related to and derived from class interests in the hegemony of progressive, modernist, upwardly mobile class relations, which was based in the Civilization of the market as well as the home.

By barring young people as agents in the economic and public sphere, child-savers positioned youth as subjects of an emerging field of social labor. As a direct result, or perhaps, complimentary process of their struggles for public recognition through the development of rationalized labor processes, and symbolic use of moral panics about young people, the “youth workers” of the Reform Era (re)situated youth at the “starting line” of the Civilizing process and themselves the coaches and referees of “the race” – universally and literally. The movement for these laws reflected Victorian cultural notions of childhood as ‘naturally innocent’ of the impersonal and calculating relations of the market. They also reflected contentions about the relationship between the conditions of society and the responsibility of public government with regard to capitalist markets.

Child labor laws, deriving from the world-view of Victorian reformers, had profound historical effects on the socially structured position and meaning of youth. Liberal reformers banned youth from the public space of the street and the productive, albeit abusive, world of the wage-labor market, and relegated them to the liminal social spaces of home, compulsory schooling, or “reform school.” Thanks to the benevolence of the middle-class liberal, children and youth soon found themselves in the dangerous position of being idle and dependant consumers of care and tutelage in a culture that values productive efficiency, independence, calculation, and “progress.” Ironically, it was the discourse of enlightenment progressivism, the very basis of the reform movement, which provided the material for the production of this socially ambiguous position.

Finally, this early cultural history of youth work illustrates that the establishment of the juvenile court system and child labor laws were not simply the product or “achievement” of a single class or group of Victorian do-gooders, but the negotiated expression of historically contentious discourses of social organization. By looking to the collective language of reformers and the social history of their own cultural resources, this examination illustrates the cultural linkages, rather than presumed contradictions, between the claims of altruism, their governmental and economic expression, and the reformers collective class interests in the reproduction of a class society. I will follow this ongoing struggle as it continues to inform the moral economy of youth work, the relationship between the state, the individual, and the market, and the ways in which the negotiated formations of youth work in late capitalism reveal a shift from the rehabilitative ideal, to the management of “risk.”

Chapter Four

From Reform to Risk: A Crisis of Youth Violence & the Privatization of Youth Work

The notion of “civilization” was the discourse by which 19th century reformers narrated their own status as achieved and produced the discourse of “reform” for those they imagined veering from a unilinear path of history. The discourse of “civilization” also enabled moral rationalizations of difference and inequality between rich and poor, Anglo and Other, men and women, and adult and child. In its early use “civilization” referred to a process of culturally specific maturation – becoming “civilized” signified an *achieved* condition of “adulthood” (Elias 1978). Accordingly, youth have been culturally constructed as a social group perpetually in the process of becoming, formalized by child-development theory for example, and have signified an always-incomplete history (Kelly 2003; Scheper-Hughes & Sargent 1998). This temporal-social discourse, which presents the future of society in the perceived condition of present youth, has also provided the discursive framework for the perception of *crisis* in the very subjectivity of youth.

Such was the implication of Charles Loring Brace’s fears about the future of society as he observed the urban youth of his time. Returning to his warnings, note the potential of the contemporary conditions he described,

The class increases: immigration is pouring in its multitudes of poor foreigners who leave these young outcasts everywhere in our midst. These boys and girls...will soon form the great lower class of our city. They will influence elections; they may shape the policy of the city; they will assuredly, if unreclaimed, poison society all around them. They will help to form the great multitude of robbers, thieves, and vagrants. [Platt 1998: 8]

Over the last century, the crisis narrative has been evoked repeatedly to explain social change and incite reaction based on grim predictions of the future. Gilbert's (1986) examination of moral panics about delinquency in the post-WWII United States describes how increasing numbers of working class and black youth attending high school and the process of working-class suburbanization through the GI bill intersected with middle-class anxieties about mass-media spreading 'lower-class' values. J Edgar Hoover, then director of the FBI, 'fanned the flames' of a delinquency crisis in his public addresses and law enforcement memoranda. Capitalizing on the present-future-crisis narrative "he warned: 'The first wave in this flood tide of new citizens born between 1940 and 1950 has just this year reached the 'teen age,' the period in which some of them will inevitably incline toward juvenile delinquency and, later, a full fledged criminal career'" (Gilbert 1986: 72). These deterministic declarations of a youth-crisis were echoed by the media itself, policy makers, social scientists, and social work professionals who for the most part placed responsibility on working-class families with grim, but exemplary titles such as "*Delinquents in the Making*" (Glueck & Glueck 1952).

"Youth crisis," I argue, is a frequently used rhetorical structure that reflects the future-in-the-present character of "youth" imagined as a nascent and developing subject of the future. As our examples above illustrate, "crisis" has been a persuasive framework of

aligning meaningful and moralized subject positions and imagining their future potential, a “forecasting” device through which cultural politics about the moral organization of the social order – the state, the market, the division of labor, the social distribution of discipline and caring – are interwoven. Through the political deployment of the future-in-the-present dimension that “youth” represents, “youth come to stand, in the public consciousness, as a metaphor for social change; but even more, for all the things *wrong* with social change” (Hall et al 1978:48 emphasis added). Moreover, as *Policing the Crisis* (1978) outlines, the cultural productions of crises are socially embedded processes where folk devils are conjured from familiar casts of historical and politically marginalized subjects. “Crises” are not simply responses to “simple set of facts but a new *definition of the situation* – a new construction of the social reality” (29).

In the following analyses, I outline how this rhetorical structure was deployed one hundred years after the Child-Saving Movement in ways that inverted and displaced many of the moralized relations devised by 19th century reformers, but extended the reproduction of class inequalities along racialized and gendered notions of difference. My arguments here are multiple; first is that late twentieth century policy and practices concerning youth reflect a continuation of the cultural politics of class that pitted inherent characteristics and a fixed social order against those cultural narratives that imply achievement and social mobility. I argue that the dominant market-oriented discourses of the late 20th century, expressed through language of “accountability,” “risk,” “outcomes,” “management” and the speculative character of statistical forecasting, demonstrates a rejection of the complex of narratives that

corresponded with and gave meaning to “the rehabilitative ideal,” including, implicitly, the idea and possibility of social mobility.

Second, I argue that the social distribution of new forms of social discipline has been uneven – that poor youth, particularly African American youth in urban areas of post-industrial economic depression, have once again been represented as the “folk devil” of imagined social breakdown. Through analyses of national and local cultural politics expressed in the rhetoric of legislators and local political elites, I will illustrate how poor urban minorities were singled-out for discipline through the patterned use of rhetorical metaphors and associations, and market discourses of “risk” and “accountability.”

Third, through an examination of the discourse of “accountability,” I will describe how the withdrawal of the welfare state and the retrenchment of social division through overt discipline have been achieved through a widespread privileging of the market, the private, the local, the community. This privileging signifies a shift of culturally produced moral domains away from government, the public, and the professional, and toward the market, the private, and the personal.

Finally, I will illustrate how these market-logics intersect with local, regional, and historical social tensions, transformations and inequalities around race, gender and class in the southern city of “Alston,” North Carolina. I describe how social movements and government policies such as school-desegregation and zero-tolerance intersect with ongoing divisions of race and class in the American South in ways that affect the social distribution of

discipline. I also consider how conceptual shifts from reform to risk, public to private, social to personal were expressed in youth work programming, the conditions of workplace-relations, and the social trajectories imagined for youth considered “at-risk.” Through ethnographic descriptions of a private, for-profit, day treatment center, I will illustrate how reconfigurations of social policy and consciousness under the rubrics of the market-economy have enabled the restriction of youth workers’ autonomy through controls and transformations in the labor process and the “management” of poor urban minority youths’ social mobility.

Crisis, Statistical Determinism, and the Cultural Relationship of Market & Discipline

In a 1998 United States Senate Judiciary subcommittee hearing on youth violence Republican senators Mike DeWine of Ohio and Jeff Sessions of Alabama evoked the rhetoric of youth crisis;

Sessions: Despite recent decline in juvenile crime, there were twice as many juvenile arrests in 1996 than there were in 1984. Unfortunately, the future looks even more troubling. The number of juveniles will increase by 31 percent by the year 2010. These are the crime prone years... If you’ve got a doubling of your most serious crime and don’t have any increases in your prison capacity, you quickly loose control. Judges, police and the courts lose respect because they have no capacity to deal with them. And, in fact, in my opinion, that is one of the driving factors behind treating more youngsters as adults, some of whom may well have been better handled in juvenile court systems, had there been a capacity for it. [*Juvenile Courts in the Twenty-First Century*, 1999: 3-4]

DeWine: You’ve cited the statistics and I think they clearly indicate that we do have serious problems in this country. Juvenile crime is a major national problem. From 1985 to 1995 the number of juveniles arrested for violent crimes surged 67 percent. Population experts tell us that the prime group that is responsible for crime – the troubled, at-risk youth – will expand greatly in

the next few years. The experts refer to them, the most dangerous of this group, as the super predators. [*Juvenile Courts in the Twenty-First Century*, 1999: 6].

Zimring's (1998) counter-analysis of the claims of a "coming storm" of juvenile "super predators" points out that these prophecies of doom were based on selectively extrapolated statistics. Specifically, the data concerned crimes reported for a cohort of teens already 15-18 years old in the mid 1990s. The alleged trends of this generation were then applied to a *projection* of the youth-population into the 21st century *as an inevitable outcome*. The effect of this rhetorical transfer from one generation to another presumes that the causes of youth violence are not historically specific, varying from cohort to cohort, but determined by fixed, intergenerational (*inherited*) characteristics of "risk." As Zimring notes "only a rather extreme version of a deterministic view of the causes of juvenile violence can give support to the notion that homicide rates fifteen years in the future can be predicted for a group of children currently between 2 and 4 years old. So talk about '270,000 juvenile superpredators coming at us in waves' in 2010 depends on a belief of fixed relationships between population characteristics and rates of serious violence" (Zimring 1998: 11). As I will illustrate throughout this chapter, the intersection of statistical data based on class informed notions of "risk," cultural understandings of youth, and the managerial language of "outcomes" and "accountability" converge in ways that signify a reassertion of discourses of social difference that imply fixed and inherited characteristics.

Zimring's exhaustive review of the statistical information and methods used, and ignored by these claims reveals that even the extrapolated statistics that were represented as evidence of a radical increase in violent crimes between 1985 and the mid-1990s were less

the result of behavioral trends of a particular cohort, but of changes in *classification* and policing *standards* (1998: 40-47). In one specific instance Zimring notes how in 1993, at the very onset of the “crisis,” “a new standard was used for the assault category, and the rate immediately jumped to more than 80 percent” (43). In fact, National Center for Juvenile Justice (NCJJ) Reports observed that while substantive and widespread policy transformations were occurring based on these constructed projections, violent crimes committed by young persons had in fact *decreased* (Torbet & Szymanski 1998). But through the rhetorical structure of youth crisis, and the manipulative use of categorical statistics, these and other legislators worked throughout the 1990’s to change the character of the juvenile justice system and its relationship to other welfare agencies such as mental health, child social-services and education.

Woodward’s (1999) examination of the post-modern cultural experience of “statistical panic” notes that public policy is often catalyzed by the use of statistical “fragments.” Statistics, as a science of prediction, assembles and imposes order on disparate elements of the past in ways that construct narrative scenarios for speculation about the future. Hence statistical “fragments” communicate full-length narratives of probable futures and serve, through grim forecasts, to generate collective feelings of anxiety (Woodward 1999). The construction of potent images like “superpredators” through statistical fragmentation and projection induced widespread feelings of panic about the future. The statistical panic about superpredators was facilitated by the utilization of the corresponding temporal narratives of “youth” and “crises.” Youth, as a population defined by its nascent characteristic of the future-in-the-present, narratively corresponds with the structures

statistics are constructed to communicate, the probability of the future (a bad one) here in the present.

The structural overlaps between the narratives of youth, crisis, and statistical determinism derive from the same “future oriented” worldview of capitalist speculation (Haskell 1985: 551) expressed in narratives of civilization, reform, progress, and unilinear evolution (Bledstein 1976, Elias 1978, Platt 1977). This is a world view most clearly identified by Weber (1930) as the “protestant ethic” and “spirit of capitalism,” which even at the level of practice is “action...which rests on the *expectation*,” even speculation of the future (17 – emphasis added). “The life of the saint was directed solely toward a transcendental end...It was this rationalization which gave the Reformed faith its particular ascetic tendency... It attempted to subject man to the supremacy of purposeful will, to bring his actions under constant self-control with a careful consideration of their ethical consequences.” (Weber 1930: 118-119) Woodward describes statistics as “the language of our global capitalist public culture” and that “statistical probabilities seem to implicate us as individuals in scenarios of financial ruin and of disaster by disease and weather...” (1999: 178). Hence, statistics, as a “discourse of risk” (Woodward 1999:179) act as narrative evidence and an imperative on the present, a moral imperative to discipline.

The economic language of “accountability” best demonstrates the cultural ascendancy of market-derived values of discipline. In the panic of a crisis (a “coming wave of superpredators” looming on the horizon of time) nearly every U.S. state passed sweeping legislation that, as the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention’s centennial

report concluded, “Shifted the juvenile courts away from rehabilitation and toward punishment.”(1999: 19). A survey conducted by the NCJJ reported that 47 states had radically “changed the purpose of the juvenile justice system from a child welfare approach to a system that promotes accountability, responsibility, and punishment” (Torbet & Szymanski 1998: 7). But earlier reports also concluded that “Accountability is, in many instances, defined as punishment or period of incarceration” (Torbet, et al., 1996: xi).

Comparing the anxieties of late 19th century reformers to late 20th century prophecies of crisis, there is an observable and repeated historical pattern. Much like their liberal predecessors, neo-conservative/liberal elites of the 20th century named “*moral poverty*” as the ‘antecedent condition for risk.’ Defined by those advocating the construction of greater prison capacity, the enforcement of zero tolerance policies, and the prosecution of “more youngsters as adults,” conservative pundits described “moral poverty” as the outcome of single parent and fatherless homes. William Bennet, conservative pundit and occasional political appointee, described these families as follows,

By “moral poverty” we mean the poverty of being without loving, capable, responsible adults who teach the young right from wrong. [Living in] the poverty of being without parents, guardians, relatives, friends, teachers, coaches, clergy who habituate...children. It is the poverty of growing up in the virtual absence of people who teach these lessons by their own everyday example, and who insist that you follow suit and behave accordingly.
[Zimring, 1998: 185]

Nearly analogous to the discourse of 19th century liberal reformers, the crisis of youth violence at the close of the 20th century constituted a cultural politics of class difference. Also analogous, though in a radically divergent direction, the deployment of a crisis of

“moral poverty” and consequent violence became the basis upon which elites at national, state and local scales-of-effect succeeded in transforming the relationship between the State, the market, and the social. This transformation was achieved by a relocation of moral domains from government to the market, from public to the private. As we will explore later in chapter six, this shift in moral domains has also effected and, perhaps, destabilized the entitlements of the secular saint, the professional.

The Cultural Politics of Class: Market-Behaviorism, Tough Love & the Savage Poor

The rhetoric of the 1990’s crisis of youth violence followed in the narrative tradition of the “War on Drugs” of the 1980’s, which largely skewed violence, drugs, delinquency and its alleged “umbrella” problem, poverty, to the supposed moral problems of urban minorities – particularly black youth (Bourgeois 1995; Males 1999). The mere taken-for-granted linkage of the terms “moral” and “poverty” itself expresses the conscious class relations of the crisis of youth violence; it names a class and its moral condition at the same time – “the poor have poor morals.” Moreover, frequent reference to a string of shootings in largely white, suburban schools such as Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado, stirred the youth-anxiety of a particularly powerful political-economic block; white suburban parents. Hence, the use of the racially unmarked terminology of “youth violence” captured the attention of particularly potent political audiences whilst federal and state policy debates throughout the

1990's conjured the source of the "epidemic" of youth violence as "domestic terrorism" originating in the "badlands" - the "God awful jungle" - of the inner city. ¹

By (erroneously) narrating a *causal* linkage between the statistical *correlations* of teen pregnancy, welfare dependency, and disproportionate ratios of young black males in the juvenile justice system, conservative think-tank pundits proposed an emerging generation of "jobless, Godless, and fatherless" juvenile "super-predators" born of "abject moral poverty" emerging from the primordial "jungle" of the inner city (Males 1999; Zimring 1998).² Major public health officials, such as former Surgeon General Joyce Elders, consistently held out black youth as a sole statistical population considered "at-risk" while asserting that poverty is "the root cause of violence" and is the "plight of the inner city" (*Violence As A Public Health Issue*, 1995). The linkage of the Moral Majority's symbolic "welfare queen" with alleged "waves" of violent crime catalyzed welfare reform bills and the deregulation of federal reporting mandates that were designed to monitor racial disproportionality in the juvenile justice system. Furthermore, imagery of a "revolving door" courthouse and "stone cold," unrepentant delinquents was used to bolster arguments that the juvenile justice system itself was effeminately "soft" and permissive, requiring greater emphasis on "accountability" - or as the NCJJ pointed out; punishment, responsibility, and more punishment.

¹ Language drawn from testimony in; *Violence As A Public Health Issue*, 1995; *The Iron Triangle*, 1997; *Training First Responders into the Next Century*, 2000; *The resurgence of heroin use*, 2001. John DiIulio, William Bennet, and a host of Heritage Foundation analysts were among the cast of these "expert" witnesses.

² Then a Fellow at the Brookings Institute, DiIulio's entire congressional testimony about "superpredators" can be found in *The Changing Nature of Youth Violence*, 1997.

Senator Joseph Biden exemplified the tenor of such violently punitive sentiment when he agreed in 1998; “Those of you who want to hang them high, these violent kids, OK, hang them high” (*Fixing a Broken System*, 1999). While claims of a crisis of youth violence provoked authoritarian initiatives such as “Zero Tolerance” and other “coordinated approaches linking law and order to community intervention” (*Youth Violence and Gangs*, 1992), they may indicate that the crisis was also an expression of cultural politics about racial and class difference. The mere fact of shock and hysteria generated over the widely publicized white-suburban-school-shootings illustrates the common assumption and normalization of violence in the inner-city. As one student of Santana High in the middle-class suburb of Santee, California explained, “The adults think there are no really mean people at this school” (Egan 2001). “This could happen in any town in America if it could happen in Santee” added the Mayor (*San Diego Community Stunned by School Shooting* 2001). In fact, attention to the discourse of political elites illustrates a social transmutation of the moral panic concerning demographically unmarked (white) school shooters in white suburbia, to black urban youth living in poverty.

The rhetoric of these calls for tougher policy intertwined the supposed moral difference among classes with a discourse of behaviorism that situated the market as a natural and moral human ecology. Take for example the 1995 Senate hearing “*The Iron Triangle: Welfare, Illegitimacy, and Juvenile Crime*” in which Senator Fred Thompson proposed that public assistance “breeds crime, immorality and idleness” (1997: 2). According to this logic, welfare, in combination with an allegedly “soft” juvenile justice system, was an *incentive and cause* of youth violence by enabling teen pregnancy, jobless fathers, and homes

of “abject moral poverty” from which come the “superpredators” of tomorrow. Though the Senator was cautioned about conflating statistical correlations with cause and effect relationships, the alignment of the three provided Thompson with the opportunity to express his

...representation of the individual as *homo economicus*. A subject who is invested with additional moral and political characteristics and conforms to the self-interested and responsible actor found in neo-conservative discourse... crime discourse, for example, represents the potential offender as a universal... ‘rational choice’ actor who weighs the pros and cons before committing an offense. [Lupton 1999: 100-101]

In “The Iron Triangle,” the punishment/rewards logic of behaviorism was aligned discursively with cost/benefit market rationalities of risk speculation, choice, and self-discipline. In the words of Senator Thompson: “our welfare system, by removing the economic consequences of an out-of-wedlock birth, removed a major incentive to avoid such pregnancies” (*The Iron Triangle*, 1997:2). I call this “market-behaviorism” as it presumes the market as the natural condition, the natural ecology of human interaction – that without the meddling of the state, humans would *by nature* be “entrepreneurs.” According to Thompson’s market behaviorism, without the moral tutelage of the market, expressed as “*accountability*,” the poor were handicapped by the meddling state. This assumption makes the contradictory conclusion that because of welfare, the poor have been sheltered from the natural consequences of the market, poverty. On the other hand, this rationalization also presumes that because of lenient juvenile courts, inner-city minority youth have never experienced the disproportionality of the system in which they are disproportionately represented. In an implosion of meaning reminiscent of the contradictory “newspeak” of

Orwell's *1984*, Thompson declared, "Welfare is democracy gone wrong" (*The Iron Triangle*, 1997: 2).

In her comparison of the "Rhetoric of (Female) Savagery" in welfare reform both in the US and New Zealand, Catherine Kingfisher (1999) observed that "A key rhetorical strategy deployed by neo-liberal reformists... entails pointing to the *moral harm* inflicted on the poor when they are provided with aid." (6) According to this logic, exemplified in Senator Thompson's discourse, "welfare is unfair, even immoral, insofar as it robs people of the opportunity to achieve self-respect by means of the self-reliance and independence gained through paid employment"(6). In contrast to the scientific rationalization of social and economic production that privileged government as the way toward a moral civilization, neo-conservative *and* neo-liberal rationalities of the social turn the moral tables and represent the market as the default, "free," and therefore moral context of human nature.

This approach has been called by critics the 'new prudentialism', a neo-conservative approach which progressively removes the responsibility for risk protection from state agencies – as embodied in social insurance for such misfortunes as unemployment or ill health – and places it in the hands of the individual or community based groups... As a result, the concept of risk has become more privatized and linked ever more closely to the concept of the entrepreneurial individual...privatized prudentialism and punitive sovereignty. [Lupton 1999:99, 101]

The following exchange between Senator Thompson and a 'Ms. Harris,' whose beauty salon was robbed by a pair of teenagers, exemplifies the privatizing and punitive discourse of the neo-liberal/ neo-conservative compliment.

Senator THOMPSON. ...Obviously we have to start worrying about the next generation now, the children that are not even born yet. ...what do we have to do to have a situation where it is more likely *for them to take responsibility?*

Ms Harris. Well, one, we have to stop so much of this *teenage pregnancy*. I am in my mid forties. I didn't have a father in my home but I had a strict mother. You brought nothing in her house that she didn't buy. If you borrowed it you had to take it back... But today, we have to start looking out for each other again. We are in some trying times. And *unless the young mothers today get parenting and to know how to deal with their children, you will either have them in jail or dead.*

Senator THOMPSON. It is a sense of *community* that we no longer see.

Ms. Harris. We lost it in the *community and responsibility*.

