

Cultural Organization of an Urban School that Works:
Lessons in Trust, Conflict and Control

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Preface

This book project was undertaken originally with one guiding research question: *How do urban youth handle interpersonal trouble on their own terms?* This question emerged from our skepticism about the dominant representation of urban youth as relying overwhelmingly on aggression and violence to settle their troubles with one another – a popular perspective advanced by media and political elites, and undergirded by a criminology that in the 1980s and 1990s narrowed its investigation of urban youth to the streets and in gangs. Our research with urban youth coupled with our socio-legal knowledge of trouble point away from violence and aggression as a singular practice of a social category and instead toward a contextualized response to trouble conditioned by structural, relational, and spatial dynamics.

An opportunistic moment provided a site for studying how youth frame and act on trouble among themselves, full access to a historically significant urban high school in the American West. Urban public schools in poor urban cores gained attention in the 1980s and 1990s as places where youth aggression and violence spilled over from nearby neighborhoods and where the state took a strategic stand to intercept youth predatory acts against one another through penal and disciplinary strategies. We put our research team into Cotton River High School (CRHS) with complete access, knowing little about how the student population handled trouble amongst themselves nor how the school and adults are implicated in managing youth conflict on campus. We gained access after convincing key adult teachers and administrators that too little was understood about urban youth conflict on high school campuses and that upon learning more about the issue, we would team with them to see what, if anything, might be done to make a difference.

Our team has engaged in research activities at CRHS continuously since 1997, ranging from years of team fieldwork/observation to retrospective archival analysis of the century-old school. This window of research expanded to include both how students make sense of and handle interpersonal trouble, and how the school is implicated in the ways conflict plays out on campus.

In this presentation and core chapter of our book manuscript, we present how we think about youth conflict and some key findings from our extended field study of an inner-city school. Our focus includes attention to trouble issues, trouble responses and what we call **trouble strings** or processes for working out trouble across relationships, space and time. We reveal the strong tendency of youth experienced in the school to engage in conciliatory-remedial processes for handling interpersonal trouble while preventing or interrupting moralistic-aggressive social processes before they gain purchase. We show how the cultural organization of the school – local mobilization, sociospatial relations, school governance practices, and nesting in institutional spheres – tilts in a direction that supports conciliatory practices among youth. We end with a perspective that underscores the importance of social trust as the glue that melds the cultural organization of the school with the capacity of youth to work out interpersonal troubles on terms that feature everyday, non-aggressive interpersonal problem-solving.

Chapter 4¹

Trouble amid Social Trust

Over the past two decades, much of the research on youth trouble in urban high schools has concentrated on so-called “toxic schools” in poor, inner-city cores.¹ This research tradition focuses on campuses beset by disorder and distrust, representing urban core youth as both predatory *and* under a “veil of suspicion and doubt” struggling on a daily basis for dignity and respect.² In this chapter, we explore how students, many of whom are urban core youth hailing from the poorest neighborhoods in the metropolitan area, make sense of and handle peer trouble in an urban high school that works; a campus marked by social trust built up over a long period of time.³ As a first glimpse of youth trouble on the Cotton River High campus, consider a story authored by a Latino 12th grader and a “trouble case” primarily based on Morrill’s observations:

Story 4.1 “Started Talking”

On the weekends me and all my friends always go to parties. Well one night we go to this party and people are there from some other neighborhoods. Something happened, this guy I know at [CRHS] from different neighborhood than me said I was doing something wrong with his sister. But all I remember doing was just talking to her. He was drinking most of the night and he gotten in my face and I told him to get out of my face! But he didn't. Gonna take care of this later. I made sure didn't see him that night or the next day. I saw him at school in the quad on Monday. He started hassling me. My two friends and his friend started pull us apart. Because I started pushing him. There trying