Senator THOMPSON. We no longer seem to have these. Is this a matter that is going to have to be dealt with by the churches, *by the government?*

Ms. Harris. Senator Thompson, it is a problem that is going to have to be dealt with by everyone. Your church cannot do it alone. Your school systems cannot do it alone. *It has to first start at home.* They took prayer out of school but you can pray at your home.

Senator THOMPSON. Let me touch on another problem. We could talk all day about this matter... *You employ six people, a small business person. You are the example that people ought to be pointing to as to what can be done.* And yet you were subjected to this sort of thing... What do you – these offenders were apprehended, as I understand it. The police did a good job?

Ms Harris. Yes they did.

Senator THOMPSON. Do you have any views as to what we do with maybe those who are too old and have gotten into such a pattern, hopefully unlike these two young men, they have gotten into such a pattern that they will not turn back?

Ms Harris. You have got *some of our teenagers* like some of our adults that *are going to be lost, all lost and will fall by the wayside. There will be nothing that you can do for these people...*

Senator THOMPSON. *Very sound advice.*
[*Youth Violence*, 1997: 14-15 – emphases added]

I cite this exchange to illustrate the logic that leads from welfare to absolute abandonment: first, the association of welfare, teen pregnancy, and mothers in poverty with youth violence and delinquency. The unsubstantiated association of the robbery of this woman's salon with teenage pregnancy and poverty, with lack of community and mothers' responsibility in the home, demonstrates the ease with which these associations identified the inner-city poor as the *cause and effect* of society's disparities. The distribution of responsibility is the second key feature. Thompson asks, "What do we have to do to have a situation where it is more likely *for them to take responsibility*? ...Is this a matter that is going to have to be dealt with by the churches, *by the government*?" Throughout the exchange responsibility is limited to the realm of the mother, the home, and "the community." The domestic focus of the moral poverty discourse shifts responsibility away from the state and toward the home, the individual, and the mother. Thompson's celebration of Ms. Harris as the personification of the responsible community member, *homo economicus*, reveals his proposal; "*You employ six people, a small business person. You are the example that people ought to be pointing to as to what can be done.*"

The valorization of the entrepreneur as the moral example shifted the moral domain of citizenship into the private and was complimented by conservative alienation from the state. While neither of them mention potential state contributions or interventions after Senator Thompson's query, Ms. Harris implies her opinion of the possibility; "It has to first start at home. *They took prayer out of school but you can pray at your home.*" Finally, the internalizing connotations of the privatization discourse configure those who have "gotten into such a pattern" as "lost" and irredeemable. In contrast to the fundamental tenets of

liberal welfare expressed in the rehabilitative ideal the discourse of privatization is characterized by absolute rejection, “Zero Tolerance,” “accountability” – an absolute abandonment of the modernist aspirations of transformation and change. The argument not only makes the poor responsible for poverty (and crime), but leaves them “by the wayside” as well.

When Senator Sessions of Alabama proposed “Washington is incapable of telling you what you need in your community” he expressed a political contention about the limits of the state, and the responsibilities of “community” and the “private-sector” in relation to each other whether it concerns youth, delinquency, or welfare payments to the unemployed. Like the Reform Era activists, professionals, and capitalists, late-capitalist politics of youth work are not only about youth, but the moral order of society at large. Returning to Senator Dewine; “I have focused a great deal of attention over the last several years on efforts to take back neighborhoods...All over Ohio and the rest of the United States concerned individuals – many times not involved with the government – private sector, volunteer groups, churches have all organized variable outreach programs to help offer young people different lives” (*Juvenile Courts In The 21st Century*, 1999: 6). Unlike the domestic governmentality of public hygiene proposed by 19th century reformers, nationwide debates about the role of the state in social-welfare and delinquency-control during the late 20th century minimized the State and privileged local, private, and ‘self-help’ governance. As Kingfisher observed, this is “welfare for the wealthy”;

This approach represents a form of economic rationalism, in which “the view that social problems can progressively be solved by the application of rationally-devised state-implemented social policies” is seen as both

unaffordable and ineffectual [Bryson 1992, 178]. Such arguments are selective, however; and in emphasizing the need to “reinvigorate the market sector,” they work to the advantage of particular groups and to the disadvantage of others [179]. (Kingfisher, 1999:5)

The collective and patterned rhetoric of these pundits and legislators construct “youth violence” in a relation to the social “other,” poor single mothers of color, who were given animalistic and instinctual characteristics through symbolic metaphors of ‘breeding,’ “predators,” “incentive” and the “jungle.” Dower (1986) argues that such animal associations enable dehumanization, allowing for the disregard of the other as a feeling human being, and displacing the moral barriers to discrimination and violence toward them. Moreover, the formulaic discourse of “The Iron Triangle” compressed statistical *correlations* of welfare, poverty and crime into a *cause-effect* relationship, associated the production of crime with poverty, and *both* with single black women – the mythological “welfare queen” of Ronald Reagan’s earlier attacks on welfare. Mirroring the social panic over “wayward girls” in 19th century, the triangulation of poor, urban, single mothers as the axis of these social problems renders “the subjectivity of poor women as expressing various dimensions of “savagery; specifically, an inability to defer gratification, and lack of bodily discipline” (Kingfisher 1999: 11).

The poor, by their very existence, serve to define the boundaries of ordered society. By being “naturally” outside of civil society, and thus representative of disorder, the poor establish the outer limits of that society. Civilization is what it is – and those who inhabit it are who they are – by virtue of not being uncivilized, of being the Other to civilization, the savage. ...They...represent the *abject, threatening* the boundary. [Kingfisher 1999:4]

Hence, the crisis rhetoric of youth violence also enabled exceptionally potent arguments for conservative interests in “accountability,” a euphemism for punishment

(Torbet et al. 1996: xi), and abandonment of the social redistribution of resources. These were the draconian, but moralized, principles underlying “The 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act,” which progressively reduced and set term limits on unemployment assistance while sending recipients to work low-wage temp positions in the service sector. The waves of legislative reconstruction also lead to the Juvenile Crime Control Act of 1997, which conditioned \$1.5 billion in block grants to states that would meet four conditions, all of them punitive. These conditions included:

- Trying juveniles 15 or older who committed "a serious violent crime" as an adult.
- Enacting increasingly punitive sentencing laws against repeat offenders.
- Establishing a tracking system for minors who commit second crimes and make their records public.
- Finally, allowing juvenile court judges to issue court orders against the parents or guardians of convicted minors who do not properly supervise them.

Stuart Hall described the sweeping state/market transformations of Thatcherism in the United Kingdom as a project of reversal or “*regressive modernization*” (1988: 163, 164). The “project was to transform the state in order to restructure society; to decentre, to displace ...to reverse the political culture” (Hall 1988: 163). While Reform Era activists preached and enforced the moral value of labor for both (poor, immigrant) parents and children, government was the imagined moral force because it proposed to regulate, rationalize, and plan not only hygienic public-environs, but also the relationship between capital and labor, market and society, private and public. The moral economy of neo-liberal market

behaviorism inverts these assumptions as inappropriate “interference” with the “natural” market, the private, the personal, and the production of human morality itself.

Pathways to Zero Tolerance: Caring & Discipline in North Carolina

In 1997, the federal Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), a component of the federal Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice, released several research bulletins reporting research on the “Epidemiology of Serious Violence.” The final report, “Developmental Pathways in Boy’s Disruptive and Delinquent Behavior” (Kelly, et al., 1997), documents research on “pathways that boys follow as they progress to more serious problem behaviors.”

Two Roads diverged in a wood, and I – I took the road less traveled by, and that has made all the difference (Robert Frost, “The Road Not Taken”)

The paths we take early in life often do make a considerable difference in the destinations that await us down the road. Pathways of particular concern are those that route some young boys to disruptive behavior and delinquency. [Bilchik, in Kelly, et al., 1997 – original emphasis]

As this passage illustrates, the research sponsored by the OJJDP reflects cultural conceptions of life trajectories – i.e. life is a path, a “road” as Frost put it. What is significant in this particular statement is the integration of the path narrative with developmental psychology to suggest approaches the State could exercise to name and police developmental “roads” leading to possible disruption and delinquency.

The strength of this pathways model is in large part due to the researchers’ sensitivity to the developmental realities of life for children and adolescents (Kelly, et al., 1997: 16).

Followup [*sic*] measures with the 576 children enrolled in the study will assess other possible outcomes of ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder), such as substance abuse, precriminal activities, delinquent behavior, and juvenile justice system contacts. [Kelly, et al., 1997]

Furthermore, the bulletin outlines the “Mental Health/Juvenile Justice Initiative,” defining collaboration between two of the federal agencies – Mental Health Services and Juvenile Justice – responsible for the welfare of youth. The collaboration initiative *embodies* the developmental pathways model, casting the widest possible net - pathologizing disruptive and delinquent behavior and potentially criminalizing “abnormal” developmental pathways.

Robert Castel’s (1991) examination of the governmentality of “risk” points out that risk calculation is concerned with the *pre-detection* of undesirable *outcomes*. “A risk does not arise in the presence of particular precise danger embodied in a concrete individual or group ... One does not start from a conflictual situation observable in experience, rather one *deduces it* from a general definition of the dangers one wishes to prevent” (Castel 1991: 287-288). Intervention, in this mode of analysis, is the surveillance and management of correlating factors and outcomes, rather than the mediation of causes and their effects. The “pathways” model presumed a risk *trajectory* and in effect criminalized culturally constructed syndromes such as Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and even male-adolescence itself (Hill & Fortenberry 1992). The “pathways model” represented a translation of the deterministic calculation of “outcomes assessments” in a corresponding cultural narrative of unilinear development. The rhetoric of choice and consequence implied by the ‘roads taken’ narrative corresponds with the behaviorist presumptions of privatization and contributed to the responsabilization of the individual for their “outcome.” For the

children “enrolled” in the Pathways study, surveillance was not a part of a disciplinary process of reform – these were children whose risk-ness was being “managed in place” as part of an organized zone of deviance with expected “pathways” and outcomes.

In 1997, North Carolina joined Oregon and sixteen other states in appropriating funds for, and authorizing “counties to establish demonstration projects that assume local management for certain delinquents to reduce reliance on states secure custody” (Torbet & Szymanski, 1998: 9). North Carolina was considered by federal officials to be a leader in juvenile justice reform and outsourcing of services to “local management.” During a 1999 National Conference on Combating School Violence, co-hosted by then Governor of North Carolina, Jim Hunt, Shay Bilchik, Administrator of the OJJDP, US Department of Justice, remarked, “It is very appropriate that this conference is being held in North Carolina. There is so much good happening in this state that we can look at it as a model” (*Gov. Hunt Co-Hosts National Conference*, 1999).

With the inception of Governor Hunt’s Task Force on Youth Violence in 1993, North Carolina joined the nationwide escalation of policing youth violence. In the same year Governor Hunt initiated a research and networking agency, the North Carolina Center for the Prevention of School Violence. Since then the center has proposed and facilitated the installation and networking of more than 500 police or, “School Resource Officers” in public middle and high school campuses. In addition, the number of “alternative schools” which house “disruptive and violent students” has grown to the point that “106 of the state’s 118 school systems have at least one alternative school or program” (*Governor Jim Hunt’s Record*,

2000). While Hunt also passed zero tolerance legislation in 1997 (mandating swift disciplinary reprisals for even *talk* of violence), more sweeping changes in juvenile policy would come with the passing of North Carolina's Juvenile Justice Reform Act (JJRA) in 1998.

This legislation mandated speedy judicial proceedings, tougher punishment, mandatory post-release supervision, offender *accountability* and the creation of Juvenile Crime Prevention Councils in every county of the state. Furthermore, the JJRA also established a "single cabinet-level agency" to address youth violence. The cabinet post consolidated the Division of Youth Services in the Department of Health and Human Services (which also houses the Department of Mental Health Services) with Juvenile Services (from the Administrative Office of the Courts) to form a single agency under the newly formed Department of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (DJJDP). Thus the consolidated DJJDP directly follows the "Mental Health/Juvenile Justice Initiative," embodying the "developmental pathways" model promoted by the federal Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (above). The DJJDP also swallowed the Center for the Prevention of School Violence created in 1993, a National Guard "Alternative Sentencing Program," as well as providing large block grants for local efforts emerging from the county councils and "partnerships with other programs" (*Gov. Hunt Signs Bill, 2000*). The privatization of mental health services was state mandated and rapidly initiated in the 2001 Mental Health Reform Act, leaving many state-employees to find jobs with private contractors who were themselves scrambling for contracts with local management agencies. Hence, mental health and criminal outcomes were combined in the organization of the state,

which in the context of increasingly strapped state budgets, transferred the budget expenditure of custody to the private sector as a lucrative service-market.

At the end of this decade of massive reformation of state youth agencies, North Carolina Governor Jim Hunt knit the narrative themes of discipline and “pathways” into a statement introducing his appointee – a police chief – to lead the conglomerate Department of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.

Someone whom I admire greatly once said that when it comes to our children and protecting them from doing the wrong things, we must *love them enough to discipline them* when needed, and we must love them enough to *prevent them from going down the wrong path*. [Office of Juvenile Justice Announcement, 1999]

The reorchestration of these particular state institutions fits well, but somewhat disturbingly, with what scholars have proposed as the benefits of an epidemiological, public health approach to youth violence – specifically its ability to “control communicable diseases through disease surveillance, contact tracing, immunization, diagnosis and treatment, and, when necessary, isolation” (Hamburg 1998: 38). However, ethnographic research and the scholarship of youth work professionals have illustrated how behavioral pathologies are often disproportionately ascribed to politically and economically disadvantaged, African-American youth (Ayers et al. 2001; Delpit 1995). The phenomenon of diagnostic social inequality has been illustrated to derive from divergent and culturally informed class expectations concerning what constitutes appropriate behavior (Bourgois 1995:176-177; Delpit 1995). In fact, “Behavioral Disorders” listed by the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM IV) reveal the cultural values loaded into the identification of “early

warning signs” for future criminality. ADHD, for example, represents a clear violation of the ‘Protestant Ethic’ of “attention to distant consequences,” and “Oppositional Defiant Disorder,” as a “status offense,” represents a clear violation of paternal sovereign power. Through these cultural expectations and “miscommunications” and the employment of public health discourses of “contamination” (Lorion 1998: 295) and “control” (Hamburg 1998: 38), poor, urban minority youth are being disproportionately “tracked” out of mainstream schools into disciplinary alternative schools and private treatment programs (Ayers et al. 2001).

Adventure LLC

The 1990’s crisis of youth violence emerged in “Alston,” North Carolina in the midst of a divided and contentious process of school desegregation and merger. The city and county school districts of Alston were sharply segregated by race with the city schools more than 95 percent black and the county system about 65 percent white. While state agencies and the governor leveled indirect threats to force the merger,³ County Commissioners eventually voted to consolidate the city and county school systems. While the commissioners claimed to be trying to avoid an “emotional and divisive” referendum (that county voters were expected to reject), a commissioner in a neighboring county commented on other motives: “Money -- or the lack of it -- drives people together.” In fact, the city school district was literally insolvent and in debt. With a threat from the governor to finance only one district in each county looming over the budget crisis, the commissioners were

³ These included a proposal to finance only one school district per county across the state, making local municipalities foot the bill for dual systems, and threats by the state department of Education to take over the city schools based on both low student scores and financial mismanagement.

forced to consolidate the districts or pay out of the county budget for the separate school system.

As the merger plan evolved throughout the 90's, poor inner city black youth were bused out to largely white suburban schools on "the county rim" and dilapidated schools in the poorest areas of the city were abandoned, adding to the building-graveyard of empty tobacco and textile plants strewn about the city.⁴ The real estate standing empty in the city was, to development contractors and investors, a gold mine. But Alston's "gang menace," portrayed in a widely circulated independent documentary, constant negative local-news reporting, as well as a cameo in a national investigative news show, made selling the city to real estate buyers and downtown shoppers a difficult task. In an effort to clean up the city's notoriously bad image, chamber of commerce officials pointed to the oft reported "gang menace" as part of the national "crisis" of youth violence and leaned heavily on the city to step up gang-prevention activity and build alternative schools for "non-traditional students." Increasing complaints about "disruptive students" from teachers and parents in the county schools, fears about gang violence, skyrocketing suspension and expulsion rates, and the simultaneous privatization of the state's custodial and service functions opened a wide space for the proliferation of private-sector programs speaking the language of risk and accountability. Joined together in a so called "network of care" that claimed to provide "wrap-around-services," for-profit corporations around the state bid for contracts to provide assessments, diagnoses, and services for residential and day-treatment, mentoring, family

⁴ Two of the other city schools were turned into magnet schools that admitted students competitively, which also served to segregate out the disadvantaged inner city students whose district had been ranked at the bottom of testing and credentialing scores statewide for several years.

interventions, and disciplinary boot-camps from the county offices of mental health, the housing authority, and the juvenile courts.

Before Alston's newly merged school district could even get its own alternative school up and running, it was already referring students to non- and pro-profit "partners" in the community. Sarge's non-profit alternative school was one of the main providers of these "alternative" services. Sarge represented her school as an entrepreneurial program, often getting students involved in fund raising drives by making and selling t-shirts. As such, her program was able to "cash-in" on the popularity of neo-liberal economic rationalism. Sarge also tried to collaborate with other community members and construction contractors to build a vocational school along the same rationale but the contentious and racially divided school board often dragged out attempts until they stalled.

The largest provider of "behavioral treatment" services for youth in Alston was Adventure LLC. Before my period of fieldwork at Sarge's alternative school, I was an employee of Adventure LLC during two years of its school-suspension, after-school, and summer day-treatment programs. Adventure LLC was a "Limited Liability Company" that provided "Adventure Based Counseling" to Medicaid clients ages twelve to eighteen. The young "clients" of the program came by contracted referral from the county Mental Health agency, where they had arrived by referral from the schools, social services or the juvenile courts. Hence, each client received a de-facto behavioral diagnosis on the way through the mental health funnel whether they were caught smoking marijuana in school, a group home resident, victim and/or perpetrator of severe abuse, deaf, afflicted with Downs Syndrome,

diagnosed with “explosive anger disorder,” or simply the child of a working-poor household and this was make-shift day care. What officially brought these kids together under the same program, despite their widely differing diagnoses, was that: one, they have all been identified to be “at-risk,” or on the “developmental pathway” to becoming a risk through various contacts and interventions by state agencies and institutions. And two, because of their low-income status, they qualified for Medicaid. All but four of the 120 or so young people I saw pass through the program in two years identified as African-American,⁵ all *at least* qualified for Medicaid and free school-lunches, and most were picked up everyday from public housing around the city.

On a dead-end road at the waning edge of the city, Adventure LLC was located in an unfinished industrial park of two sheet-metal warehouses between a coffin factory and a lot piled with rusty junk-cars. On an 8 x 11 sheet of paper taped to the inside of the window, printed in letters only an inch or two high and only visible from a few feet away, was the name “Adventure LLC.” Through the glass of the front door I could see some of the kids that attended the summer session already inside.⁶ They were running circles round the office, chasing each other, dislodging furniture, wrestling over chairs and, as was usually the case, attempting at all costs to delay the routine of the day. Chris, Adventure’s administrator, was badgering them to leave the front office area and go into “the back.” “C’mon, let’s go! This is a place of business!”

⁵ Federally funded school lunch programs required us to survey the clients on this one and only demographic: race.

⁶ The summer program lasted from 8AM to 4PM, Monday through Friday, during the school district’s summer break.

Contrary to the prevailing demand for “accountability” in government, schools, poor families and young people, Limited Liability status allows business owners to manage their own company while benefiting from the liability-protection offered to corporate shareholders not responsible for company (mis)management. This status also allows sole proprietors to avoid paying both corporate and shareholder taxes by collapsing the two entities into one, and frees them from the corporate requirement of compulsory publication of their finances. Therefore, in addition to the fact that no liability could be attached to the proprietor for any damages their company might inflict, no public information exists about how much money they take in and how it is distributed to client services, or profit. In addition to this, Adventure LLC was located in a tax subsidized industrial-development zone, in a rented aluminum warehouse. For its consolidated services, Adventure LLC was paid by the hour for each client, with higher rates corresponding to severity of diagnoses, which, as the company expanded to provide more services, their own clinicians provided.

Reflecting the “moral poverty” discourse, and the internalizing character of the neoliberal rhetoric of privatization, the Adventure LLC program claimed as its central goal, the “improvement of self-concept” as an antidote to “the oppressive behavioral phenomenon known as *conditioned hopelessness* regularly observed and documented among underprivileged youth.” Overtly behaviorist, clients were moved through the program by complying with treatment plan mandates such as “improve respect for authority as evidenced by less than three instances of not following directions per month for two consecutive months.” Participation in the program was individualized through the principle of “challenge by choice,” which declared that no one could be forced to participate in activities, obscuring

the fact that the clients were there by referrals they, in all likelihood, did not request, and that their treatment plans required compliance in order to get out of the program. Clients were to “keep focused on the present and future” and any recourse to mitigating circumstances, what we might call “historically informed social relations,” was called “scapegoating” or the “blame-game.”

By complying with behavioral contracts, clients could earn “privileges” by accumulating “points” meted out by facilitators such as myself, who were given the sovereign power of “final say.” Points could “cash in” once a week at the “Adventure Store” for candy, ice cream and soda. The language of “behavioral contracts” and “challenge by choice” reinforced the market-economy-behaviorism experienced in the shopping motif of the points system. Backed by clinical practices of isolation, examination, treatment, and evaluation, the discourse of Adventure Based Counseling (ABC) individualized “under-privilege.” It privatized oppression as an internal psychological condition - “conditioned hopelessness.” The market-behaviorism of the program positioned young people as responsible for addressing their own despair, as commodities with exchange-value, and, through the market language of “choice” and “client,” as consumers of self-discipline.

Labor conditions also reflected the discipline of marketized social programming. Motivated by profit margins, as the choice of incorporation over non-profit status suggests, Adventure LLC’s low-wage facilitator positions required no professional degrees or license, offered no benefits, and often held employees responsible for violence between clients in their overcrowded groups, in which client-to-staff ratios were often six-to-one or more. In

staff meetings late in the sweltering summer, when everyone had become bored and frustrated with attempting to control the behavior of sixty to seventy bored and frustrated adolescents, Chris the administrator would insist by threat of our employment that we eliminate fighting and “rough-housing” in our groups.

Though, as I described in chapter two, Chris valued “book knowledge” over the “street-knowledge” tactics of discipline some of the facilitators employed, Chris made no bones about the kind of enforcement he expected should book knowledge not suffice to keep order. Moreover, the assertion of the kids’ disposition as determining their pathological behavior could be used to displace the blame for the violent and overcrowded labor conditions: ‘We need to keep a structured routine on them, *lock ‘em down*. In the morning, no four-square, that just sets them off to a bad start – we can’t give them that much freedom.’

⁷ As several facilitators complained that we were outnumbered by the clients and needed more staff, Chris replied that ‘these are bad kids, it doesn’t matter how many of us there are – even one to one they’ll get in trouble.’ The control mentality of Chris’s notion of therapy was best expressed in his metaphor of ‘*the box*’ – the ‘structured environment, the rules of behavior, the limits and borders of acceptable behavior that a patient must know and abide by for therapeutic work to be initiated.’ As Chris, and Donna (who rebuked the idea of a facilitator sharing the objective conditions of a client’s disposition *with the client*, see chapter one) also illustrated, “the box” of discipline was often all that was demanded of the facilitators as well. In fact, they were the box.

⁷ “Lock ‘em down” could be interpreted in a number of ways, but in this context I interpreted it to mean greater restrictions on clients’ freedom. Foursquare is a game played with a kick-ball.

Corresponding to the time-discipline values of market culture (“*time is money*”), one of the most effective forms of imposing “the box” was the common practice of “time-out.” When kids were ‘acting out,’ getting ‘caught up’ or not ‘on task,’ the punishment for such lack of discipline was, most often, to put the young person in a chair facing a corner of the room for a specified amount of time that corresponded to their *age* – this was called “time-out” (see figure 3). During the time-out the penitent subject was not to look at or speak to anyone, and hands were to remain ‘to themselves.’ The act of occlusion in facing the wall mimetically performed the act of self-time-discipline by bringing the delinquent’s attention to their age-status and the “distant consequences of their actions” through the hyper-attention paid to time and self.



Figure 3: “Time out”: This twelve-year old boy doubled the effect of his forced seclusion by pulling his shirt up over his head, to cry. (Photograph taken by author)

Like the clients, the facilitators were mostly from poor and working-class backgrounds and, except for me, all African American. Few of them were comfortable with, and often resisted, the disabling notions of behavioral pathology, which they interpreted as a scapegoat or excuse for their behavior. Many of the facilitators considered the social or behavioral problems of the kids symptomatic of the kind of “moral poverty” mythologized in neo-conservative policy discourse and prescribed their own practices of “home training.”

The moral symbolism of the home was a potent frame of meaning often used for constructing social relations between the workers and the so-called “clients.” Facilitators at Adventure LLC, Sarge at Alternative Pathways, as well as a large proportion of “frontline” workers I have met, referred to the young people they worked with through kinship terms like “my son,” or “my girl” (as an analogy for daughter), and generally “my kids.” These were not casual slippages of meaning but the application of a constellation of domestic symbolism that defines gendered and age-graded relations between adult workers and youth. In particular, the symbolism of the home naturalized relations of power between them. It situated the worker and youth within the rights, privileges, and responsibilities of the parent to discipline and care for the child. The use of kinship terms inverted the independent status implied by the economic term “client,” into dependant statuses of children that more closely corresponded to the disciplinary relationships workers were often *required* to maintain. Hence, the facilitators’ authority found support in the right of “final say” in behavioral judgments, and the ever-present discourse of responsibility, however, this was about as far as labor conditions privileged the facilitator.

As I noted in chapter one, to my chagrin, but to no surprise of my coworkers, facilitators were not to assume tasks that infringed on professional roles hierarchically superior to their own, such as discussing the conditions of clients' treatment plans with them. All the daily-activity schedules were administratively set, every action and minute accounted for. Treatment records or "notes," the hallmark cultural skill of technical inscription that enabled the recognition of social work as a profession, were *not* the therapeutic devices their name once implied. Chris, Frank, and Donna, the recognized "professionals" at Adventure LLC, often referred to notes as little more than *billing receipts*. As such the language facilitators were allowed to use was strictly outlined in line-by-line, *word-by-word* instructions. Even a list of *approved verbs and adjectives* to describe client behaviors and staff-interventions was provided. When the notes were not approved by the agency-coordinator, they were returned with the facilitators' time sheet the following Monday, which delayed your paycheck until the next pay-period. Consequently, treatment notes, the technology and material evidence of skill for social workers, therapists, and casework at large, were reduced to currency in the company's contract exchanges. Predictable production, the economic rationalization of "attention to distant consequences," necessitated regularization of the labor process. Since a market of clientele is virtually guaranteed by the dominance of "developmental pathways" model of risk prevention, all that need be done by the professionals at Adventure LLC was to manage the circulation of service and billing through the discipline of the facilitators. Through the discipline of both labor processes and the clients, the structures of privatized, internalized "behavioral treatment" served to fix the social trajectories of these poor black urban youth. The oft-heard phrase "that kid's got a jail

cell with his name on it” expressed the common, tacit acceptance of this neo-conservative determinism.

The culture of the market, expressed in the term “accountability,” disciplined not only those disproportionately targeted, underprivileged, minority youth and transmuted them into “service-consumers,” but it also actively limited the professional aspirations and autonomy of front-line youth workers. The overt routinization of case notes strictly regulated the autonomy and discretion of workers in the labor process. Although case notes have always functioned as a commodity of the social or biomedical worker, market-rule, through their appropriation *as capital*, virtually emptied them of value as a technology of therapeutic social work. In this way, market-regime-culture displaces the humanist language and orientation of therapeutic social work. It also contributed to the devaluing of frontline youth workers and the knowledge they bring to the workplace. In fact, the market-discipline over the labor process was so dominant that the labor process was literally spelled out, word for word – every step managed, controlled, and disciplined. Like the client, facilitators were subject to a “box.”

Through the discipline of market-behaviorism, sovereign paternal power, and the marketization of therapeutic devices, the treatment trajectory of the client shifts from one of reform, rehabilitation or healing, to a constant regime of ‘punishment, responsibility, and punishment.’ What these national, cultural and structural shifts signify, at least in part, is an displacement of the humanist narratives expressed in discourses of progress for the market-

economy calculation of accounting. Rather than a process of “rehabilitation,” treatment and prevention have been reconstituted as “management.”

Market-rule, Fragmentation, Open Fissures

The above ethnographic examination of programming and labor-practice controls demonstrates how the marketization of social services and dominance of economic rationalism limit the status of youth workers as autonomous, professional agents of skill. These are the everyday conditions that youth-work studies and writers in chapters one and two glossed over. The symbolic gendering and modern ethos of caring intersect with the labor conditions of market rule to marginalize youth workers and produce the fragmentation, flux, and devaluing of the labor force they bemoaned. Market-rule labor discipline contributes to work-identities that infer unskilled and dependant roles, such as the “glorified babysitter” described in chapter one. Hence, the “fragmentation,” low status, and lack of entitlements experienced by youth work advocates of professionalization (described in chapter two) were in good part achieved through youth workers’ status as wage-laborers under a disciplinary regime of managerialism. Youth workers are *not* “undisciplined” as Sercombe romantically imagined them (particularly since privatization is a dominant force in Australia as well), but are subject to the hegemony of market-rule, which privileges managerial practices over job-relevant skills. This shift is also evidenced by the fact that most credentialing programs available to youth workers stress management skills, not therapy or child development. The professionalization of youth workers requires a level of autonomy not compatible with the management of wage-labor relations, which require the worker be reduced to a “facilitator” of production objectives. Rather than documenting

treatment, notes served to produce the client as a source of remuneration and profit. Through the control-practices of managerialism, youth workers are *strictly* limited as to what they can say, do or write to prohibit jeopardizing *a client's future status as a client*. In other words, the discipline of youth workers through marketization of the therapy process, such as the reduction of treatment records to billing receipts that justify further “treatment,” also serves to keep client’s trajectories within *the limits of capitalist production*. Corresponding to the welfare for the wealthy orientation of privatization, the labor process of “treatment” at Adventure LLC privileged the *management* of clients, rather than rehabilitation of patients or, for that matter, the development of “hope.”

The widespread circulation and uneven distribution of moral poverty discourse illustrates how the cultural politics of youth work were part of longstanding, symbolically racialized and classed assertions about the moral construction of selves and others. At the same time the privatization of social services and the displacement of therapy by the facilitation of management affects those who serve these youth, it requires (and prefers) fewer highly trained (and paid) professionals. It only requires that managers who can communicate and implement the discourse of market-behaviorism between the state and the laborer be put in charge of (proportionately more, low paid) unskilled, and non-professionalized laborers. Nonetheless, this substantial shift has unforeseen possibilities.

In fact, my fieldwork experience in Alston suggests that the broad structural shifts favoring the private sphere and the community over institutionally or state-implemented programming for “at-risk youth,” enable what Bourdieu (1984) called “creative

redefinitions” of occupational practice. The emerging participation of people formerly excluded from the fields of education, social work, and mental health brings change on its own as these newly hired laborers bring “hitherto unknown aptitudes, dispositions and demands with them into relation with that job, [they] *necessarily* cause changes in the job itself” (Bourdieu 1984:150, emphasis added). In the remaining chapters I will illustrate how people with perspectives shaped through experiences of institutional disenfranchisement and social discrimination are claiming moral and authoritative ground, building critical discourses and amplifying voices that have literally been *expelled* from public space. These emergent laborers also participate in the privileging of the private, using personal and decidedly non-professional discourses to create structured relationships between them and youth. I also will argue, in the chapters that follow, that these personal discourses are claims to authority and legitimacy in the public engagement of youth. I argue that these claims reject the fixed social trajectories structured by market-rule and bio-medical constructs through intimate relations of reciprocity, community, empowerment, and transformation.

Chapter Five

Organic Expertise, the Work, and the Gift

It could be said that the privatization of youth work has been occurring for a long time. Beginning in the 1950's with calls for "deinstitutionalization" and "community alternatives," private sector group homes and juvenile ranches have been operating either by state agency contracts, or foundation and grant patronage. Cohen (1985) reported that "by the end of the 1970's, one-third of all delinquents, even in the official custodial system, were in privately owned facilities" (1985:64). Most scholars seem to agree, however, that both the rate and conditions of privatization have dramatically changed and have increasingly favored for-profit service providers (Ayers 2001; Kearns 1998; Cohen 1985). Moreover, competition incited by the outsourcing of contracts and reduction in grants limits the funds available for operating costs, or profits, and drives down the skill expectations and wages companies and non-profits are willing, or able, to pay.

This long drive toward privatization, as I have already claimed, enabled the participation of an expanded range of social actors who brought a correspondingly widening range of practices and interests beyond professionalism to the workplace. I will return to a closer look at the relationship between state withdrawal, privatization, the labor "niche" opened on the frontline of youth work, and the cultural struggles that facilitate these

processes in chapter six. In this chapter I will describe the “non-professional,” and even *counter-traditional*, identity practices employed by many of the youth workers I’ve met, whether they were wage-laborers, volunteers, administrators, street workers, or even police officers. There were various reasons people worked these jobs; as a temporary transition or last resort for example. However, a greater proportion of the youth workers I have observed over the eleven years since I began practicing youth work, who came to the job with the intention of working with youth “at the frontline,” related to youth through very intimate, yet collectively structured narratives of self-identity. I call these narrative practices “organic expertise,” evoking the concept of the “organic intellectual” Gramsci described as the

...intellectuals which every new class creates alongside itself, and elaborates in the course of its development [and] are for the most part “specializations” of partial aspects of the primitive activity of the new social type which the new class has brought into prominence. [Gramsci 1971:6]

I borrow from Gramsci’s concept because it provides a framework for understanding the socially informed cultural knowledge workers bring to practice as intellectual as much as knowledge labeled “professional” through badges of certification. Gramsci notes that

...one cannot speak of non-intellectuals... there is no human activity from which every form of intellectual participation can be excluded: *homo faber* cannot be separated from *homo sapiens*. Each man [*sic*] ...participates in a particular conception of the world, has a conscious line of moral conduct, and therefore contributes to sustain a conception of the world or to modify it, that is, to bring into being new modes of thought. [Gramsci 1971:9]

Hence, Gramsci alerts us to the idea that there are philosophies of conduct, grounded in the class experience of each person, circulating within the realm of ‘common street knowledge’ that professionalism attempts to cordon off from social, public, and market

value. I modify the concept, “organic intellectual,” to “organic expertise” in order to highlight the *knowledge-practice* orientation of the relationship Gramsci emphasized between intellectual participation and activity, and to avoid essentializing an “authentic” class identity. Gramsci’s emphasis on participation and practice also points to the social, collaborative, and therefore *grounded* and *emergent* character of the knowledge – thus, “organic” knowledge.

At other times you may notice the use of the individualizing term “organic expert.” I do not use this term to imply that these laborers are more or less “organic” than anyone else, in fact, Gramsci was clear the “every class” generates intellectuals whose knowledge is “organic” to the class from which they derive. As chapter three described, the “professional” was an organic expert of the middle-class. Hence “organic expertise,” in what ever class stratum it is relatively practiced, is an expression of learned “habitus,” which Bourdieu defined as,

Systems of durable, transposable *dispositions*, structured structures predisposed to function as ...principles of the generation and structuring of practices and representations. [Habitus is] ... a socially constituted system of cognitive and motivating structures. [Bourdieu 1977: 72, 76]

When I speak of “organic experts” and oppose them to “professional experts” I am pointing to the *habitus* of various workers *in relation to their subject* - youth. The young people within these various programs all shared common sociological positions within class, race, and gender hierarchies. “Organic experts” shared these positions, or at least a history of them, and used that shared experience to work with those particular young people – in this way their practices were “organic” in relation to the subject of their labor.

I explore these collective practices of organic expertise because, just as in the case of the professional, understanding the knowledge employed in the interactional process of self-authoring is axial to understanding how the worker shapes practices in relation to youth. Understanding this relationship, just as in the case of professionalism, is axial to understanding how agents construct relationships in the context of ongoing social struggles and cultural change. To do so I will go beyond the limits of “professional boundaries” discourse and attend to the ways that informal, everyday, intimate and oral traditions of youth work are relationally and historically constructed. Here I am referring to the speech practices found in the everyday talk of youth workers – talk that is shared between them and with youth, talk that is the practical consciousness of laborers’ understanding of their work.

Alternative Paths

The “Alternative Path” non-profit high school, for students suspended and expelled from the Alston Public School District, was located in a marginal but deeply symbolic space of the city of Alston. In the renovated second floor loft of what used to be an industrial-scale tobacco mill, surrounded by condemned housing that was once rented to laborers, the school leased space from the city’s housing authority which took over the complex as industries fled or went bankrupt throughout the 1980’s and 90’s. As I entered the first floor, I passed another symbolic renter within the hulking shell of industry, one which more vividly reminds Alston’s unemployed and working poor of the absence of those flourishing textile and tobacco industries; the “Center for Training and Employment.”

After being let in the locked door to the school at the top of the stairs by Mrs. Ross, the school secretary, I could hear the bellowing of Sarge's 'morning drill,' so I headed straight down the long central hall of the school. The open loft was divided by sheetrock partition-walls to parcel out office, classroom, cafeteria and other needed spaces, but sound traveled over the walls and across the entire five thousand square foot area. As I looked in through the window in the door could I see her pacing back and forth before the students who were seated side-by-side along the back wall of the classroom so that each could be seen from the centrally positioned teacher's desk. I quietly entered and sat down with pencil already scribbling;

'The way you look at crack heads on the bus is the way people are going to look at you if you don't get an education... You don't know how powerful you are, and you let the streets take you down. It's gonna require something of you. To be humble, you're going to have to humble yourself to someone, to listen to someone. As a woman I am strong enough to step up to my calling. Most of you are men – YOU'RE supposed to be at the head, not the tail. But here I am.

See this stack of bills? [waving a stack of envelopes in her hand] I'm not your mother but I keep the doors open for you. I'm too old to baby-sit you. I don't have enough room, and these people [pointing to me and two other volunteers] come here for free, without pay and you're falling asleep in their classrooms! It's all about commitment. I require it from you. I expect you to be excellent. Get off your pity party out in the street you little sissy boys! Ya'll ah punks! Jumpin on the bandwagon. If you ain't here by 8:15 I'm locking the door!

Ya'll think it's all about you. Ya'll need to go to the morgue, the cancer ward. This boy [her hands rest on the shoulders of a 3rd year student of the school] his grandfather's dying – you should be keeping him lifted. He's still here. It's hard. I know. I remember when my grandmother died. I understand. But what if it was us? Babies! Ya'll *so* selfish! Mr. H, [the math teacher] his sister just got back from Iraq fighting so you could have a safe place – she comes back, gets hit by a car, has to go to the emergency room, C-section, 'cause she was

7 months pregnant. But HE'S still here!! You think YOU got it hard? All we ask is that you come, and *bring it* with you!

If we had to shut this place down now we'd have to ship you all back to Riverview [the City's alternative school]. That's ok. I could start all over again. But we need to stop beatin each other up. You need me. I need you. I used to sit in these same seats in somebody's class. There's trauma and drama in everybody's house. There was crack in my house too. My daddy used to beat my Momma like a fuckin puppet. I had it, too. But I'M HERE! We're ALL HERE! But we had to come through the ranks. I chose to make a way around it. My Momma lives in [Sandy Beach] now. I did what I could do for her...and you think it's all about you.'

Behind Sarge, standing with his chest out and his hands clasped behind his back, an armed police officer was silently waiting. Behind him a whiteboard had the words "Failure is not an option - Sarge" written in large black marker, and on the wall above was the school slogan; "Alternative Pathways, A Place of Higher Expectations." As Sarge paused, she looked back and, seeming to have forgotten he was there, introduced the officer as Sergeant May from the Alston City Police Gang-Task-Force. As she stepped back to give him the floor, he removed his badge¹ and laid it face down on the desk, symbolically stepping out of his role as an enforcer of state-defined law and order. In an unexpectedly softer tone than the volume of Sarge's 'drill,' Sgt May opened his arms to the students and said;

'I used to smoke weed. I've lost a lot of friends along the way. I am sick of scraping black male bodies off the concrete. You have got to support each other. You've got a handful of people here who care about you...All [Sarge] has to do is call me and I'm here. The bars on this suit don't mean a thing to me – it just supports my family. I'm from McFarland Terrace[a nearby public housing project]. I am talking to you from my heart. I put people in jail for years but ... I realized that putting people in jail is not the way. Sarge is right, these people know what their talking about.

Sarge doesn't get the cash that the school system gets – you're getting education with love. These are people who care about you. You're getting

¹ But, notably, not his weapons.

one-on-one attention, you've got to care about each other, be focused. I beg you from my heart.'

[A student interjects]: 'Yeah I know you, you got me off of plenty of trouble at Joliet' [the high school from which he was suspended].

[Sgt May]: 'And where was my heart?'

[Student]: 'In the right place.'

[Sgt May]: 'I was just like you. If any of you ever need to talk to me, that don't mean a thing [pointing toward the badge on the desk]. Call me. Guys; wake up and hold your doggone heads up high.'

At that Sgt May picked up his badge and turned to talk to Sarge. As I rested my cramped writing hand, EJ, another volunteer at the school, tapped my shoulder and whispered; 'I'm bringing them on a field trip today, when she's done let's get them all lined up on the wall out here to go down to the van.' Sarge noticed EJ and I not 'picking up the pace'; 'You ready?' she asked. I nodded and she returned to the class and told them all to get lined up in the hall. As we escorted the line of students out to the van, EJ told me we would be going to the food bank and picking up food in order to make a delivery to a community center in a nearby housing project. And though many of the kids thought of "community service" as punishment because of an association with the courts' practices of mandating service-time during probation, I was excited to get the kids involved in positive contributions to the local community.

EJ had been coming to Alternative Pathways for only a few weeks but I'd had the chance to talk with him a few days before on a drive to his apartment in McFarland Terrace, the nearby housing project where we would be delivering food. As we went to fetch a book he had left at home on government grants that support small businesses, EJ told me; 'Their

problem is they don't know how to make a legal living. If they had that, they'd be all set – *then they could reach back*. 'Were you in a gang?' I asked, and EJ smiled; 'Oh yeah. A crackhead gangsta – there ain't nothin worse. Then I got saved! *Thank you Jesus omnipotent!*'

EJ told me he was employed by the community center in McFarland Terrace as a gang-prevention youth worker. Sarge was well connected with long time members of community centers in all the city's housing projects. Knowing Sarge from her earlier non-profit program at McFarland Terrace, people there had directed EJ to Alternative Pathways in order to "reach" more troubled kids in a concentrated way. As we returned to the school that day we passed Ms. S, a volunteer who taught poetry and drama at the school once a week. 'I work for a non-profit,' EJ said as we climbed the stairs, 'because I've caused trouble all my life. So I've come back to give back, *got to give back*.' Ms. S, the volunteer drama teacher, chimed in response '*That's the name of the game*.'

We did exactly as planned, delivering food from the food bank to the community center at McFarland Terrace. But, instead of getting back into the van at the community center, EJ told Mr. G, the school's math teacher, to meet us up the hill on the other side of the projects at McFarland Elementary with the van, and that we were going for a walk. Mr. G and I looked at each other a bit confused but as EJ walked up the sidewalk, leading the students along, I shrugged my shoulders and took up the rear of the group. It was early in the school year and since Alternative Pathways' roster is dependant on school suspensions, we regularly began the year with only half a dozen students – today we had seven boys with us.

For the three years I have observed the Alternative Path School the roster was invariably full by the end of the year as the district suspended many students and thirty was the maximum capacity of the school. As we walked up the hill between rows of brick apartments in the sweltering heat, several of the students complained that this was dangerous because some were from other areas of the city and they could be attacked by rival gang members. But EJ insisted we continue the walk and he slowed his pace to make a point; *'We're all just peoples [sic]. You see? You don't need to be afraid of each other.'*

As we approached an intersection halfway up the hill in front of a small store that sold mostly beer, wine, cigarettes, and candy, EJ stopped and turned to face the group; *'See that store? That's where I was shot. That sign [pointing across the parking lot], that's where I was hit by the car that did the drive by. See those flowers on the corner? That's where my friend was killed. From this corner all the way down to Alston Ave and over to B Street was my property. If you sold a nickel rock you had to kick two dollars to me.'* *'Really?'* asks one of the students with wide eyes. *'But he got shot twice for it'* I responded. *'Yeah and I don't have a pot to piss in now. Let's go.'* said EJ, and at that he turned up the road and we followed.