¹ To appear in Calvin Morrill and Michael Musheno (with Cynthia Bejarano, Christine Yalda, and Madelaine Adelman), *Youth Conflict: Culture and Control in an Urban High School* (contracted with the University of Chicago Press). Draft: 1/9/14. **Do not quote without permission.** Contact: Calvin Morrill (cmorrill@law.berkeley.edu) or Michael Musheno (mmusheno@law.berkeley.edu)

to get us off the quad so we could think. I told him & she [his sister] told him that we were just talking! But he was upset and he was going to finish what he had started. He came after me and I'm like -o-my god what am I doing. Different neighborhoods and all could be trouble. But not on this campus. So I stop put my hands up like it's all okay and I started talking to him and said this is dumb you know if you don't want me talking to her then I won't but right now I'm telling you we were not doing anything. He was cool with it. And so we said sorry and started talking. All us walked up to M [building] to eat lunch. And all that stuff, and now we are Best friends and me and his sister are seeing each other! So he saw that I'm not such a bad guy.

Case 4.1 “Going off the Breezeway”

During lunch, I'm finishing my interview with Mrs. Grandholm in her career counseling office in the “C” building on the quad. She is a sturdily-built white woman in her sixties, with steel-grey hair and half-glasses dangling on a chain around her neck. This is her thirtieth year working in the Cotton River District and her eighth year at Cotton River High. She's worked as a teacher, an assistant principal, in the district office, and now as a counselor. She says that she enjoys working with students the most, especially in career counseling where she can, in her words, “help them get on the right path”. Her office door is propped open and, from my vantage point, I can see two African American girls, Fay and Cara, sitting on the cement walkway just outside her office in the shade, chuckling as they converse with each other. They are juniors and long-time friends. Chris, also a junior and of white and African American descent often is in the company of both girls, although Cara and Chris consider themselves boyfriend and girlfriend.

Cara, chuckling and playful, but also with a somewhat aggressive tone says, “You too out after the party doin’ who knows what.” Amid laughing, Fay responds, “You know he [Chris] don’t like parties with lots of people. He gets all nervous and such. We just left.” Cara, only half chuckling now, responds in a tone that is difficult to tell whether she’s joking or serious, “I know he had to leave”. Two or three exchanges follow in which the girls clarify when and what time Fay left the party with Chris, and when she left him that night to go home. Cara then says in a more adamant tone, “You think it’s a joke. Ain’t a joke, Fay!” She then yells, “Stay away from my man! He’s my man!” Fay says something that leads to Cara laughing a little and then I hear Fay calmly say, “I won’t do it again.” Cara follows in a raised voice, “You better not again, Fay, or else!” Fay responds in a defiant tone, practically shouting, “Nothing happened!” Mrs. Grandholm hears the raised voices and gets up from her desk to look outside, but does not walk out of her office. I lean out of my chair, as well, to get a better view. It’s not clear if Cara and Fay see Mrs. Gandholm, but I don’t hear any more yelling. I get up and look out the doorway to see the girls walking around the corner of “C” building on to the main breezeway. After a minute or so, Mrs. Grandholm and I trail after Fay and Cara, navigating the stream of students walking up and down the breezeway, to find them sitting on the grass between “J” and “K” buildings. I’m standing slightly behind the corner of “J” building so that they can’t see me but I can see and hear them. The girls are leaning in to each other but they’re not yelling anymore. I can hear Fay, saying “I understand, Cara” as Mrs. Grandholm walks up to them. She asks them if “everything’s okay” and to “talk kinder” to each other. Neither girl says anything in response. Cara looks down at the ground while Fay looks up to Mrs. Grandholm, nodding her head

slowly up and down. Mrs. Grandholm and I retreat back to her office, keeping the door open. She says she is “unsure what long-term impact” she had on the situation but notes she “wanted to let them know I was here while they were going off the breezeway to talk things out”. She adds that Fay and Cara are “good girls” and Fay in particular “is in good position to go to college”. We continue our interview for a few minutes more and then I bid goodbye to Mrs. Grandholm. Ten minutes have passed since I saw Fay and Cara sitting between the buildings, and I walk up the breezeway to check if they’re still there, but they’ve moved. I walk out toward the fields and I see them sitting together. I watch from afar for a few minutes. At one point Cara throws her head back in what appears to be laughter, shouting “I know, Chris gets sick over it!” After several minutes, Fay leans over and touches Cara slightly on the shoulder and Cara smiles back at her. The bell rings, indicating the end of lunch. They then get up and start walking back together toward the buildings as I head back toward the breezeway.