At the top of the hill, we entered the elementary school, EJ, the seven teenage boys, and myself. Mr. G looked to me from the van again *'what's up?'* with his palms up. I shrugged again and followed as we filed in the door and in the main office where we were asked to sign in. As the rest of the group was signing in I noticed the school mission statement; *'It is the mission of McFarland Magnet Elementary School to empower young*

students to be active inquirers and to actively participate in risk taking...’ (*Risk*’ I scoffed to myself, recalling my coworker’s doubts about the value of risk for kids “at-risk”). But then I was pulled away as EJ led the boys out of the office and down the hall. As we walked through the halls past orderly lines of beautiful, young smiling faces, the boys ‘tough strut’ with which they had sauntered through the projects seemed to soften to a shuffle. They held their eyes down and, like the children, followed in single file line. As we came to a stop at a door in the first-grade wing, EJ pointed inside the classroom and waved. A moment later a young girl came out from the classroom ‘*Hi Daddy!*’ and EJ picked her up in his arms and hugged her. Then EJ turned to us; ‘This is my daughter’ he said with a grin. As we left the school EJ’s sister was waiting outside with her car. EJ handed his daughter off, kissed her, and then herded us all back to the van where he spoke instructions into Mr. G’s ear. Mr. G, looking puzzled, put the van in gear and off we went again.

As Mr. G drove the van into the parking lot of a well known downtown funeral home, EJ turned to the boys; ‘This could be any one of ya’ll. Let’s go! Everybody out!’ One of the boys sat motionless in the back of the van ‘Yo G I ain’t goin in there!’ Several other boys refused as well and stayed in the van with Mr. G and I as EJ lead four into the funeral parlor. After a few minutes two of the boys asked if they could go inside and, imagining that EJ had some point in mind, I agreed to walk them in.

Inside the lights were dim and rose tinted, the black ceiling was coated with a dusting of sparkle, and an organ played Gospel melodies as the Pastor at the pulpit delivered the eulogy. Despite the dim lighting, it took little time to locate EJ and the others, the rose

lighting made the white tees of our students glow in the dark room. Lined up across the back of the room, we observed, listened and took in the tragedy of a man, apparently a friend of EJ's, who had shot and killed his wife and then himself. EJ said nothing as we all got back to the van and were rushed back to the school for 'lunch period.' The boys, who sat staring out the windows, were all solemnly quiet as well. I was emotionally exhausted; the experiences of giving and sharing at the food bank and community center; then fear, pain, loss, and then joy as we traveled up the history of EJ's life in McFarland Terrace; and then painful, seemingly senseless violence and loss again. Lunch period was much quieter than its usual raucous pitch that day and everyone seemed much more thoughtful of everyone else's presence.

The Name of the Game

The ethnographic descriptions above illustrate how youth workers; from administrators, to police officers, to gang-prevention workers, utilize their emotional expressions of self to affect the disposition of the young people they engage. Recall that both Sarge and Sgt May identified 'from the heart' with the students of the school, told them they were getting an 'education with love,' imploring them to think selflessly, to 'keep each other lifted.' Recall that EJ used the 'tour' of his emotional life-history to impress on the students that 'this could be any one of you' and that someday they should 'reach back' like he was presently 'giving back.' Youth work is emotional labor because youth workers, paid or not, are often 'giving something of themselves' in order to affect the emotional, conscious disposition of others.

But what rationalities *do* explain EJ's tour, the fiery sermons of Sarge and the 'badge-off' pleadings Sergeant May? How do youth workers collectively understand their work identity in relation to culturally produced labor processes and workplace relations? In other words, how can these 'personal' expressions be understood as socially constructed cultural practices of emotional labor rather than in terms of individualist reductions to "the personal"? How are these practices related to collective but still culturally *specific* understandings of "youth"? What did Ms. S mean when she replied that 'giving back' was 'the name of the game'?

While Hochschild's concern with emotional labor was its alienation from the laborer's 'personal' self-expressions via labor control and commodification, I am also interested in knowing how identity is expressed, even con-constructed through emotionally expressive, exchange-relations of social-work – particularly youth work. Following Leitch (1996), who illustrated how miners' discursive understanding of marble mining contributed to their self and social identity as "empowered masculine subjects," I argue that youth work can be a "deeply *embodied* activity, central to the formation of human subjectivity and consciousness" (236, emphasis added). Through an examination of the rhetorical structure, symbolic meanings and social relations of youth work in the "thick of practice" I will argue that very personal encounters of youth work labor often draw on very well, and collectively 'reasoned' practices that engage youth workers and young people in relations of social exchange, identity (re)making, discipline, reciprocity, and *communitas*.

“You were one of these kids, weren’t you?”

My first paying job in youth work was a part-time job as a group-home counselor in a coastal town in central California. During my interview, when ‘Rob’ the company’s administrator, asked what made me think I was qualified to work with at-risk youth, I claimed that my education in anthropology had made me attentive to social relations and interactions, and that I could use this insight to ‘counsel’ youth. When he asked why I wanted to work with youth, particularly ‘troubled youth,’ I told him that since my own youth was sort of ‘troubled,’ I wanted to work with kids who were having a hard time – I felt my own experience could help me relate to them, reach them, and help them. Rob nodded his head in what seemed like approval and I was hired. With little experience counseling “at-risk youth” and a bachelor’s degree in anthropology, I would be paid only eight dollars an hour, about 16 to 24 hours a week – on call.

On my first day working at the for-profit group home I was invited into the office of the home’s director, Joseph, and offered a seat next to his desk. Joseph described my responsibilities, procedures for doing tasks, dealing with emergencies, and showed me the location of notes, files, medications, contacts, keys, and the locked contra-ban drawer, all in a rather dull and routine way. Then, turning to face me, Joseph looked me squarely in the eyes and asked the following question; ‘*You were one of these kids, weren’t you?*’ I was a bit unsettled. Unsure of his intentions, I squirmed in the slippery vinyl office chair until Joseph grinned and said; ‘Don’t worry! I’m not accusing you of anything! It’s just that most people who choose to work with these kinds of kids, at this level of interaction, you know, *identify*

themselves with them.' I broke a smile of relief and agreed with him. We then, and many more times, broke into conversations about our own youth. We exchanged stories of belligerent defiance toward authority, perilous escapades, blissful ignorance, the consequences we had paid (or been lucky to avoid), the people who had changed us, and the long journey of change that had brought us to sit there and share such riveting, but often regretful stories. On the rare occasion one of the residents was interested in talking to us we would share our stories with them as well, mostly the regretful ones, when they seemed to our interpretation, relevant. We would point out the consequences we faced, sometimes long after the recklessness of youth had passed, and hope they would draw the same conclusions we had, learn from our mistakes, follow our example as reformed, responsible adults – that was the hope, that was “the Work.”

Considering the relationship between concepts of “the gift” and of “the Work,” Shershow (2005) distinguishes between the “*work*” that people do, “the labors by which one lives or, ...makes a living” and “*the Work* ...the project or poem, the opus, the oeuvre... those achieved or imagined totalities” that remain always incomplete (1). As the gift is to the exchange relation it implies, procedures, strategies and tactics of the job refer to an objective beyond the act, often a higher moral purpose. In this sense the required practices of the job or the informal tactics and strategies of the laborer can be conceived of as dialogical acts referring to an imagined purpose, “mission,” or as Sarge called it, her ‘vision.’

For example, a treatment plan from Adventure LLC stated the following “Goals: Improve anger management skills as *evidenced* by decrease in temper outbursts and

aggressive behavior.” The economic “management” language of the goals in the “plan” corresponded with the entrepreneurial implications of encouraging “positive risk-taking,” behavior “contracts,” “challenge by choice,” and the consumer implications of the points system. The “evidence” orientation of the goals emphasized the management of quantitative outcomes rather than substantive change in the “client.” But the stories of trouble, discipline, change, and giving back that many youth workers presented to youth, and to each other, were, by contrast, narratives of healing that reflected the work of shaman-induced transformation. As Fadiman (1997) explains, shamans are often identified by their survival-experience of illness or ordeal. Their experiences “are thought to be evidence that they have the power to perceive things other people cannot see... The fact they have been ill themselves gives them an intuitive sympathy for the suffering of others and lends them emotional credibility as healers” (Fadiman 1997:21). As well as the “organic” social experience of class or race shared between youth workers and young people, the salience of which will not be neglected, the cultural construction of “youth” in general has structural correspondences that structure basic narratives of organic expertise as akin to shamanistic practice.

“Youth,” Liminality, and the Shaman

In a rather stinging critique of youth work’s participation in the reproduction of the unequal conditions of capitalism, Skott-Myre (2006) proposed that the field of youth work is premised on the construction of youth as an ambiguous social “*other*.” In a similarly critical analysis of the increasingly “institutionalized mistrust of youth,” Kelly claims that youth

have “historically occupied the ‘wild zones’ as imagined within the institutional spaces characteristic of modernity,” which mark them as “un-governable and lacking self regulation” (Kelly 2003:166). Take for example the way in which “*adolescence*,” a term chronologically interchangeable with “*youth*,” and a seemingly neutral category describing a life-stage between childhood and adulthood, is also constructed as a state of potentially pathological danger.

Analysts largely concur that the western notion of adolescence is historically conditioned, a creation of modern industrial society... Requirements of capitalist-industrial society both increased the value of children and adolescents... Child-labor laws were enacted and compulsory education became widespread. A distinct period in the life career... emerged as they were separated from family settings and [economic] responsibilities... Prompted by ongoing historical transformations such as industrialization, urbanization and population growth, psychologists and social critics... began to focus attention on adolescence and its “pathologies.” [Fabrega & Miller 1995:433]

In their examination of adolescence as a “*culture-bound syndrome*” of westernized societies, Hill and Fortenberry (1992) argue that the medicalization of adolescence as a period characterized by “risk” marks the life-stage as *a disease* in and of itself. Using a broad survey of students, professionals, and community members in Oklahoma, they found that respondents overwhelmingly associated negative behavioral and psychological states such as “rebellious” and “confused” with adolescence (1992: 75). These popular perceptions are buttressed by techno-professional medical diagnoses listed as “adolescent conduct disorders” in various editions of the Diagnostic and Statistics Manual of the American Psychiatric Association. These include “*Identity Disorder*,” which “relates to *uncertainty* about career, sexual orientation, moral values and may include ‘the individual’s asking the question, ‘*Who am I?*’” (Ferguson 1992:76n, emphasis added) and “*Oppositional Defiant*

Disorder” identified by “argumentativeness, rule violations and temper tantrums” (Ferguson 1992:76n). The description of these ‘disorders’ symbolically overlaps with *commonly* held expectations about the *normative-emotional* character of adolescence itself, hence, adolescents are understood as “other” in both age-status and pathological senses. In fact, it is the other/pathology intersection that make adolescence a *socially problematic* other.

As a constructed life-stage status-group stigmatized by abnormality, youth are imagined to be, by their very *nature*, *liminal* subjects. Ideas that youth are “confused”, “uncertain” and “in-between” correspond with what anthropologists Turner (1969) called “liminality”;

The attributes of liminality or of liminal *personae* (“threshold people”) are necessarily ambiguous, since this condition and these persons elude or slip through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space. Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial. [Turner 1969:95]

In terms of dominant developmental theories about linear, progressive human life-courses, youth are by definition “liminal personae.” The widespread circulation of the works of G. Stanley Hall, who coined the “storm and stress” vision of adolescence, and Erik Erikson, who theorized adolescence as a time of identity crisis, within childhood development theories exemplify the largely unquestioned acceptance of the youth-as-liminal narrative (Hill & Fortenberry 1992). Youth, in these popular and professional narratives, exist “betwixt and between” the nascent stage of childhood and in dependant relation to the independent, authoritative, normative position of adulthood. As the narrative of crisis illustrated in chapter four, youth “is principally about ‘*becoming*,’

...becoming an adult, a citizen, autonomous, mature, responsible, self-governing. There is some sense in which all constructions of youth defer to this narrative of becoming, *of transition*. There is also a sense in which becoming automatically invokes the *future*. [Kelly 2003:171 – my emphases]

“Youth” is a term that describes, and collapses several dimensions of human experience; at once it can refer to temporal space (a life-stage), a quality (being young), a social category (young people), and at the same time refer to an empirical subject (a young person). In the collapse of these experiential dimensions young people are often positioned in qualitative and temporal relation to adults as an uncertain future “becoming” in the present. As a prophetic oracle of unfulfilled and potential futures, the qualitative status of liminal youth is *certain uncertainty*. Hence youth are often considered “at-risk” in the sense that they are qualitatively un-developed, dependant, and uncertain, but they are also often “demonized” (Sercombe 1997; see also Giroux 1998; Males 1999) as “the risk” in the sense that the future of the social order rests in their potential, their becoming.

Ideas and practices of ‘prevention’ and ‘intervention’ flow directly from, and symbolically correspond to the potential and the disorder signified by the ‘certain-uncertainty’ of youth. The representation of youth as a “dependant population” of liminal subjects also refers to a relation of inequality and power, as Turner described;

Liminal beings [youth] have no status...*they must obey their instructors implicitly*, and accept arbitrary punishment without complaint. It is as though they are being ground down to a uniform condition *to be fashioned anew...*” [Turner 1969:95 – emphases added]

Inherent to the construction of youth as a liminal subject there is, always already, an asymmetrical and authoritative relation to a normative subject; the adult. Youth work emerges out of the cultural construction of this temporal/qualitative relation; of one becoming the other, of becoming the future, of creating the future from the present condition of liminality. As in the case of the wayward children of the 19th-century's "dangerous classes," "at-risk youth" are not subjects in-and-of-themselves, but subjects defined by their relation; by what they are not, and by anxieties over what they could become. Both of these historical examples also illustrate how "youth" intersects with other cultural categories of social division and struggle.

Also vitally significant is the transformative potential of the liminal narrative of youth; to 'become' is "to be *fashioned anew*." This quality of "youth," as an ordeal of storm, stress, and dependence through which everyone is presumed to pass through, makes fixing their social trajectories a difficult task. This is, of course, unless one presumes inherent/inherited characteristics independent of universal human development – like "risk factors." The temporal-ordeal quality also conditions the possibility of adults, who have passed through youth *experienced as an ordeal*, to act as shamanic healers. This is particularly the case where other social divisions intersect with the experience of youth-as-an-ordeal, such as race, class, gender, sexuality, and the cultural stigmatization of "Behavioral Disorder." In fact it is at this intersection where discourses of risk stake claims to "predictability" (a weak form of determinism), and where discourses of reform oblige immediate intervention. Both draw from the temporal/ordeal qualities of youth as a dangerous/vulnerable subject, each with different visions of *the Work* in mind. These visions

of reform or “management” outline positions and relationships shaped by the social experience and cultural materials agents bring to the practice and politics of youth work.

The Rhetoric of Organic Expertise; the Shaman and the Gift

As I continued a career and dissertation research in youth work, I found that what Joseph (the group home director) had in fact recognized was the social metamorphosis and complementary opposition of this liminal, pathologized subject. For example, in an occupational life-history interview I conducted with Sarge, the administrator of Alternative Pathways, she describes her entry into youth work;

“I started working initially in my second year at [college], in the boys and girls club, and that was in the heart of the projects, or ‘in the hood,’ downtown hood. Little *kids who seemed to have experienced what I went through early on in life*. And now after doing that, and *getting myself together, I’m an adult, I’m in college*, at this point but still really feeling the wrath of what went on before, and watching these kids go through that stuff... I’m sayin to myself, you know what, if you don’t hurry up, *if we don’t do something for you, you’re gonna end up on the other side of the fence*. Cause it would have been easier for me to do that, *except I had a praying family*, I had a praying grandmother, my mother was, real supportive, my aunts and uncles, all, *everybody expected things out of you* and you knew that they expected it out of you!” (Emphases added)

There are several notable features present in this narrative that resonate throughout performances of the informal knowledge Joseph recognized, and what I will label “*organic expertise*.” First: there is a self-identification with an “other” – youth – through a narration of a perceptively shared history; recall Joseph; “*you were one of these kids...*” Recall Sgt May; “*I used to smoke weed ...I was just like you...*”

Bekerman and Tatar (2005), while conducting research on Israeli university students training to become youth counselors, found that "...counseling students' expectations of adolescence are related to their own personal experiences during adolescence, *or at least to their recollections of those experiences*" (311, my emphasis). They quote two student-counselor's description of this practice of self-authoring through self-history;

Katy: "My own experience as an adolescent has created in me a special sensitivity towards quiet introverted youth... *I remember my own search and difficulties* ...the challenge is to sharpen the senses of counselors, teachers, parents, to the needs of 'quiet' children so they will not assume in advance that these children are free of problems..."

Sara: "My ability to enter the world of the adolescent...to overcome all his defense... is the result of the meaning I attached to my own youth experiences..." [Bekerman & Tatar 2005:316]

These passages illustrate how youth workers bring to practice their own recalled experiences as liminal youth to relate to, and to identify with youth as part-in-parcel of their labor.

This identification with the young-other operated through intersections with other categories of social experience and division. Sarge identified with the shared social experience of growing up in the violence of urban poverty, in "the wrath" of "the hood" and fashioned an *equivalence*, 'communitas' between herself, grounded by her recalled class experiences, and the "kids'" present disposition. "My life has mess, the things that I dealt with; poor, not having, going through the emotional and abusive barriers that I came across, has become my message to kids because I know where you're coming from" (Sarge). While the particularity of the identification varied, from emotional states, to class, ethnicity or race,

gender, or sexuality, the identification operated through *a shared history* of risk and liminality – of being ‘on the fence.’ Through this reflection and identification, organic expertise is a practice of empathy and relation-building.

A second feature of the narrative of organic expertise was illustrated in the way Sarge narrated a difference between herself and “the kids.” This difference is grounded in notions of transformation and adulthood, what sociologist Arnold Van-Gennep called “reincorporation”; “after...getting myself together, I’m an adult.” In the midst of these two rhetorical actions, of relation building and distance, an intimate but uneven social relationship was made, one that seemed to cut through time and age-status via a constructed equivalence, but was always framed by a privileged and reflexive ‘vision’ on the part of adults. Organic expertise positions the speaker as having an ability *to see the potential of contemporary youth through his or her own past*. John Warren noted that “the act of examination always already situates a separation between two people; thus the ability to look is rhetorically powerful within systems of oppression that only grant the power of the gaze to particular people” (Warren, 1999:194). Keeping the relation of inequality between the “liminal being” and the “instructor” in mind, Sarge’s insistence on this distance illustrates the radical relations of power involved, but also expressed the dialogue across differences that separate working and middle-class, or more conservative and liberal, views on the disposition of youth;

‘Nowadays it’s always like, ‘ask *them* [youth] what they’re thinking’ or ‘they should be able to express *to you*, and what do *they think* about this?’ I mean, [she sighs] my parents, it’s really my philosophy today; *I’m the adult* because *you* [youth in general] don’t have, you’re not able to make such decisions and have an such an opinion right now that matters. You can give me a whole

bunch of wishy washy junk you know, just to make you feel like I heard you but ultimately, us as adults need to make a decision in children's lives. They don't have the ability to do it! You know, when they become an adult and we've trained them and guided them and *showed them the way*, then they can give you an educated opinion. But right now you're getting ready to screw yourself up because you're telling me you believe in it yourself, so I don't ask them their opinions, I make the decisions and this is how we live.' [Emphases added]

While Sarge and other youth workers practicing organic expertise may have related to and identified with youth in particular ways, the social ground between them was always clearly distinguished, uneven and when challenged, disciplinary. This is also the case in more liberal narratives of youth work professionalism. Walker and Larsen, the authors who described the conflict between the personal and the professional, quoted "Linda" to affirm this inequality; "You need to talk to them as though they are teenagers" (2006: 113).

Third: narrations of organic expertise identified a heroic protagonist (a person, a social institution, even a place), one who aids, leads, obligates, or mediates the transformation of the self in a time of liminality; "...it would have been easy for me to [end up on the other side of the fence]... *except I had a praying family*, I had a praying grandmother, my mother was, real supportive, my aunts and uncles, all, *everybody expected things out of you.*" The protagonist functioned as the 'medium' by which speakers narrated their transformation from a prior state of being 'youth' and a present state of 'vision.' Take for example, Jerry, a facilitator at Adventure LLC's day treatment program;

"It's like we're trying to even or tip the scales, to give a little bit more positivity and try and outweigh the negative. That's almost impossible but... I for one, I grew up in church, *my mother, the pastor* and you know blah, blah blah... it was *that hard teaching*, strict. At one point *I rejected all that*, growin up – I think it was because it was drilled into me so much that *once I got past*

that rebellious age, like I said, when the smoke cleared I was able to reflect on all those things that I was taught, that I learned. That I was able to see, somehow or another it all comes back. Fortunately for me I was in a position where I could take advantage of what I got.” [Emphasis added]

Similar to many of the narratives of organic expertise that I collected, Jerry’s narrative pointed out a significant ideological detail in the relationship between the shaman and the rebellious youth. The transformation was often told as a revelation and recuperation of a gift given earlier, a gift of knowledge and discipline; “when the smoke cleared *I was able to reflect* on all those things *that I was taught...that hard teaching.*” Knowledge and discipline were a gift to which repentant youth were obligated to subject *themselves*. EJ named the ultimate spiritual protagonist in Christian cosmology as his medium of transformation: ‘Jesus omnipotent.’ The protagonists of Sarge’s narrative also revealed the exchange nature of the protagonist/self/youth chain of relations; everyone expected, or held as an obligation that she would ‘get herself together.’ This fourth narrative feature of organic expertise evokes the obligatory character of the social relations being (re)produced through visions of impending crisis; “if we don’t do something for you, you’re gonna end up on the other side of the fence.”

Following Weber’s thesis in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Shershow (2005) posits that the perception of “the Work as [a] gift” is, much like a calling, represents a “theological” perception of work. In this sense, the practice of organic expertise is an “Art [which] is ‘bestowed’ upon us from beyond... the product of an ‘inspiration’” or what D.H Lawrence described as “a wind that blows through me” (Shershow 2005:140). Furthermore, the perception of the Work as a gift morally obligates the receiver to “give

back” in a circuit of exchange. “The divine ‘talents’ given ‘freely’ by the divine are absolutely impossible to reciprocate and yet, precisely as such function in the individual subject as no more than an implacable injunction to produce” (Shershow 2005:149). I argue that the narrative practice of organic expertise is an act of ritualized reckoning, a structured reflexive practice that typologically links the cosmological protagonist, the reincorporated organic expert, and the troubled/vulnerable youth. As a ritualized process of social exchange, identity making, and social reproduction, organic expertise fulfills and incites, the “injunction” (or obligation) of the calling, but is also drawn directly from widespread and historically formed notions of youth as a liminal state of being. Hence, the narrative structure of organic expertise in youth work incorporates modernist narratives of fulfillment-through-labor practiced as reciprocation. This reciprocity is transposed from an obligation to the protagonist, “through” the youth worker, to the liminal, dependant, and becoming youth.

In interviews with Brent, another facilitator at Adventure LLC, he described his entry into youth work by beginning with the gift-exchange narrative of “*giving back*” (also often spoken of as “giving back to the community”). Note in this extended quote all the features of organic expertise I have outlined thus far;

“First of all I thought *I was going to try and give back*. I mean because hell, *I went through all of these programs basically myself*, wilderness camps that type of thing. But I was still a knuckle head, I didn’t really care at the time about helping kids out – but I lost my mother one weekend and my brother got a murder charge, I just had a lot on my mind. But Paul [another facilitator], one day came up to me and said we need to get you a job working with these kids, maybe *if they see someone whose had you heartaches and your troubles, it might rub off on them*. So I was like “ok I’ll give it a shot.” So I came in the program and Brian stuck me with Troy, the worst kid in the whole bunch. But *I see a lot of myself in a lot of these kids*. They’re on a lot of the same roads

that I've been down. You know, I can't stop them from going down that road but I can tell them what's going to be there when they do get there.

But some of these kids got put in situations at school and the teacher couldn't handle it so the teacher had to get rid of them, put them in a classroom where its more self-contained. Put a little more muscle in there to control them and that's where the kid stays for the rest of his life. And the kid gets in there and he sees that the rest of his class going on and getting lunch by themselves and they've got to walk in a line or when everybody goes to change classes they get picked on – they get angry. *I was in a self-contained class my sophomore year.* I'm in high school, playing football, and you got people who snicker "What's wrong with him?" Back then everybody got sent to the same class whether you were bad or mentally retarded or deformed, they'd stick you all in the same class. I was in there just because I was ornery.

I wouldn't come to school, it wasn't cause I couldn't – it was because I didn't want to. I had coaches that would come to my house to whoop my ass! They would call the house and ask my mom how I was doing and she'd tell them "Oh he was hanging out late, came home the other night drinking" and they'd be like "WHAT!" And they'd come over and, you know I didn't have a father, so you'd just accept that this is what's going to happen, you knew this old man would come over to whoop my ass."

Brent (1) self identified with the "kids"; "*I see a lot of myself in a lot of these kids.*"

He told the story of his marginalization in school to draw a correspondence between himself and "these kids," who were on the liminal space of "roads" with serious consequences. (2) Beside the use of the diminutive term "kids," Brent's narrative about school truancy, being out late drinking, and the reference to "still" being a "knucklehead" in relation to that correspondence substantively positions him on distant social ground when he says he's already '*been down that road.*' (3) Brent identifies two pivotal interventions in his life, both at times of liminality; the coaches that would beat him when he did not follow expected behavioral rules and his friend who invited him to a job, at a time of great family peril, where he has found (4) both reincorporation from liminality and fulfillment of his obligation to "*give back.*"

Imagine watching a bus full of kids heading blindly round a corner toward the edge of a cliff only you can see. By narrating the temporal and social distance between youth and self in terms of having ‘been down that road’ the narrative of organic expertise authorizes, even obligates the youth worker to intervene, or at least ‘redirect’ that bus. Brent’s metaphor of the “road” and the “fence” metaphor used by Sarge reveal notions uncertain trajectories from youth to adult. But, both sides of the fence and the roads leading to them are only visible from the claimed vantage point of the metamorphosed organic expert, who offers ‘the Work’ of self-discipline as gift;

“One day the smoke is gonna clear and when they hit that reality, I would like to say that the kids that I’ve worked with, they have something there. That’s why I spend so much time talking with them. They might not get it now but, so maybe *when the smoke clears* and they reflect back on some of the things that I’ve said. *Maybe I gave them enough* to make the best decisions for their situation.” [Jerry, Adventure LCC]

Jerry narrated ‘the Work’ in terms of a ‘time-release’ gift into the future, unfinished, incomplete. This temporal gift was also expressed in the phrase Sarge once shared with me; ‘I’m just putting a little nugget in their ear *for later on, when they can hear it*’ (my emphasis). Like the coaches who kept him in school, apparently by threat and use of physical violence, even Brent, despite his earlier discouraging forecast for ‘the roads they’re on,’ still held hopes, expectations for the effects of his practices on the kids at Adventure LCC and their appropriate reciprocation of his gift: “If I could just take one of those kids and see them ten years from now, walk across that stage getting their diploma saying, ‘thank you Brent – I learned something from you’ *that* would do it for me.”

The passages above also illustrate the reflexive and temporal dimensions of the gift-exchange relation structured by the narrative of organic expertise. Organic expertise is a reflexive practice in the sense that it involves the recollection of self in relation to two temporally distant subjects; a recollection and projection of a remembered self in the young people of contemporary encounters, and a performance of the historic protagonist “reborn” in the expression of the worker’s present self-identity. Again, in Jerry’s words; “when the smoke cleared *I was able to reflect...to see* [the things I was taught]... so maybe when the smoke clears and they reflect back on some of the things that I’ve said. Maybe I gave them enough to make the best decisions for their situation.” Recalling the ‘spiritual character’ of the calling as a gift ‘that blows through me,’ consider as well the following passage from a New York Times article that implored readers to support youth programs in a local county;

*ALL of us kids' lives would've gone down the drain if we didn't get help. I'll always remember the dedicated people who were there when we needed them. At a time when most people turned their backs on me, you gave me a chance. The authors of the testimonials are now all productive members of society; many of them - not surprisingly -are youth counselors, emulating their role models. One of them, now working at ..., the county's detention center for boys, said, “Your love and caring rubbed off on most of us and will always be there *through us.*” [Fink 1985:20, emphases added]*

The obligatory character of the reflexive social relations of the practice of organic expertise produced an ongoing social mimesis of the shaman-protagonist. But this is done specifically in relation to the reflexive act of objectifying one’s past-self in the circumstance and disposition of the *liminal* other who “*would’ve gone down the drain*” – youth. These temporally distant but parallel relationship between the protagonist and antagonist, in past and present, form a rhetorical typology that has the *potential* to fulfill the ritual of exchange through a reproduction of the narratively modeled relationship; “Your love and caring rubbed

off on most of us and will always be there *through us*." Notably however, there is also always the potential for going; "down the drain" or, to the "wrong side of the fence." The work is never certain.

It must also be noted that fulfillment of the ritual-exchange-circuit of receiving and giving back *requires* that a transformation of the subject take place. The reproduction of the practice of organic expertise, which is fulfilled in the act of 'giving back,' is also contingent on affecting the metamorphosis of youths' conscious and social disposition – a 'road must be traveled,' a distance made, or the Work goes unfulfilled. 'This ain't no dog and pony show' Sarge told me, 'its everyday speaking a word in your life that's hopefully going to be *a life changing word*...that's going to give you those things that you've not apparently heard before.' EJ also held expectations that when youth were 'all set,' they should be expected to 'reach back,' 'give back.' As the Ms. S, the volunteer drama teacher at the Alternative Paths School explained it, 'that's the name of the game.'

But even according to the narrative of organic expertise, this transformation is imagined as occurring beyond them, in the future which is experienced as 'germinating' in the present; "We're just *planting seeds*, ...knowledge and *inspiration* in their lives" (Sarge). "I can't stop them from going down that road but I can tell them what's going to be there *when they do get there*..." (Brent). "So maybe *when the smoke clears* and they reflect back on some of the things that I've said. *Maybe I gave them enough* to make the best decisions for their situation" (Jerry). And, in the theological spirit of the calling, Sarge often highlighted her role as a shaman of individualist self-discipline; 'God said to me, 'I just told

you to tell them, I didn't tell you [that] you could save anyone!' In this understanding of the Work, it can never be assured. This is partly because youth is a state always "becoming" and therefore the socially (re)productive practice of organic expertise *perpetually* subjects the laborer, as a matter of their fulfilling self-identification with the protagonist of their own past, to reciprocate the compulsory gift of organic expertise in the form of caring discipline.

The Work can never be "*done*" by the organic expert precisely because the ethic of rugged individualism, which also anchors the authority of the protagonist, mandates that the actual transformation be '*self-inflicted*.' The following narration of rebirth from Jerry illustrates the radically disciplined individualism of organic expertise;

"I heard someone tell me a story before; it was through listening to that story that kind of got me thinking different. I'll give you a brief summary of that story.

There were two artists. They were both asked to paint a picture of peace. The first artist said "I can do that!" And he began to take out his paint and he painted a nice blue sky, no clouds - a perfect sky. He painted the ocean and it was so calm, ever so gently brushing against the sand. Nice trees with a light breeze passing through them, not too strong - just perfect. He put a bird in the tree, a bird singing. He said, "Now that's peace."

Another artist came along and said, "Well I beg to differ." And he took a canvas and some paint, and he painted that sky dark, with clouds and lightening. He raised the water so it was bombarding the shore - just chaos all over the place. The wind was blowing so hard that the branches of the trees were damn near touching the ground - that's how hard the wind was blowing. And he put that same bird in the tree, singing! And he said; "Now that is peace."

The moral of the story is that you can have chaos going on all around you. But if you've got peace - a lot of people here put everything into their environment - but if it's on the inside it doesn't matter what's going on around you, you can always have peace - within yourself.

When I got to looking at that and really analyzing it, I realized that we put a lot - as humans - we put a lot of ourselves or we expect so much from our environment and that's why we were miserable ninety nine percent of the time - because everything to us is environmental. If you put all your peace into a house in the house burned up well then there's your peace burning up. If you put it into a person and that person walks away from you, well then there's your peace walking away. But if it's on the inside nothing can take that away from you no matter what's going on in your life.

After hearing that and analyzing it, that began the ball rolling in that it made me aware of my environment. When you're in it, it's hard to see it. But that [story] allowed me to step out and view it and once I got a good look at it - I said "wow!" And everything relates to it, you can relate everything to it. The way kids are, the way the world is today. And once that happened it opened my eyes to the things that surrounded me. It gave me a different perspective."²

Note that Jerry ascribes agency here not to the person who told him the story (the protagonist/medium/gift-giver), but to the story, the gift itself; "*it made me* aware of my environment" and "*It gave me* a different perspective." The transformation was his own revelation ("I realized") of the story's significance; "everything relates to it, you can relate everything to it. The way kids are, the way the world is today." In this narrative arrangement the youth worker *mediates* the passage of the gift – the gift of self-discipline. For Jerry, this story expressed not only his narrative basis for youth work practice, but his understanding (and social positioning) of self-in-the-world, his identity – "peace" through self-discipline and "environmental" occlusion.

² A very similar version of this "picture of peace" narrative was found written in a café in London one year later by anthropologist Carolyn Nordstrom. Person communication, also see *Shadows of War*, 2004 pp180-181.

Self-Discipline, Reciprocity and Community in the Narrative of Organic Expertise

At first glance, the rhetoric of individualist self-discipline and communal ‘giving back’ in the narrative structure of organic expertise might seem to be transmitting contradictory lessons to young people. But, considered a collective practice of identity making, the practice of organic expertise can be understood as a ritualized practice of community making that links the transformative self-discipline of the (reincorporated) individual to the maintenance, even survival of the community (giving back through youth work). The practice of organic expertise is drawn from and intimately connected with local, but also collective social conditions and experiences. Organic expertise is knowledge expressed, through the exchange relation of youth work, as action toward transforming the collective community via the present discipline of young people. Recall that Sarge admonished her troubled students to discipline themselves as individuals, to reject the “pity party out in the street” and reinforced its negativity via symbolically charged gendering of the emotional disposition of “pity” as “sissy.”

Sarge’s gendered symbolism played on expected gender roles in order to obligate the self discipline and reciprocity of her students;

‘It’s gonna require something of you. To be humble, you’re going to have to humble yourself to someone, to listen to someone. As a woman I am strong enough to step up to my calling. Most of you are men – *YOU’RE supposed to be at the head, not the tail.* But here I am.’

Sarge inverted broadly accepted, and strongly held cultural notions about the gendered characteristics of leadership in the public sphere to shame her all black, mostly male, and endangered students into setting right the disordered world that has put her and

them in these inverted positions. She tells them it will require self subordination – discipline – to ‘step up’ to her position at ‘the head’ and answer the calling of reciprocity; ‘I’m not your mother but I keep the doors open for you ...you think it’s all about you... his grandfather’s dying – you should be keeping him lifted.’ The use of the gender head/tail inversion acts as a rhetorical *incitement to reciprocate* with self-discipline, subordination to the needs of others (signified by ‘keeping him lifted’), and leadership. This is not an irrational expression of “shock-value” or discipline in the name of self-elation, but discipline in the name of the survival of the community; ‘we need to stop beatin each other up. You need me. I need you. I used to sit in these same seats in somebody’s class.’ And Sgt May; ‘I’m from McFarland Terrace... *I was just like you...* I am sick of scraping black male bodies off the concrete.’

The narrative practice of organic expertise, as a practice of rhetorically forming common relations with others in the present through ones past experience, exemplifies what Holland and others have called “history-in-person” (et al 1998; & Lave 2001). Holland employed the term to describe the “sediment from past experiences upon which one improvises, using the cultural resources available, in response to the subject positions afforded one in the present” (1998:18). Using history-in-person as an analytical construct to understand the narrative and rhetorical structure of organic expertise, it becomes evident that the emotional labor of organic expertise is ‘in dialogue with’ not only the immediate, emotional exchange relation with “youth,” but also with the historical, social and political conditions of the present, the “enduring struggles that extend in larger reaches of time and space” (Holland & Lave 2001:30).

For example, for many of the youth workers I have worked with, who were largely minority men and women that had grown up in poor urban communities, the experience of poverty, violent urban conditions, and racial disparity was an ever-present referent in dialogue with their practice. Sgt May typified this dialogue when he spoke to the students, all of whom, like himself, like Sarge, like Jerry, like Brent, shared collective experiences of the relationship between race and inequality: ‘I’m from McFarland Terrace... I am sick of scraping black male bodies off the concrete.’ Jerry: “It’s like we’re trying to tip the scales a bit.” Sarge; ‘None of your parents live in a mansion on the hill. We’re all poor -- black and poor... Somebody’s got to break the curse.’

The conditions of risk or crises that constitute the perceived disposition of young people, are, as I have already pointed out, particularized and create community between the youth worker and the youth. Historical struggles of race and class, but also gender and age-grade, condition the possibility of and are consciously brought to bear on their emotional, intimate expressions ‘from the heart.’ Through the narrative of organic expertise the lived experience of work became an embodying social experience in the sense that their sense of self, at least their public identity, was constituted through the narrativized labor process of youth work. Rather than undisciplined emotion or self-interest, which professionals have historically asserted about “non-professional” labor, attention to the language of personal and emotional practice-relations of youth work illustrates that workers were critically reckoning historic struggles of self and community in structured and disciplined ways.

Narratives of organic expertise drew upon specific referents such as race, class, and gender, which were shared across the age-status divide. These referents are the socially experienced cultural material called on when Sgt May said, “*I was just like you.*” They are also the bases of these youth workers participation in the cultural politics of meaning about youth and what “should be done” with them. Hence, the narrative of organic expertise, while individualist and disciplinary in many ways, also provided the grounds upon which workers could align themselves with others and generate critical practices of youth work. These emergent laborers, as we will explore in the next chapter, have capitalized on the privileging of the private, the personal, not only to gain entry into a field of public engagement and fashion authoritative positions, but to contest the uneven cultural politics of inequality and “at-risk” youth. Through the intimate relations of reciprocity and community generated by organic expertise, and against the history of inequality they have experienced, these laborers have sought to produce transformative social-work practices. Unlike their 19th century predecessors however, many of these workers sought not only to transform young people, but also the social relations of power that produced their marginal position as “*the risk.*”

Chapter Six

Cultures of Insubordination, State Withdrawal, and Labor-Economy of Privatization

In the rhetoric of late 20th century welfare-state policy reform, political elites strategically aligned populist ideals of minimizing an allegedly overbearing state to, as Hall remarked, “transform the state in order to restructure society; to decentre, to displace ...to reverse the political culture” (1988: 163). Likewise, I argue that the privileging and restructuring of the state in terms of privatization has also enabled the use of “privatization,” as a populist discourse privileging “experience,” to undermine the monopoly on skill claimed by institutional professionalism. What’s more, I argue that privatization resulted in structural shifts (such as increased contract and grant competition) that have consolidated professional authority as administration and management, and inadvertently created a low-wage labor niche in the for-profit sector that draws sometimes radically divergent interests into the workplace. I also argue that that the withdrawal of the state from direct program implementation, and in many cases from funding, the creation of a market where non-profits compete for diminishing and contingent block-grants, and the abandonment of social welfare has created a constant state of ‘emergency’ in the non-profit sector. This state of crisis, experienced as shortages in funding and labor, as well as forced dislocation, created a space, perhaps a rupture, in which a domain of desperate alliances materialized in the quasi-public space of the community oriented non-profit. I argue that as state withdrawal and

privatization create these marginal spaces, critical perspectives emerged from the experience and conditions of this community emergency. This chapter will describe the relationship between cultural discourses enabling privatization, shifts and gaps in the privatized human-services labor market, and the emergence of the critical practice of organic expertise in these workforce “gaps.”

Populist Rhetoric from the Hill

Recall the 1995 hearing organized by Senator Orin Hatch and chaired by Senator Fred Thompson titled “*The Iron Triangle: How Welfare Dependence and Illegitimacy Contribute to Juvenile Crime and Violence.*” In it, Thompson, like Senator Sessions, repeatedly praised the local entrepreneurs of “the [business] community” for their independent or state-contracted social-work. Like most of the witness testimony, the hearings were often based on the premise of government breakdown, inability, and disablement through title prefaces such as “*Fixing a Broken System,*” which appeared in three hearing titles between April 1997 and September 1998. To quote Chattanooga Police Chief J.T. Marlin, whose “on the ground experience” was explicitly privileged by Senator Thompson:

One of the tough decisions to be made is to completely rework our nation’s welfare system. Our current *system* breeds crime, immorality, and idleness...Generation after generation of families have lived off *a system that is destroying them and depriving them* of the very substances that made this country great. [*The Iron Triangle*, 1995:3-my emphasis]

Also testifying in the hearing was American Psychological Association representative Donald Bersoff. In his testimony, he called the linkage of welfare to youth violence “spurious” and attempted to instruct the hearing on the “scientific principle [that] correlation doesn’t mean causation” (28). However, Bersoff was not only outnumbered at the hearing, but his testimony was summarily dismissed by Thompson, Chief Marlin, and by Heritage Foundation Fellow, Patrick Fagan who decried:

You see, science is useful if it fits with common sense. Now, science is not common sense, but when science and common sense are somewhat at odds,...either common sense needs a correction or there is something wrong in science. [33]

In “Visions of Social Control” (1985), Cohen describes “a profound destructuring impulse” in contemporary language of widely varying political and intellectual criticisms of state welfare and social control:

Beyond these specific critiques and visions, the destructuring ideologies could draw on certain worldviews of the 1960s. These were the years of the ‘greening of America’, the ‘third wave’, the diffusion of counter-cultural values into the educated middle-class. All sorts of radical populist ideas...entered into the intellectual super-market: small is beautiful, people are not machines, experts don’t know everything, bureaucracies are anti-human, institutions are unnatural and bad, the community is natural and good...Society could be redeemed by what Illich nicely called ‘organizational disestablishment.’ [Cohen 1985:35]

The ‘antiestablishment’ discourse of these conservative politicians and political think-tank intellectuals is suspiciously contradictory when spoken from the privileged position of elites who themselves selectively quote statistics generated by ‘experts’ to fabricate a coming “wave of superpredators.” However, notions that institutionalized forms of benevolence are hopelessly ineffective and morally questionable projects of overbearing paternalism

resonated with populist anti-establishment narratives of heroic individualism and defiance (Dudley 1994). Counter-establishment 'rebel' narratives are often echoed in romanticized tales of the nation's origin mythologies, about The Boston Tea Party for example, and the American Revolution itself. Though these political elites were anything but "subordinate," their populist rhetoric that dominated 1990's welfare and juvenile justice reform played up popular cultural conventions of "creative insubordination."

In their study of school principals in Louisiana, Haynes & Licata (1995) outline several features related to the performance of "creative insubordination"; one is a position of cynical irreverence toward bureaucratic professionalism, ceremony, and institutional authority. These conditions are expressed by the privileging of "on-the-job experience" and a skeptical view of the "relationship between certification and competence" (Haynes & Licata 1995:32). Second, by translating their insubordination as "service" to a deserving subject (the student), insubordinate teachers and principals capitalize on "the legitimacy of the justifiable" and occupy a "moral high ground" (Haynes & Licata 1995: 33). In fact, this justifiability renders the insubordinate not only heroic but also morally responsible by redeeming the populist contract broken by self-interested authority. As Kingfisher noted about the moral plays of "welfare for the wealthy," the deployment of such claims of moral justifiability by elites looking to dismantle assistance to the poor and redirect funds into the hierarchical structures of the market, smacks of crocodile tears.

Organic Expertise & Creative Insubordination

Performances of organic expertise correspond with the performance of creative insubordination in several ways. For instance Sarge’s media and general public commentary continually displayed irreverence toward city and school district administrations so much so that the district made it a matter of her continued partnership – calling her “disloyal” in a memorandum circulated in the superintendent’s office. She often disdained attending formal meetings between community organizations and leaders because, as she said, ‘they’re always saying the same thing to themselves, keeping each other in business with this ‘Network of Care’ stuff.’ She would often sit, arms crossed, leaned back in her chair, next to a school board member known for her consistent opposition toward the white superintendent and school board members, and routinely stepped out the door to talk on her cell phone and audibly complain about the meeting occurring inside. Her presentations at these meetings lacked the handouts and planned formality of the “network” representatives, and would usually end with an incitement such as ‘we should be down on the street instead of sitting in here again.’

These performances certainly did no good to smooth her relationships with the professionals that ruled the network of care, the school district, or the city, and, as accusations of disloyalty and mismanagement illustrate, contributed to repeated attempts by these power-elites to de-fund her program. However, through the protests Sarge, parents of her students, and sympathetic community leaders brought to school board meetings,¹ city hall, and the media, Sarge was able to situate herself as in service to a higher moral cause,

¹ Shortly after this and other protests about racially disproportionate suspension and drop out rates (see chapter 1), public commentary and criticism was banned during “public” sessions of the school board.

her *vision*, and achieve “legitimacy of the justifiable.” Statements from juvenile courts judges like “[Sarge] fills a gap nobody else is willing to” juxtaposed with the observation that “kids are dying in the street” made sinking her program a difficult public maneuver, but also illustrated the veneration she was able to muster as a “creative insubordinate.”

As a narrative that privileges personal-social experience, organic expertise represents a direct challenge to the authority of abstract, mediated rationalism that is the hallmark of professionalism. By speaking from a position within *personally* experienced social divisions and inequalities, organic expertise stakes a competing claim to vision. While their visions often included strict self-discipline, expressions of organic expertise also asserted visions of social injustice, collective victimization, and positions of moral authority to act on behalf of young people in whom they saw not only their own past, but also an extension of injustice into the future. Like professional youth workers, organic experts also asserted moral authority based on their knowledge of youth as vulnerable and victimized. While narratives of organic expertise privileged the private over the institutionalized public, the community over the state, I argue that this was because, from the social position of organic expertise, the view of that institutionalized public space is a view of a system (“the system”) ruled by the class interests of white elites.

White Reign: Downtown Revival, Public Abandon, & the Undermining of Local Communities of Practice

As I did each day when I came to Alternative Path School I looked into Sarge’s corner office to see if she was available to talk and update me on ongoing events before

going down the hall to the classrooms to observe, assist, and sometimes lead classroom activities and discussions. She was on the phone and reading email, her desk covered with organized stacks of papers, she glanced up and waved me in toward a seat. I took a seat next to the small black-and-white monitor that showed video of the hall outside the office and gazed out the wall of metal-frame factory windows overlooking the old mill-tenant-neighborhood. Along with most of the surrounding neighborhoods of low-income, subsidized tenant housing, it was being demolished as part of the “downtown revival” project.

Sarge always seemed swamped when I visited her, but when ‘things were hot’ she seemed to appreciate venting at me. Hearing only half the conversation, I could easily understand she was in the midst of negotiating, through an intermediary, with the city council member that had been threatening her city funding by casting suspicion about her salary. When she hung up, she explained as much to me; how she was agreeing to increased financial oversight and the contracting of an accountant outside the non-profit’s board to maintain the records, all in order to ‘get this guy off my back.’ She read to me a response an associate of hers had written in the op-ed pages that asked, ‘Of all the programs in the city, why is it only the salary of an outspoken black woman that gets questioned?’

As we talked the booming and hammering of demolition resounded from outside and inside the partly refurbished textile-mill. The mill too, like all the other abandoned, gargantuan brick factory buildings in the city, was being gentrified into loft condominiums and upscale shopping centers as part of downtown revival schemes that large development-

corporations had been brought in to produce. At one heated city council meeting I attended, community members from all over the city, whose neighborhoods had been promised community centers and recreation facilities for youth, berated the council. One woman stood and declared; ‘We see you with your hard-hats on, breakin’ ground with your friends downtown - so don’t tell us ‘these things take time! Where are the millions of dollars you promised us years ago?’

Sarge told me the city housing authority, itself in default to the federal government for millions of dollars, had sold the mill-complex. What’s more, the new owner was raising the rent for the loft from one thousand, to eight thousand dollars per month – an obviously impossible sum for a program publicly known to be struggling. She pointed out the window to one of the reconstructed streets a few blocks away and told me the area had been recently rezoned – that it was no longer “section eight” housing for low income families. ‘This place’ she said, ‘their gonna make millions! *Hundreds of millions!* You see that tennis court over there? [It was located in-between three adjacent, rezoned streets being ‘revived’] *I knew* when they put that tennis court in they weren’t building that nice neighborhood for poor black folks to live in! They always intended on selling it to the highest bidder!’

In the midst of this conversation a long time colleague of Sarge, identifying himself as an “Alston community social activist,” dropped by to give her some support in light of the contentious insinuations circulating in Alston’s public dialogue. At Sarge’s urging, he and Sarge began to describe to me their history; how when they both ran recreation-programs out of different housing projects they had worked cooperatively, creating programs that brought

kids from all-around the city together. ‘There were always problems in the ‘hood, but we didn’t have gangs here then’ said the activist. ‘That’s because we had them all together, they knew each other, now they don’t and they shoot at each other’ replied Sarge. They also described the incremental dismantling of these programs as the housing authority, then the city, and then the state cut housing budgets in the context of decreased federal funding for public assistance. Reminiscent of the competition and contentious conditions between youth work organizations that was incited by block grant restructuring (discussed in chapter 2), Sarge observed the sociological effects of neoliberal state withdrawal. ‘Now we’re all just doin our own thing,’ Sarge lamented, ‘*divide and conquer.*’

The discussion then wandered into criticisms of the city’s gang task force, which they asserted had only exercised greater punitive measures and imprisonment of Alston’s poor black youth rather than working with proven preventative approaches. They cited the stratospheric expulsion, drop-out, violence and imprisonment rates, the school board’s recurring failed attempts to implement successful prevention schemes (which she often said were attempts to displace her own program), and the disproportional orientation of all these against inner-city, low-income, black youth. Sarge held the pamphlet of a program developed by an associate of the district superintendent in her hand tilted toward me to view. Pointing to lines in its mission statement that nearly mirrored her own, Sarge also pointed out how formally developed their curriculum and outcomes-testing language were; ‘They’re paper savvy,’ she said ‘they switched up the language. Its political alliances and dollars, that’s all. [But] *they* never come down here to see what’s going on!’

Challenging the city's decision to contract a consulting firm to evaluate gang activity and the legitimacy of the accusations about her salary, Sarge and the activist drew attention to the race-and-class-economy of the city establishment. 'You want to say we're not professionals and we shouldn't be getting paid so much, but we're the ones the kids are coming to for help!' said Sarge. 'Yeah' replied the activist 'they want to go and get someone of a different race, with a PhD, from somewhere else, pay them a *100 grand* to do a survey instead of asking people with a history in Alston [that] can tell you about gangs in Alston – *but no, they're the experts!*'

From a perspective of long-term observations of local change, struggle, and inequality, these youth workers understood their work as steeped in and deriving from the history, intersection and constraints of class and race divisions. As Sarge and her long-time colleague watched the infrastructure of the public community they had participated in building being dismantled and divided by privatization and "downtown renewal," they also understood the redirection of resources toward police-enforcement and professional expertise as part-and-parcel of a long and terribly painful history of domination and inequality. As we gazed out the window, jackhammers rattling in the building next door, we observed these same processes occurring in the demolition and gentrified 'revival' of the city's industrial past.

For these two youth workers the rhetorical conventions of "creative insubordination" *organically* corresponded to their social position as marginal, yet resourceful tacticians in the cultural politics and moral economy of state withdrawal. Irreverence for institutional

authority was a direct result of their exclusion, abuse, and neglect by such authority. Furthermore, this irreverence was tied to their experience of authority as it was embodied by the reign of racialized poverty, violence, and disenfranchisement. “Creative insubordination,” in this case, was a tactic derived from the same lived experience that informed their occupational identity, and as such, part of the habitus that generates their organic expertise.

Privatization & the Labor-Economy of Youth Work

The strategic use of insubordination discourse as an elite device for “destructuring” public assistance and privatizing services to “community alternatives” has resulted in a rift in the labor market of socially oriented work. As for-profit companies attempted to bid for contracts with the agencies of a financially strapped state they are forced to choose between operating costs (such as labor, facilities, client expenses) and profit. As I described in chapters one and five, these imperatives were expressed in the location of Adventure LLC in a warehouse within a tax-sheltered industrial park, in the overcrowding of the program, in the reluctance of the administrator to spend money on client outings, and in the low-wage position of the facilitator. On the other hand, conditions of increased grant competition and ongoing local inequalities have *imposed* similar conditions on non-profits, making them dependant on low-wage workers, “partnerships” with local institutions, and volunteers. Both of these processes have opened increasing space for people who may not have had the opportunity to conduct such indirectly state sanctioned social-labor in the past, for pay or not. In fact, I will argue that the populist/privatization language that incites these structural shifts

also accompanies many of the laborers taking advantage of these openings at the boundary of the state.

The first of the conditions creating this rift is the consolidation and layoff of professional workers employed by state mental health facilities as a result of the privatization of state services. In North Carolina, these two processes were most acutely felt in the juvenile justice and mental health reforms of 1998 and 2001 respectively, both of which called for statewide consolidation of agencies and outsourcing of services. In a 2006 article titled *Bad News for Some Patients with Mental Illness*, Dr Palmer Edwards, President of the North Carolina Psychiatric association, gave his assessment of how privatization has affected mental health services sector of the state;

As president of the N.C. Psychiatric Association, I'm not only concerned about less available and fragmented patient care, but also the impact these sweeping changes have had on treatment providers, including psychiatrists. As an example, since 2002 in Cumberland County, the local mental health center has lost 43 percent of its work force, which strains the remaining staff in their efforts to provide ongoing care. *Gaps* in the medical work force are difficult to fill, in part because of the national shortage of psychiatrists.

As fragile systems become overloaded, the providers — including nurses, social workers, therapists and psychiatrists — burn out and begin to search for more stable work environments. This is unfortunate as many decide to leave careers in public psychiatry, which focuses on helping those who often have the most severe difficulties and the least ability to afford private services. As noted in a series of analyses by the N.C. Psychiatric Association, between 2003 and 2005, North Carolina suffered a loss of the equivalent of 48 full-time public psychiatrists. This exodus is reflected in both per capita data, as well as lower numbers of psychiatrists available for mental health center patients. [Edwards 2006, Op Ed]

As state agencies consolidated and laid off professionals, some, like Chris, became management and administrators in large for-profit corporate “chains” like Adventure LLC.

Other professionals splintered out into private practice, often linked together and to remaining state offices. State sponsored agencies, such as the NC Department of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, “The Center for the Prevention of Youth Violence,” or the local county Mental Health offices were reorganized as contractors, “information clearinghouses,” and local referral agencies for these remaining professionals.

I called Alston’s Mental Health Center, what Palmer referred to as one of the state’s 30 “local management entities,” and asked if I could interview someone there about youth services available in the county. The Center’s representative told me ‘We don’t provide any. We refer people who call the Center to appropriate service providers in our local “Network of Care.”’ You can look on our website to find out who provides those.’ These “Networks of Care” were comprised of for-profit companies like Adventure LLC, licensed therapists and social workers in private practice who can bill Medicaid directly as independent contractors, and not-for-profit organizations like, when Sarge could tolerate them, the Alternative Paths School. Alleged to provide “wrap around services” to meet “clients’ diverse needs,” the professional language at the Network meetings, and time spent on how much better they could network themselves and circulate clients by having more meetings, were enough to drive Sarge away. Through the ritual acts of professionalism, the regularized “associations” that enable the standardization of language, the Network of care functioned as a gate-keeping syndicate of locally connected professional subcontractors.

However, while professionals continued their long tradition of exclusion by consolidating legitimate authority through language and ritual association, principles of

capitalist production also operated to open “gaps” in the workforce, as Palmer called them. As Kearns observed in a 1998 report in *Youth Today*; “For-profit companies...must shave costs to make money, they generally set out to hire fewer employees and pay less in wages and benefits than state, federal, or non-profit operators. ...they build in out-of-the-way sites where land and construction costs are low, and unions are weak or non-existent” (1998:1). Rather than acknowledge the profit motive of the LLC, Chris explained these conditions, and the emergence of organic experts in the space of youth work, in the language of “scarce resources,”

“Being that there are hiring limitations ...staff and requirements are not extremely high. It doesn’t pay enough to afford to hire staff that have had real formalized training so a vast amount of the training comes from experience on the job, supervision. So you have people who don’t necessarily have the book kind of understanding or training about child development and psychology. *So it’s kind of an economic situation, so some of the people when I got here had a kind of different philosophy about working with kids.*”

Adventure LLC was practically a model example of Kearns general observation; building out on the edge of the city in a tax-sheltered industrial park, hiring laborers with little required training or experience in human services. Chris, despite his inverted explanation of the economic cause, echoes Bourdieu’s observation that as the structure of labor organization shifts, laborers with “hitherto unknown aptitudes, dispositions and demands with them into relation with that job” (Bourdieu 1984:150).

Moreover, Adventure LLC had the advantage of a labor force fragmented by North Carolina’s “right to work” legislation, which undermines union stability and collective bargaining by making it illegal to require membership as part of employment in the

workplace. Finally, at the time these shifts in the labor-market of social work occurred, unemployment rates in North Carolina were climbing, reaching 7 percent in 2002 and (as of this writing) generally remained higher than in most other states (U.S. Dept. of Labor 1997-2007). Under these conditions for-profit companies moving into the social-service industry found a fragmented and weakened labor market from which to hire ‘unskilled’ front-line workers at low cost. This enabled larger companies to competitively bid for contracts from stripped-down local government offices acting as ‘clearinghouses’ of Medicaid dollars and clients for private profit. The last I talked to Chris, he told me that Adventure LLC was the fastest growing provider of behavioral treatment services for youth in North Carolina.

Non-profit organizations attempting to take advantage of, or simply fill the gaps left by the state, did not find the entry as hospitable as it was for the for-profit sector. In 1998, the state of North Carolina was forced to pay \$74 million dollars back to the federal government in allegedly misused Medicaid dollars and by the year 2001, the state froze payroll, contractor, and local government payments for several weeks in light of a \$791 million dollar budget shortfall. In the context of limited state budgets and a field of professionals scrambling to recuperate their own losses, competition for referrals was stiff and demands for ‘accountability’ often excluded grass-roots organizations not speaking the language of market-behaviorism and discipline. New structures of block-grant distribution at the federal and state level (described in Chapter 2) shifted throughout the late 1990’s and the G.W. Bush presidencies, making funds available for non-profits radically competitive and unstable. Alternative Pathways and other non-profit organizations I observed were constant victims of this nut-and-shell game of funding almost annually, having to scramble and find

new resources as grant programs dwindled and disappeared. As result, the few paid employees a non-profit might have endured periods of reduced or even no pay on a regular basis. For the most part, however, these non-profits were almost entirely dependant on volunteer labor – which radically fluctuated in reliability, substance, and quality. But, as budget strapped states like North Carolina privatized social services in the name of a ‘broken and demoralizing system,’ people long the subject of and excluded from formal practices of institutionalized ‘social-work’ have appropriated private/anti-establishment discourses, entered into the gaps of the human-service workforce, and claimed authority as ‘visionary’ individuals, community activists, and agents of change. Elite political rhetoric of insubordination and moral justifiability may have achieved a good measure of the privatization of public assistance and services, but the conditions of privatization also enabled, perhaps unwittingly, the participation of laborers with understandings of youth confrontational to both professional expertise and the conditions of racial inequality in the United States.

The State, the Professional, and the Intermediary Gap

For example, Chris and the management interests of Adventure LLC employed the “street” discipline of facilitators like Brent in order to control clients through fear – a practice he claimed to reject. At the same time he and Adventure LLC benefited from the disciplinary relationships the facilitators formed with ‘their kids,’ the company also exploited the knowledge practices of organic expertise to maintain “the box” of client discipline through the intimate social kinship between the workers and the kids. As Walker and Larsen

(2006) point out, the use of personal relationships with youth is at once an exploited and subordinated strategy of being an “effective” youth worker. Despite their “boundaries” discourse of feeling rules (discussed in chapter 2), Walker and Larsen acknowledge the use-value of ‘the personal,’

Youth workers are often *effective in their jobs* by relating to youth in more personal, informal, and *peer like* ways. Leaders find this more personal bond helpful in building rapport, motivating youth, and gaining their trust. To cultivate personal relationships, *they may share feelings and develop caring and authentic friendships* with youth. [2006: 110, my emphasis]

Even without Chris’s routine threats to our employment if we didn’t “lock ‘em down,” facilitators often developed personal, paternal, and disciplinary relationships with clients, which also functioned to help workers achieve the compliance of other clients. Adventure LLC, like the whole of society that benefits from the unrecognized labor of caring work, reaped the benefits of this consensual compliance. In the “gaps” opened by the standards-mediated relations of professionalism and the withdrawal of the state from public infrastructures, organic expertise offers an intermediary agent at the boundaries of power.

With the long history of racial oppression deeply embedded in the personal memory and collective identity of many in Alston’s black community, the withdrawal and disinvestment of the public sphere,² and the dissonance created through zero-tolerance policies directed toward their children has only further divided and alienated the inner-city poor from “the system.” This distance was so apparent that after a national investigative television special featured Alston as exemplary of gangs ‘invading main street America,’

² Both in terms of the destructive way that desegregation occurred, and how the cities housing authority has gone defunct while downtown factories are turned into condominiums and ‘upscale’ shopping centers.

which did not bode well for downtown revival investors, the mayor, a former technology firm executive, approached Sarge through police-envoy to mediate negotiations with youth gang leaders. During my fieldwork, the police made routine visits to the school to question students and scout for information about gang activity. I sat in during this particular meeting where a major and a sergeant from the city police-force, who themselves cited the news coverage and the city's need for solutions, negotiated with Sarge the redistribution of resources in exchange for the mediation the city needed to control gang violence.

The police admitted 'All we do is stuff and cuff' (meaning arrest and detain) and describe this process as a never-ending cycle of imprisonment and violence. Then they proposed the idea of a meeting between the mayor and gang leaders, with Sarge acting as a 'liaison.' However, Sarge made clear her perception of the conditions that lead to this situation and the conditions that might bring about change. Shaming the major as a representative of the city, Sarge charged that; 'Once they pulled out of the projects and left us with nothing, the gangs moved in behind us.' 'What do you think they'll be asking for?' the major asked, inquiring about gang member's interests. 'Something to do, something safe to do; jobs and an education system that they can relate to' Sarge replied. She described the unwelcoming reception and stigmatized existence the inner-city kids experienced as they were bused out to county schools, the ensuing expulsion and drop-out rates, and their involvement in gangs; 'that's how it happened, so they had to defend themselves' she explained. 'But I can't go out there and make promises if it's not backed up' she added, and launched into a description of her many unfunded program ideas.

The police-major interrupted; ‘how many of your kids are affiliated [with gangs]?’ ‘One hundred percent,’ Sarge replied.³ ‘Are these influential members?’ asked the major. Sarge pointed to a news clipping tacked to the wall over her computer monitor about a student who had been shot several nights previous to the meeting, ‘Influential enough to get a bullet’ she snapped. ‘And you’ve got kids from all over the city, from different gangs together?’ asked the major. ‘Yes’ replied Sarge. ‘Well then major’ the sergeant stepped in, ‘you know who’s doing lip service and who’s doing what. We get forty thousand for gang prevention.’ ‘You’re right’ chimed in the major ‘we’ve got the money, maybe this is the place to put it instead of spreading it around too thin.’ Sarge then made sure to point out how pictures of her students were used in a newsletter about “*the city’s*” gang-prevention programs and said ‘then they can actually put their money where their mouth is.’

Summary

This chapter has illustrated the relationship between populist discourses appropriated by conservative elites that undermine state and institutional authority, the processes of state withdrawal, the structural shifts in the rearrangement of human-service labor, and the emergence of organic expertise as a mediating practice between the state, the professional, and the disenfranchised urban poor. Through the window in Sarge’s office and in

³ It was actually sometimes difficult to ascertain whether a young person was “affiliated” for several reasons. The first is that it was illegal and students/clients/kids feared we would reveal their status if they admitted it, so it was rare to get a direct admission. Second, boasting of affiliation, flashing colors and hand signals for example, was often interpreted as inauthentic “playin” or the act of a “wanna-be gansta” since it was presumed that a real gang member would never directly make such an admission. On the other hand, based on the fact that all the kids in both Adventure LLC and the Alternative Path School were from poor neighborhoods where gang activity was most concentrated, it was often presumed that if a youth was not identified as being affiliated, they were certainly “on the fence/at-risk” of being recruited. Finally, since it was thought that gangs claimed all the kids in their neighborhood as members by-default, the police often treated the neighborhood kids as such. In this instance, as Sercombe (1998) described happening in Australia, Sarge was playing on these ambiguities in order to influence perceptions of youth and the need for funded interventions.

conversations with ‘community activists’ I have described the ways in which racialized politics and economic shifts, both national and local, have conditioned the social landscape that shapes the conditions of youth work. While political elites privileged personal experience in ways that indirectly enabled the participation of and correspond to the values of organic expertise, their paradoxical deployment of the discourse of populist “disestablishment” was betrayed by their selective use of statistics, conservative experts, and the channeling of public funds toward private hands that can operate with near impunity. By contrast, the use of the conventions of “creative insubordination” corresponded directly to the socially situated insubordinance of organic expertise and the structured language that derived from that experience. Following the definitions outlined by Haynes and Licata (1995), organic expertise *is* creative insubordinance.

In the next chapter, I will describe how youth workers formulated critical social theories about the social reproduction of inequality by drawing on the habitus of organic expertise. I will also describe how the social theory and creative insubordination of the organic expert converged to produce critical pedagogies that promote community between youth, critical reflection, and radical social change. Finally, I also examine how the processes of state withdrawal and non-profit desperation led to the circumstances by which these organic experts would assemble an audience of students, and the quasi-public space in which to engage them.

Chapter Seven

The Theory and Pedagogy of Organic Expertise

In his ethnographic description of “disputatiousness” among ethnic Chinese truck drivers and in Malaysia, Nonini (1999) identifies a critical pedagogy where the exploited drivers, accused by their employers as “cheating” them, offered “critiques of a language of domination used by employers [that] served as an element within a pedagogy enacted as much physically as it was articulated in language”(59). In this chapter, I will describe how marginalized youth workers employing practices of organic expertise assert critical pedagogies about the relationship between the racialized [dis]organization of society and the conditions of their work. As I outlined in Chapter five, Organic Expertise and the Gift, the reciprocal structures that serve to authorize the narrative of organic expertise incite an exchange-relation to be fulfilled through a particular disciplinary pedagogy, like the “disputatious” truck drivers “such a pedagogy teaches others through their constrained imitation of the habits and styles of work and ways of embedded speech practiced by those who participate in the process of... labor” (Nonini 1999: 53). Nonini calls this “learning *through labor*” (1999:53, my emphasis). Organic expertise grounds itself through a learned and modeled pedagogy of lived social crisis, critical awareness, and self discipline. What’s more, the narrative incites the subject, youth, to participate in the repertoire, the critical awareness, and express their capacity to “*give back,*” to teach their own organic expertise.

I also argue that these critical pedagogies were produced in relation to the conditions of crises set by the structures of destruction and exponential inequality that were the conditions under which these workplaces came to be, how these workers and these youth would be in these places, speaking a critical awareness of the field of power that situates each of them collectively. Just as “when drivers spoke at length, they did so on the discursive ground set by the linguistic capital of owners” these organic experts “showed a critical awareness with respect to” (Nonini 1999: 53) the social conditions that situated them near the edge of what Sarge called “the fence.” Through ethnographic description of the history of dislocation and marginalization of the Alternative Path School and the circumstances that led to Sage’s most longstanding alliances with other Alston non-profits, I will describe the relationship between their experience of crisis and the reflexive, embodied pedagogy that workers from these non-profits brought to the schools’ students.

Considering their position within the radical inequality and unrelenting crisis that situates their labor, and workers “system awareness” of those conditions, this chapter will examine how youth workers construct curriculums that encourage youths’ collective recognition of shared social positions through critical media and arts production. Through an examination of the lesson plans of “Perspicacity” and “Emergency,” I will illustrate how these critical curriculums were not only encouraging the transformation of ‘troubled’ youth, but also encouraging the revolution of the conditions of social life through the transformation of youth. Hence, like many others participating in the cultural politics of youth work, I will illustrate how the transmission of critical discourse and narratives of communal reciprocity

endeavored to “restructure society; to decentre, to displace ...to reverse the political culture” (Hall 1988:163).

Organic Expertise: Witness to Social Reproduction

Speaking from a position of social observation (or ‘vision’), organic expertise looks in three directions, or has three stories to tell. The first vision is into the past, a reflexive history of self-in-society. The second is one that compares that self-in-history to a present youth – in fact it is through youth that the story of the self/past is told and compared. The third is the prophetic future implications of the present, the crisis of transformation *or*, as the saying goes, the ‘prison cell with his name on it.’ Through these tales of self-in-society there are two subjects; along with the individualist narrative of discipline and transformation there is also a critical social theory being disclosed. Through the intersection of two oppositions; “the system” and the self, white and black, *respectively*, organic expertise often describes a social theory of racial inequality and violence.

Take for example the critical history of medicalization and institutional violence told by Brent, one of the facilitators at Adventure LLC;

Brent: “I guess because I’ve been through some of these programs at an early age and I’ve seen how the system works – and I wasn’t a kid who was on medication or was sick – cause I actually came from a good home. My mother gave me everything I ever needed or wanted. I was clean and always had good food. It was just that I wanted to exhibit a tougher behavior; I mean I wasn’t tough enough.

So I said, “Naw I’m from New York, I’m tough” So if I was in school and a teacher said something to me I’d say, “You think you can handle me?” So

right then the teachers started saying, “Hmm what’s wrong with this child. This child has behavioral problems.” So it goes on from there, you [hit] your first teacher and everybody thinks your crazy! I mean I was from New York and I’ve never seen teachers get me up in front of the classroom and give me a whooping, I was only ten years old and here I was up in front of the classroom and the teachers there whooping me with some rulers and I fought back and the first thing they said was “This child is crazy!” But I had just lost my father. So I went to see a therapist and the therapist said, “Well he’s exhibiting these behaviors cause he’s missing his father” So I’m hearing this stuff and I’m like “Pff yeah, I miss my father, that’s it, I’m upset!” They gave me a scapegoat, like they do to all these kids. They give them a scapegoat; they tell them why they’re having these behaviors. So if you’re going tell me why I’m being bad you just gave me a ticket to say, “I can be bad, it’s not my fault.”

Erik: “I noticed that you were saying that there are some kids here who are really sick and there are other kids here who are just bad – but all of these kids come in with a treatment plan with some kind of diagnoses. So you think some of these kids are truly sick and some aren’t?”

Brent: “Some of these kids are sick. But some of these kids got put in situations at school and the teacher couldn’t handle it so the teacher had to get rid of them, put them in a classroom where it’s more self-contained. Put a little more muscle in there to control them and that’s where the kid stays for the rest of his life. And the kid gets in there and he sees that the rest of his class going on and getting lunch by themselves and they’ve got to walk in a line or when everybody goes to change classes they get picked on – they get angry. I was in a self-contained class my sophomore year. I’m in high school, playing football, and you got people who snicker “What’s wrong with him?” Back then everybody got sent to the same class whether you were bad or mentally retarded or deformed, they’d stick you all in the same class. I was in there just because I was ornery.”

Brent’s history links the violence of the school and the psycho-medical establishment with the marginalization and containment of “ornery” kids mistakenly identified as “crazy” through the control demands of these institutions. In the process he tells a history of *social reproduction*, not just his own, but a generalized “kid” who “got put in situations at school [public beatings] and the teacher couldn’t handle it so the teacher had to get rid of them... Put a little more muscle in there to control them *and that’s where the kid stays for the rest of*

his life.” Reflecting on his changed disposition as an adult in the ongoing struggle of these relations, Brent described how the force of the wage-economy now disciplines his behavior;

Brent: “I might get mad at Chris [the administrator], but I can’t just go and say “fuck-you you stupid son-of-a-bitch!” I have to go in there and say you know, “Chris I’m upset, I’d like to go back over this with you, if you’d sit down and listen to me” – that’s not what I wanted to say, but if I want to keep my job I’m going to say it the way I’m supposed to say it. It’s the way you supposed to act in everyday life, not always the way I want to.”

Within the social biographies of these facilitators there were perceptive criticisms of disproportionate labeling and internalization, as well as acknowledgements of the agency of control-subjects to manipulate the meaning of their behavior through what Brent called “scapegoating.” There were also clear perceptions of the social impact of these relations; agency or not, institutions from schools to professions to the wage-economy had transforming, marginalizing and disciplining capabilities exercised through multiple forms of violence. First, there is the obvious physical violence repeatedly inflicted by teachers and the “muscle” they put in the classroom. Then there are the more subtle but equally effective relations of structural violence signified by a marginalized education and a life lived by the threat of unemployment. Brent, though considered to be limited to “street knowledge” and brutality by the white administration of Adventure LLC, was a keen social observer.

These social biographies also expressed sharp critiques of the intersection of these institutions of power and race. In fact, the critiques often described the institution *as a function of* the intersection between race and class-relations. Many also contained within

them a familiar, general theory of human development from being environmentally determined and liminal to being self-disciplined. As my facilitator-partner explained;

Jerry: “I think that a lot of kids are driven, and when I say driven I mean driven by their environment. Regardless of positives or negatives I think it’s what motivates them. ... We talk about how some kids have chemical imbalances and all those things and I do believe that for some kids, I do believe that there are chemical imbalances and all those other medical, psychological things but the majority of them it’s their surroundings, what they’re living in, where they’re coming from.

... You can’t take every child you see and say, ‘you’ve got a behavior problem so we’re going to give you a whole lot of medicine and label you for the rest of your life.’ Unfortunately, that’s what happens. Instead of dealing with the kids they say, ‘Let’s just give them a bunch of pills and let them keep up that way.’”

Erik: “One of the things that scared the hell out of me when I got hold of some of the treatment plans and I saw that label “oppositional defiant disorder”, if that had been around when I was this age, 15 or 17 years ago, how would my life have been different now? [Jerry: *Yeah, uh-huh*] When I was in high school, I got in fights with my teachers and they asked my parents ...”

Jerry: “*That’s what I’m saying!* These things have been around for so long, but now we have all these medicines and stuff like that – *there’s going to be a whole generation drugged up!* “We don’t have time for them, give them pills” [in a nasally voice often employed by my black co-workers to mock whiteness] - instead of looking and saying, “Damn, look at that environment.” Start looking at the mother, and the mother’s mother - I believe that’s where you’ve got to start.

I’m not trying to say its some white or black issue but I mean that’s where you have got to start - you can’t just take up from the child. Some of these people have gone through generations of hardness, generations of not having. So they turned to drugs and then they live in these environments - start with that before you snatch the kid up and start doping him up and giving him the complex and making him feel like he’s got a play a part now because he’s been labeled.”

Jerry’s narrative interwove several strands of social relations that he situated, though reluctant to offend me, in the history of racial inequality. Clearly he links *this* social history to the production and cause of the “driving” and ongoing social environment of “generations

of hardness, generations of not having.” Reversing the moral claim to vision declared by Chris, Jerry situates the bio-medicalization of behavior as misperception of these conditions and processes, at least, and as social neglect at worst. In addition to the criticism of labeling, also employed by Brent, Jerry described a condition of structural violence in the neglect of this history through individualizing medicalization: “We don’t have time for them, give them pills.”

When Jerry’ considers the implications of being subject to individuating bio-medicine he describes it as a process of euphemized violence akin to what Bourdieu called “symbolic violence” (Bourdieu 1977:191). Symbolic violence is “the internalized humiliations and legitimations of inequality and hierarchy” that operate through “the unwitting consent of the dominated” (Bourgois 2004:426). In Jerry’s social theory, symbolic violence operated through the therapeutic model by “giving him a complex and making him feel like he’s got to play a part now because he’s been labeled.”

What Jerry described, in the language of ‘experts,’ was the cultural reproduction of social inequality. Again, through the experience-legitimized social biographies of organic expertise youth workers asserted complex theories of social inequality and human behavior that not only challenged the legitimacy of dominant institutions but linked them directly with the disparities these institutions claim, in another cultural language, to be “treating.” For many who operated through the perspective of organic expertise, the social environment was the extension of institutionalized racial power, and both environment and institution acted to marginalize and dominate generations of young black mothers and their sons, many of whom

are now ending up in treatment programs and alternative schools¹ (Ayers 2001; Ferguson 2000).

During formal and informal interviews, when a participant perceived race as inseparable from the matter they were discussing, they would often use different strategies of dealing with the contentious topic depending on who was speaking, and who they perceived was listening. Chris for example, who saw me as a graduate student and as sharing his “book knowledge” liberal consciousness, shifted to and fro in his seat and came up with the “cultural difference” metaphor to avoid situating himself in the category of “racist” – supposedly deemed ignorant by liberal assertions of natural human equality. The community activist above employed the phrase “someone of a different race,” perhaps to avoid offending the white guest of his long-time friend and compatriot, as they outlined the racial order their conversation unmistakably identified. Jerry, not wishing to offend his white coworker, hedged a bit with the phrase “I’m not trying to say its some white or black issue” but then clearly signified to his listener that it was indeed a racial issue with “but I mean that’s where you have got to start.” If the lack of racial inferences in Brent’s narrative implied that he did not see the social history of race as bearing on his work, one would only have to watch him in practice long enough to realize that he did. However, either he too did not wish to offend his perceptively privileged and perhaps naive listener, or his staunch individualism prohibited reference to external constraints and rendered talk of race as “scapegoating” or “playing the blame game.”

¹ The latter of which, at least, may not always be a bad thing considering the district, and the school.

In fact, the few times I witnessed Brent invoke race illustrated both an awareness of how race intersected with labor conditions – when he sarcastically referred to me as “the equal opportunity employee” – and when he demanded individual discipline from the kids in relation to the expectations of institutionalized racism. Only days after Chris’s imperative to crackdown on fighting between the clients, I entered a scene where Brent and another facilitator had just broken up a fight and in the process found a red pocket-comb they identified as a gang sign. To my surprise, rather than carting the two offenders off to the back of the building to hold logs in the air as usual, Brent loudly berated the group as a whole; ‘Back in the day they used to say that black people were less than human, that we were all animals! *ANIMALS!!*’ he screamed, and everyone in the otherwise silent room shuttered. His chin slightly quivering, he continued; ‘When you fight, join a gang, and act the way you do, you’re just proving it in their minds – you are *acting* like an animal.’

The “they” in this riot act indicated his adamant refusal to attribute power to an external force *by even naming it*. In his radically self-disciplined negotiation of racial inequality, the unmarked but clearly racialized authorities have the power to ‘contain’ only as long as they are given it by the undisciplined subject. Much like the bird of Jerry’s story of peace, Brent invoked a defiant figure unable to stop or escape the storm though capable of finding dignity in knowing power, playing its rules of etiquette, denying it a name and refusing to accept the names power ascribes. What both the bird and the riot act illustrate is a refusal of symbolic violence, a refusal to subject oneself to subordination under the terms furnished by institutionalized power to naturalize and misrecognize inequality (as pathology or biology). This dynamic of power and refusal haunted Brent’s social biography and ‘they’

haunted his pleadings with the kids. His pedagogy of hard discipline, sometimes to the point of tears on the pamper-pole, was grounded in his lived experience of structural and symbolic violence, and of imminent crisis vis-à-vis racialized medicalization, segregation, and dehumanization. This experience was embodied in the expression of the riot act, in the crack of his scream and the quivering of his chin Brent was physically and verbally bearing the lived pain of this social history. But in a cruelly ironic way, ‘they,’ ‘the system’ also operated through his embodied, physical disciplinary practices as what he called ‘*the muscle*,’ or as Chris would call it, ‘*the box*.’

Political Economy of the Community Oriented Non-Profit and the Pedagogy of Organic Expertise

Sarge’s tenuous financial position, her adversarial relations with the political institutions of Alston, and her acute awareness of both her students’ and her own social positions as conditioned by the racialized political economy of the United States, both attracted and endeared her to analogous activist and volunteer organizations in the city. Because her school is so financially strapped, and because the district only provided one teacher and one aide for thirty students from all four high school grade levels (but performing far below them on ‘assessments’), Sarge was constantly engaged in stimulating the flow of resources needed to keep the school afloat and always eager to bring in more volunteers. When I first made contact with her, I got as far as telling her who I was and that I was interested in doing research in her program when she interrupted me to ask; “Ok, ok, ok, but what are you going to do for me?” Sarge was not shy about obliging you to contribute – to give.

Most of the time, when she could get out of the office, she was either talking to students (often shouting) or she was driving about the city networking with other community organizations. These included organizations such as local chapters of national youth clubs, food banks, local cultural programs, pregnancy, drug, and alcohol prevention and recovery programs, housing project community-center workers, parents, private donors, and supporters, neighborhood Weed & Seed, and “Network of Care” meetings. Student volunteers from surrounding colleges and universities routinely came in ‘off-the-street’ for periods of a week, a year, sometimes two (volunteers were rarely consistent or dependable), with a range of interests and skills to offer; from feminist and black-power inspired perspectives, to service-learning students teaching right out of the North Carolina Standard Curriculum. Retired engineers from local technology firms came in to teach math, a middle-class yoga-instructor came in once a week as part of the general ‘violence prevention’ programming. Several of the consistent volunteers Sarge has had, like the facilitators at Adventure LLC, have been black men, twenty-five to forty-five years old. Most came with stories of troubled pasts and recoveries, through organizations like Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous, but some came in independently as well. Sarge often brought in male religious leaders from her own church and welcomed the missionary interests of her Muslim, Christian, or Hindu volunteers and public school teachers – who were not allowed to speak of such things within the public school system. However, since Sarge’s program was an independent non-profit, as Sarge liked to put it, ‘I can do what ever I please in here – *this is my house!*’ However, I must add, within limits.

These limits were most clearly represented by the fact that ‘her house’ was routinely evicted from the shelters she had been able to scrounge from her network of local supporters. Beginning at first in a public housing project community center, her first program “Operation Dignity” was evicted when the city’s housing authority, as part of the continuing siege of downtown renewal, tore down the projects and replaced it with mixed-income housing. Next, through relationships with other non-profit community workers, she found shelter in the basement of one of the abandoned inner-city schools, which had been leased to other non-profits through the housing authority. Within a year, the housing authority evicted the three non-profits that had been operating there claiming that the building was beyond repair and the cost of maintaining it too great.

Beside Sarge’s program, there had also been an HIV/AIDs-prevention program called “Project Rescue” and an arts and literacy program called “Community House,” both of which were also struggling to establish themselves when the eviction came. Desperate, Sarge called on allies in the local television and newspaper outlets. In the following weeks the publicity drawn to her plight and the heroic imagery of filling “a gap no one else is willing to,” Sarge was able to garner a new space when the administrator of the Employment Training Center told her of the renovated loft space above his in the abandoned textile mill. Though the housing authority owned and leased this building too, it was not through any help of the agency that she was referred to new spaces as the agency progressively evicted her out of each of their properties. As of this writing, Alternative Pathways was being operated out of the basement of national youth-club’s local chapter, once again evicted from public space by urban revival and the bankruptcy of the housing authority. These patterns of dismantling,

demolition and displacement, abandonment and eviction, all these symbolize not just the state's withdrawal from the public, not even an undermining of the public, but what they symbolize collectively is a pattern of active destruction of public spheres of social life and community interaction. The distribution of resources across the private domain in Alston, under neoliberal reconfigurations of government as "public-private partnership," reveals the implicit inferences of policy discourse that privileges 'the private.' The eviction history of Sarge's school, as it traced the post-welfare, post-civil-rights, and post-industrial geography of Alston, illustrates how even the neoliberal state's closest cousin to the public – the non-profit – was being actively hounded out of existence while the capital of inner-city land-development and Medicaid dollars flowed into the *for-profit* hands of "Limited Liability" businesses. But as Sarge said as she described this history of community abandonment, destruction and eviction; 'I make their bad, my good.'

Accordingly, and not surprisingly, it was in the course of this long siege that Sarge made long-lived alliances with some of her most critically inclined volunteers from other non-profit and community organizations. While she was in the basement of the abandoned school several activists from Community House, an organization promoting 'social change and justice through arts and literacy,' began volunteering regularly to offer and organize a variety of programming for Sarge's struggling school. These included classes in substance abuse prevention conducted through Narcotics Anonymous and Alcoholics Anonymous members (who themselves practice an "organic expertise"), HIV prevention conducted by a worker from Project Rescue, African-American history conducted by a volunteer community

member, a ‘community leadership’ curriculum in which I regularly participated, and a critical poetry/literacy course called “Making Choices.”²

Making Choices was conducted twice a week by two women volunteers, Allie, a young English graduate student and daughter of foreign diplomats, and the other, Niara, a woman who had grown up in public housing in the north east United States. While both drew from their experience as black women in the United States in their relationships with the students, Niara, having grown up in conditions similar to the students, often drew on her history in “the hood,” her organic expertise, to validate that she was “keeping it real.” Allie and Niara’s curriculum, termed “*Emergency*” in reference to Walter Benjamin’s theory of modern social history as *a state of siege*, was designed around the use of black poetry, music, and arts as a medium of expressing and mobilizing social awareness and justice. In this way they presented the curriculum to students and others at times as violence prevention, pointing to how social awareness created community between opposing gang members, but also as social and cultural criticism.

The devastation wreaked by hurricane Katrina upon New Orleans in 2005 provided the *Emergency* curriculum a forum for exploring and acting on social inequality across the marginalized zones of New Orleans and Alston. In coordination with a local food bank and donations collected through several networked non-profits, Niara enlisted students in the

² So critical and cautious of institutional authority and the history of white power were these organizations that some of their volunteers declined to be interviewed or participate in my research at all. While they invited me to sit in and listen to their discussion with the students, I was asked not to take notes. I have omitted any direct reference to these individuals. However, before you cry out that as quasi-public actors they should be obliged to consent, I should also point out that the Alston Public School District refused to allow me to observe their own alternative school at all. Their lawyer sent me a letter that said the APSD “felt that this research project would not be a good fit for the district at this time or in the near future.” So much for accountability in government.

Community Leadership course to raise money as well as collect food, clothing and blankets to be sent to New Orleans. But in an act that emphasized the kinship between the 9th ward and Alston's poor neighborhoods, Community House decided to divide the donations between communities in need in both cities. Students were enlisted to collect, divide, pack, send and deliver the local donations to a community center in a nearby housing project. Describing the organization's vision of social change, Niara referred to the Zapatista peasant uprising in Chiapas, Mexico. 'They took care of their base so when they came out from under the radar, BAM! [Referring to the critical mass of support the Zapatistas were able to mobilize] That's how I want to be. Ya'll can go to city hall, and somebody should, but I'm into creating a base, staying under the radar.' Referring to the city's official Katrina-aid initiative and its neglect of local social analogs, Niara continued, 'These people, getting East-End housing refurbished for hurricane victims, that's nice and all, and they're doing something good, but did you ever ask them what they wanted? Did you consider how people who need a home *here* would feel? All these people who tell the school district and city hall what to do with these areas of Alston never talk to the people they're trying to help. The Chiapas Zapatistas, they're the model for Community House.'

Classroom discussions about the Katrina disaster brought out the race and class dimensions of the human disaster. Using a widely cited disparity in media coverage, Niara pointed to the way that photographs of people taking goods from stores in the flooded and isolated city were differentially labeled in the captions as "looter" or "victim" depending on the color of their skin. 'They had snipers on the roof shootin at looters, not victims, so you know who's getting shot at' added a student from across the room. Mr. E, the school's long

time teachers-aide from the APSD, held up a newspaper in his hand ‘You know about the Gang-Busters Bill? It’s just like the laws they had back in slavery and Jim Crow. Black folks weren’t allowed to congregate because they were afraid we’d riot! Well this gang busters bill says if you’re hangin’ out in a group they’ll classify you as a gang and come after you just the same.’ He then reminded them of the case of a man in Florida acquitted for murder by claiming he felt threatened and shot a young black man dead. ‘Every day they’re comin up with something just to get rid of ya’ll. Some white guy is up all night thinking about how to end ya’lls black lives!’ The message was “stay off the street” but also “because you’re black.” In a city that still is occasionally blighted by burning crosses, these were not unfounded conspiracy theories.

Another student interjected the widely cited fact that the mayor of New Orleans at the time was himself black. Niara brought the conversation to local divisions within the black community, to the black mayor of Alston so alienated from he poor black community that his only alternatives were to use the force of the police or Sarge as intermediaries. To Niara’s surprise even an outspoken black member of the divided school board, running for mayor at the time and often derided in the press as an “agitator,” became subject to moral suspicion as one student, Sheri asserted ‘She’s just in it for herself.’ Niara protested, ‘Well as long as she’s bringing attention to the issues.’ ‘Nah’ replied Sheri, ‘I think she’s in it for herself.’ Observing these fractures and tensions in the black community at-large, Mr. Randall, the “special-education” teacher (he used to put his fingers up for quotes when he used the term) provided by the APSD added, ‘This is going to set poor folk back a hundred years. I’ve been down to New Orleans before; it’s *dirt* poor down there.’ Standing in the center of the room

Mr. Randall paused, took a deep breath, and said in a matter of fact way, ‘We’re really living in a caste system in this country you know, *not* a class system.’

As a part of the Community House curriculum Allie and Niara often brought in visiting artists funded through the non-profit, or took advantage of their residence at one of the local universities. One morning Niara and I loaded the Alternative Paths’ used and dilapidated shuttle-bus with all the students who had arrived on time and went to see one of these artists, a Palestinian woman from Brooklyn, New York, who was in residence at a local college. This particular artist, Alena, like many brought to the school by Community House, employed poetry to encourage the students to express themselves. She also used an exercise in poetry to criticize taken-for-granted cultural orientations of linear consciousness and to evoke student’s imagination of others who share their social experiences.

Having sat the students at a round-table in a small conference room she asked them to ‘write seven lines of poetry about how the weather makes you feel.’ At a painfully slow and deliberate pace two of the seven students opened their notebooks and began writing. Two other students sat in the corner away from the table looking out the window whispering to each other. The remaining three claimed they had no pencil or paper until Niara and I had delivered these to them and coaxed the other two to join the table. This took several more minutes while Alena sat in the center of the circle of tables. She waited several minutes until pencils stopped scribbling and then, without asking them to share their creations, told them ‘Now turn it around, write it backwards, it’s better! You are taught in your school systems to

think in straight lines but we don't think in straight lines.' A few of the students rewrote their poems. Only two were willing to recite them.

Then she asked them to write five lines describing "My side of Alston" Again, all but one or two of the student's attention had to be 'redirected' back to the table. Alena stood close to the two boys having a conversation but faced another girl who was popping her gum with her chair turned away and looking upward. 'Writing allows a way for me to get into your story' Alena said, 'Think about the 9th ward, the inequality of the suffering, the inability of the people there to talk to each other. If you can't be that way on the page, how you gonna do that on the street when it comes down here? Do you want to stay in Alston?' she asked facing the gum-popping girl. 'No' quipped Sheri as she rolled her eyes. 'How you gonna get out of Alston?' Niara replied, 'You've got to read and write your way out of here.'

'So tell me' Alena repeated, 'How's Alston? What's it like in your hood? What's different about hood in Alston than hood in Brooklyn, or New Orleans or any other hood? Don't you feel empowered to rep where you're from? Don't people die in your side of the hood? Don't they cry, laugh, don't they make babies? What happens when you're gone and you never wrote it down?' 'Nothing' mumbled Sheri. 'That's right, nothing will change' Niara said, looking around the room, 'and no one will ever know you were any different from many other sista or brotha unless you write it down.' Every pencil was moving in the following minutes. Several of these poems were reproduced in the annual student writing collection drawn from the *Emergency* curriculum.

Alena's exercise of grammatical reversal functioned to pull the students into the activity but it also directed the students to think of the linear worldview as a collective and enforced deception. From this pedagogical device she framed the discussion in terms of their relationship to a system of power engendered in linear consciousness. The reversal operated to launch the discussion into critical comparisons – 'how is your hood [your social position] any different?' Coupled with the incitement to 'write your way out of here' the reversal of the poetic grammar reflected the incitement to reverse the social direction of power, to claim an identity and transform oneself – *through writing*. The reader may think this claim ironic, as I made so much of writing having been the hallmark of the professional, however, the function of professional writing is far different, even oppositional to expressive writing. While the function of standardized language in professional writing and literature is to close-off the potential for intimacy for the sake of a rationalized market-exchange, Swanger (1995) notes that aesthetic arts, such as expressive poetry, are "devoted to heightening feeling" (448) and producing *empathetic knowledge*. Swanger describes the experience of art as promoting "the internal connection between the reader and his or her humanness, which includes the capacity for good and evil, and, of signal importance here, the capacity to be empathetic, to see the other not as someone distinct and different, but as someone with whom human destiny is shared" (1995: 449).

The juxtaposition of New Orleans's Ninth Ward and Alston's East End operated to expand this critical reversal to shared positions in relation to power. Reversals of authenticity such as the poetry exercise above played a key part in configuring relationships between the city and the non-profit school. These were the "anti-students," those that had

been expelled from the system and were not even allowed to set foot on the property of the school district, including its own alternative school. As Mr. Randall described them ‘These kids don’t exist to the Alston Public School District.’ The charismatic leader of the school and the organic expertise deployed as authority there represented the antithesis of the city and school district’s institutional authority; even the police took off their badges in this classroom. Awareness of this tension was an everyday part of the generalized curricular idiom promoted by Sarge, what one of her earliest teachers had introduced as “perspicacity” – an ability to reflect on your own position, your perspective and to see from the point of view of another. This combination of reckoning and empathetic reflection was emphasized in various ways, from asking students to share their poetry in class, to a collaboratively and self-published collection of them. But critical perspicacity was also a part of everyday language in the classroom.

One morning’s Community House class began as Niara and Allie played various hip-hop songs with “instructions” in them. Students were asked to think of songs they knew with instructions in them. Students rattled off a list of songs by Fifty-cent, Tupac, Snoop-Dog, and other various hip-hop artists. When asked for my contribution I was thoroughly chastised by the students for my “wack”[lame] choice of Bob Marley, *Get up Stand Up*. As one student informed me, it was a predictably ‘white choice.’ Allie explained that ‘All of you are given instructions all the time.’ While Allie spoke, Niara was handing out a worksheet with the title “*Instructions*” on it, and then a series of horizontal lines, blank until about halfway down to the bottom the following authority role and places were listed on the left side of each row: “MAYOR”; “PRESIDENT”; “SCHOOL-BOARD”; “TEACHER”;

“SUPERMARKET.” The students were instructed to think of people who give them instructions and write instructions *to them* on the top lines of the sheet. Most students listed parents, teachers, Sarge, with instructions such as ‘don’t worry about me,’ ‘Keep on doin what your doin,’ and ‘Be there please.’ Then the students were instructed to write their own instructions to all of the authority figures and institutions listed on the lower half of the worksheet. ‘People don’t ask you for your opinion or advise, so we’re including your words in the Making Choices book so that people hear what you have to say.’

While most students began the task immediately, others asked, ‘What’s the mayor’s name?’ ‘Bill Brown’ replied Allie. Niara was then caught mumbling under her breath by Sheri; ‘What’d you say?’ Sheri asked. Laughing, Allie replied that ‘Ms. Niara thinks he’s a sell out!’ Another student asks ‘What’s that lady’s name ...the superintendent?’ ‘Allison White’ Niara said with a grin, ‘Sarge! You want to tell her about *Ms White*?’ Sarge stepped in from the door where she had been observing the class, ‘I’ve got no comment on that one thank you. But I’d like to hear what ya’ll have to say.’ After a few minutes Allie asks what each student had to say to each of the authority figures listed – these were their responses.

“SCHOOL-BOARD: I don’t care; More days off; Stop kickin’ peoples out; Stop hatin’; Get Allison White out!; Stop hatin’ on Black students; Get ready..”

“TEACHERS: Stay calm; Keep teaching; Stop being like the police; Don’t snitch.”

“SUPERMARKET: Hire more Black people; Lower prices; Get better meat; Keep the food fresh.”

“MAYOR: Legalize weed; Keep the hood; I don’t know you; Give me a job; Fix the streets; Give me a job.”

“PRESIDENT: Don’t get us killed, Leave, Get off the stand; Stop the war; Walk out on the battlefield yourself; Keep out of the Black community; Suspend yourself.

More than “political agitation,” exercises practiced through the *Emergency* curriculum functioned to alert students not simply to local relations of power and subordination, such as “teacher to student,” but to recognize patterns of institutional authority, collective marginalization and therefore, patterned relations of inequality. At the same time the curriculum incited the most marginalized students of the city to “rep” for Alston’s black community, to speak back to power, and through self-expression and collective identity, claim a little for themselves. The institutionally critical language of the *Emergency* curriculum often appealed to the students as it also aligned with their own insubordinate status to the establishment. So much so that claims to authority based on universalized positions and institutional roles, such as “adult” or “teacher” held fragile authority with the students. When Mr. E, who had come from a rural, ‘military home,’ once attempted to command a student to turn off a television in the cafeteria, the student refused and Mr. E “lost it.” he Screamed at the student ‘you have no respect for your elders!’ and the student replied ‘I don’t have to respect you just cause you’re old!’ ‘*I’m your teacher!*’ replied Mr. E but Q cut him off, ‘You ain’t taught me nothin! Has he taught you anything?’ Q asked his classmates who sat silent with grins reaching ear to ear. Mr. E stormed out of the room, the TV remained on.

However, the critical discourse of the *Emergency* curriculum also became a point from which the teachers in the formal History and English curriculums could appeal to the students’ interests. In one class, Niara and Allie had brought in a handout exercise that on one side listed the 10-point program of the Black Panther Party.

1. We want freedom. We want the power to determine the destiny of our black and oppressed communities
2. We want full employment for our people.
3. We want an end to the robbery by capitalists of our black and oppressed communities.
4. We want decent housing, fit for the shelter of human beings.
5. We want decent education for our people that exposes the true nature of this decadent American society. We want education that teaches us our true history and our role in the present-day society.
6. We want completely free health care for all black and oppressed people.
7. We want an immediate end to police brutality and murder of black people, other people of color, and all oppressed people in the United States.
8. We want an immediate end to all wars of aggression.
9. We want freedom for all black and oppressed people now held in U.S. Federal, state, county and military prisons and jails. We want trials by a jury of peers for all persons charged with so-called crimes under the laws of this country.
10. We want land, bread, housing, education, clothing, justice, peace, and people's community control of modern technology.

As they reviewed the language of each of the 10 points, students were asked to describe how each point would affect their community. Most were unable to imagine the possibility of these demands and refused to participate, saying 'it just ain't gonna happen.' But Niara and Allie persisted, asking them to write down their own 10 point program. As the students began to offer their own points, providing allegorical examples of why they were legitimate demands, Allie wrote them down on the white board at the front of the class. The demands reflected a hybridization of the Panther's 10-point program and their own experience. These were the students' points as Allie wrote them on the board with the explanations students provided in parentheses:

1. No Police; less laws ('When they can't get you for one charge they'll hang you up on another!')
2. I would like a job; jobs; equal job opportunities (many of the students voiced complaints that the only jobs available for them were working in fast food restaurants).

3. Stop tearin down [basketball] courts and rec centers ('We don't have nothin to do no more!')
4. Better teachers; a whole new school board cause the one we got now is racist; change school system (*every* student in the room burst out with an allegory of discrimination by their teachers)
5. Health insurance for the black community ('If you make too much money they cut you off, so my mother had to quit her job and get a worse one; white doctors don't treat you nice.')
6. Stop labeling people ('I ain't no gang-banger!')
7. Teachers and authorities to be held accountable; equal punishment under the law (they called it unfair that they were expelled while violent and discriminatory teachers and officials remained employed)
8. Sex education for everyone ('If they'd just talk about it instead of just waitin 'til you're pregnant to yell at you, we wouldn't have half the problems.')

Observing the effect of these exercises in evoking the participation of the students in reflective thinking and writing, school-district teachers Mr. Randall and Mr. E began constructing their assignments in relation to the *Emergency* curriculum. Mr. Randall assigned readings by and about Black Panther Party leader Dr. Huey P Newton such as *Insights and Poems* (Newton & Huggins, 1975) and *Seize the Time: The Story of the Black Panther Party and Huey P. Newton* by Bobby Seale (1970). Classroom discussions of the texts reverberated between Newton's own life trials of self-education, allegations of addiction and embezzlement, how it feels to be black in a white-defined society, and the positive contributions of the free breakfast program and health clinics that were part of the Panther's 10-point program. Reflecting her motto for Alternative Pathways 'A School of Higher Expectations,' Sarge was taking the students; these banished "folk devils" of Alston, on a tour of four Historically Black Universities and Colleges the following week. Mr. Randall looked out at the students, took off his glasses and told them, "Think about this when you go on that tour. Like you, like Sarge, and I guess myself too, Huey Newton came from a

hard life. He got his education through his own study and through college, then he went back home and took his education there too.'

In only a few weeks of Mr. Randall's arrival at Alternative Pathways that fall of 2005, he had discarded the notion of strictly following the NC Standard Curriculum. In the context of the radical domination that situated and was often a subject of the reflexive and critical pedagogy at Alternative Path, Mr. Randall was allowed the liberty of 'creative deviations' from the standard book lists (*imagine!*). What's more he had come to employ 'perspicacity' toward his own 'hard life,' his social history *as a labor of critical pedagogy*, a labor of "giving back" – the labor of organic expertise.

Ms. Niara and Sarge were always adamant about the practice of 'appreciating where you came from,' so much so the phrase often underlined the title of many of their functions. Ritual events such as annual graduation ceremonies and honorary recognitions of Sarge's career of dedication, often attended by a sweeping range of Alston's black communities, functioned to remind people, particularly graduates, from where they had collectively derived. Sarge described to me the process of recruiting everyone and anyone who would come in and work with the kids, 'Everybody I asked wanted to know what they should say to these youth? My response was 'Tell them what you were told that encouraged you to succeed'' she explained. For, as Sarge frequently pointed out, organic expertise is a discourse of transformation, 'it's everyday speaking a word in your life that's hopefully going to be a life changing word.'

Chapter Eight

Conclusion

There are many conclusions that could be drawn from what I have presented here as an anthropology of youth work. Probably more than I could ever draw on my own. I have attempted to trace many features and ongoing struggles that are as integral to the cultural politics and practice of youth work as they are to the cultural and social history of the liberal welfare-control-state, and of the shift to the discipline of neoliberal privatization. As much as crises about youth have been an ‘objet d’art’ for asserting visions of social [dis]order throughout this history of conflict and change, the language and labor of the social agents engaged in this field of contentious struggles provide a window into the workings of historic rifts over the structure of social organization and cultural meaning.

I have attempted in the preceding chapters to outline the contours and conflicts that characterize what some might attempt to call “the field” of youth work. I argue that constructed oppositions of altruism and market-exchange, the personal and the professional, book and street knowledge, public and private are not stable alignments, as the ‘reversal’ of domestic governmentality to market governmentality, and reform to risk, have illustrated. Nor are these natural categories of distinction. Rather, they have been produced in direct relationship to the social conditions and cultural materials available. Ideas of modern

humanism have been produced and rejected as the interests of aspiring capitalist classes encounter varying conditions of social and economic crises in history.

The production of the discourse of “Civilization” as an assertion of human value through achievement arose in direct relation to the struggles of European merchant classes against the theological social determinism of the landed, feudal aristocracy. The language of ‘achieved civilization,’ fundamental to enlightenment concepts of human subjectivity as the source of meaning (e.g. Descartes “I think therefore I am”), asserted essential and universal human properties (such as the free will and rationalism of Descartes’ proposition). In this way, the humanist aspirations of the nascent capitalist class attempted to carve out a “natural” space for their social mobility by displacing the exclusive determinism of theologically defined lineages of social caste. These same principles were the materials drawn from in the rejection of biological determinism and inheritance by social reformers espousing discourses of relativism, reform, and rehabilitation. Nineteenth-century child-savers understood the disposition of the “dangerous” ethnic immigrant classes as an affect of their deprived circumstances (recall Braces impending crisis). Reformers called for the transformation of the *environs* of the poor as a method of enculturating them to the forms of consumption, political participation, and labor the Victorian middle-classes proposed as “civilized.” Fundamental to this proposition was a presupposition of natural human equality.

However, at the same time notions of achievement presupposed essential or natural human equality, “civilization” provided new forms of rationalizing of conditions of social inequality. For example, as the labor conflicts and aspirations of the 19th century middle-

class intersected with immigrant exploitation, notions of universal human civilization guided a revolution in the social discipline and (limited) mobility of the laboring classes, one that drew on ethnocentric norms and marginalized the ethnic poor to segregated spaces for “rehabilitation.” As the post-industrial globalization of capital has transformed the economic landscape of the United States, particularly in the American South, the ensuing economic crisis of the state phrased in idioms of a crisis of youth violence and other moral panics, has facilitated the privatization of social/control services. The dominance of the market terminologies of risk, outcomes, accountability, and management signify radical reversals in the orientation and resource flows of human social-work. Market oriented structures of policy and resource distribution privilege for-profit production while setting non-profit organizations in market-like competition for grants that dangle like carrots on politically contingent strings. Structures of neo-liberal state and market relations defined by “limited liability” shift economic and personal risk away from those collecting more of the (allegedly) meager resources of the state while structuring risk as both an objective condition and stigma of the poor. What’s more, the market-oriented and color-blind discourse of late-capitalist neo-humanism rejects the transformative social engineering and trajectories (e.g. civilization, progress, social mobility) idealized in modernist visions of collective human equality for individualized accountability exercised through internalized pathology, self-management, and, as Castel described, “organized zones of marginality.”

Ethnographic perspective brings these sometimes abstract historical shifts in policy and dominant discourse down to the ground where they also intersect with experiences of gendered and classed labor, struggles of racial inequality, and economic transformations in

the arrangement of social-work. My experiences with the many people who struggled in this field of tensions have shown that these historic shifts shape the contexts and resources with which they have to make sense of themselves, to form relationships with others, and to do their jobs. These everyday intellectuals challenged the culturally defined inequalities and biases that situated poor minority “kids” and shaped the history of their own lives, their “history-in-person.” The socio-historical knowledge of their place within collective experiences of oppression, transformation, and struggle informed the production of their own humanist notions of essential human equality. These notions were expressed in their theories of environmental conditioning and a firm insistence on the dignity, potential, and transformation of young people with whom they intimately identified. For them, youth work was a space of social-work (in the anthropological sense) where agents attempt to affect the conditions of society through their own constructed and embodied labor-relation with youth.

The discursive performances of perspicacity, empathy, and reciprocity expressed in the practice of organic expertise engender critical forms of community with young people. Organic expertise incites young people to participate in the local enrichment of this community through “giving back” material resources (to community centers, victims of disaster and poverty) but also through the cultural production of expressive arts. Organic expertise invites ‘troubled’ youth to take part in a community of material and cultural exchange that is also characterized by the cultural politics and uneven relations of caring and discipline. In as much as organic expertise generates these communal features, it also participates in critiques and contradictions that situate identities in meaningful and moral relation to dominant structures of social [dis]order, and to youth.

While organic experts may have “slipped in” through the gap in the labor market opened by neoliberal privatization, the political economy of service-subcontracting and block-grant funding unevenly privileges market-competition-behaviorism and the habitus of *homo economicus*. These conditions produce low paying wage-labor jobs in the for-profit sector and even orient non-profits toward entrepreneurial schemes, penetrating every bastion of public space possible with economic rationalism and limiting the resources available for communities of reciprocity and critical discourse.

Having made a commitment to visibility and intervention in the imbalanced relations of youth work, I am drawn by my observations to venture a claim to “what should be done” in relation to youth and social-work. You might guess from the observations above that my suggestions begin with the issue of funding, and they do. The widening disparities in income inequality and the decreasing tax and legal responsibility of the wealthy have been compounded by both record war spending, the devolution of domestic responsibility on the part of the state, and the redirection of public resources into for-profit hands through privatization (Chasin 2004:51-62). If anything, adjustments in these glaring disparities and a redirection of priorities toward providing local community organizations with ample resources to rebuild the lines of exchange lost by the abandonment of public spaces – these would be a *start* to reconnecting communities torn apart, and youth turned against each other. Furthermore, supporting programs with critical media literacy and expressive arts generates greater social awareness and promotes the recognition of shared “humanness” between people.

While Sarge did ‘play up’ the sometimes-ambiguous gang status of her students, known members of opposing gangs did in fact sit peacefully adjacent to each other in her classrooms. I never witnessed a fight, not a weapon drawn – lots of taunting and prodding – but in the three and a half years I have participated in or kept in touch with Alternative Paths, there has been no sign of a “wave of superpredators” there. At Adventure LLC the violence of “the box” was an ever-present demand on the facilitators and the distance made between them and the “clients” was a source of friction that reverberated throughout the workplace. While at Adventure LLC, facilitators were encouraged to discipline their emotional expression and forge boundaries between them and the “clients,” at Alternative Path, workers were encouraged, not least of all by Sarge, to share their history, their identity, and their passion toward young people. The lessons of the *Emergency* curriculum were directed toward encouraging the students to express themselves, and teachers and volunteers often participated and shared in the activities with the students. This culture of self-expression was echoed by the narratives of organic expertise that circulated among volunteers, teachers, and the head of the school, Sarge. Many students who were allowed to return to their own school when their suspension expired refused to return to the Alston Public School District, and finished out their education at Alternative Paths.

The particular use of poetry as self-expression through language corresponded with the narrative performance of organic expertise and functioned to pull students into conversations about shared pain and joy, discrimination, anger, and fear – among themselves as well as with teachers and volunteers. It prompted them all to recognize their shared

positions in fields of power such as race, class, and gender, as they intersect in the struggles of everyday people asserting their claims to access to local resources, autonomy, and social value. In a classroom where teachers, volunteers, and students shared their expressions and interpretations, there was more than *youth* development going on, as the case of Mr. Randall illustrates. The shared participation in these expressive activities also enabled what Holland (et al. 1998) called “*codevelopment* – the linked development of people, cultural forms, and social positions in particular historical worlds” (33, my emphasis).

As a method of violence prevention and community building, the production of reflexive and expressive language, oral or written I would argue, requires “empathetic re-creation” because as we write and or read meaning into self-expression “our mind becomes collaborative with that of the artist/[audience]” (Swanger 1995:428). In Bakhtin’s description of the process, “the speaker strives to get a reading on his [*sic*] own word, and on his own conceptual system that determines this word, within the alien conceptual system of the understanding receiver; he enters in to dialogical relationships with certain aspects of this system.” In this sense, “the speaker breaks through the alien conceptual horizon of the listener, constructs his own utterance on alien territory, against his, the listener’s, apperceptive background” (Holland et al. 1998: 172). Hence, speakers, authors, readers and listeners of expressive oratory or written narratives must “enter the subject” of the other and allow them to “enter him or her[self]” (Swanger 1995:452).

But the point is not to iterate platitudes about the power of art. In a quite definite and, I think, irrefutable way, the arts can lay claim to significance in the moral domain – not because of certain prescribed “moral” content, but precisely because art is a created and shared vision of our humanness, and

therefore engenders empathy, the elimination of otherness. [Swanger 1995:449]

Because our human “existence as uniquely social beings presupposes the presence of the other” (Scheper-Hughes 2004:225), I argue that it is through the cultural production of empathetic knowledge that we can work *with* young people to forge communities of exchange in terms of giving and reciprocity. Such mutually constructed communities inherently oppose acts of violence. Violence requires the obscuring shared social histories and other’s existence as thinking and feeling human beings. Doctrines of inherited difference by race or risk, “pathology,” “professionalism,” or “gang loyalty,” each promote the dehumanization, othering, and distance that either condones or directly leads to violence (Dower 1986). To avoid these possibilities, I believe we need to embrace *the personal as a public discourse* of the work. Like the organic experts, who literally put their lives “out there” for young people to examine and learn from, youth workers need to embrace a practice of visibility and community with the young people they engage. We can make this attempt at collaboration with young people, one that resembles democracy more than the privatizing market relations of entrepreneurialism, or risk promoting and/or condoning the violence of inequality by our unwitting participation in fields of domination. The first field, then, begins with breaking down the division between “adult” and “youth” and emphasizing our shared social experiences across categories of difference. Again, following Skott-Myhre’s call for visibility, I argue that we “begin to lose actual community whenever we engage upon the project of separating people... and designating them as different from us” (2006:228). Moreover, Skott-

Myhre argues that “The dismantling of otherness needs to come through an exploration of our own ‘local memory’” (2006:228). In terms of what we have explored in this dissertation, we might consider an exploration of “local memory” synonymous with expressing our organic expertise, recognizing our “history-in-person,” or perhaps, our awareness of cultural self in social history. But key in this formula for practice is that such expressions are shared and interpreted *with* young people who, in their basic human need for social recognition, affirmation, and community with others, are just like you.

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