In the weeks that followed this incident, we spotted Cara and Chris, Cara and Fay, and sometimes all three youth in each other’s company. Sometimes they ate lunch on the quad in the company of a larger group of mostly African American students and sometimes saw Cara and Chris alone, or Cara and Fay alone, or all three together sitting off the breezeway between the buildings or on the fields.

“Started Talking” is one of 539 first-person stories written by 9th and 12th graders about trouble, while “Going off the Breezeway” comes from a set of 94 trouble cases based on observations on campus during our first three years of fieldwork.⁴ Combined with in-depth interviews of students and school staff, these materials illustrate an analytic vocabulary for understanding youth conflict: *trouble issues* (how youth and adults label sources of trouble);

trouble responses (specific actions taken by youth and adults to handle trouble); and *trouble strings* (sequences of trouble responses).⁵ This vocabulary enables us to see the full range of social and spatial moves through which youth and adults handle trouble, including escalation toward or de-escalation away from interpersonal aggression or conflict.

Both “Talking” and “Breezeway” illustrate trouble issues that youth refer to as “drama”. In “Talking,” the author paints a picture of youth from different neighborhoods coming together in a weekend party where he runs afoul of a male peer by talking with the peer’s sister. “Breezeway” focuses on a relational triangle of a different sort between two female friends and the ambiguities of intimate interaction with one of their boyfriends at and after a weekend party. The central characters in “Talking” and “Breezeway” move from initially, ambiguous interactions to heated interactions involving accusations and denials. “Talking’s” author and his antagonist get through the night of their party without further problems (despite the author’s report of his antagonist’s heavy drinking) and then meet up again on campus the next week. There, the trouble string threatens to escalate beyond “pushing,” but the author intones, “not on this campus,” which gives voice to the normative contours of trouble responses on campus and the underlying social trust within the school. The author, his friends, and his antagonist’s friend intervene to try to keep the peace and move the altercation off the quad deep into the “refuge” for reconciliation that ultimately results in new relational connections among the author, his antagonist (now the author’s “Best friend” [sic]), and the antagonists’ sister. In “Breezeway,” what begins as good-natured interaction between Cara and Fay escalates to angry accusations and denials, and then moves off the quad to a quieter place in the “refuge” so they too can begin talking. “Breezeway” also illustrates how some adults on campus use their knowledge of peer

trouble to supportively monitor such interactions, looking for signs that intervention might be needed and signaling youth-centeredness and trust.

We also use our field evidence to compare how older and younger youth imagine peer trouble, and how stories of youth trouble compare to actions observed on campus. Students, especially 9th graders, tend to write about peer trouble as a moralistic string of tit-for-tat challenges to honor that must be met by aggressive responses. This pattern resonates with Elijah Anderson's well-known depictions of "code-of-the-street" intimidation and neighborhood conflict.⁶ But our years of observations on campus reveal few peer formations in an around turf and little interpersonal intimidation. Indeed, in the classic code-of-the-street school context, we would expect juniors and seniors to recruit freshmen and sophomores into their turf groups and intimidate youth who resist membership or pass through their turf.⁷ These dynamics do not occur at CRHS as youth engage in relatively free sociospatial movement, a core feature of compartmentalized fluidity. Instead, by the time Cotton River High students reach their final years at school, they largely eschew the code-of-the-street lens in favor of understanding interpersonal trouble on campus as amenable to youth problem-solving processes and, occasionally, adult intervention. And, rather than coerce younger students, juniors and seniors socialize them into the campus ethos of trust. At the same time, we note the interplay between the campus and contemporary educational and criminal justice fields, as well as parts of the local community, where dominant perspectives portray urban core youth as predatory. While social trust moderates the impact of these images on campus, it does not erase them from either the consciousness or actions of youth and adults.

Trouble Issues on Campus

Trouble among youth at Cotton River High emerges from social interactions marked by “dissatisfaction, irritation, upset or discontent with an act or attitude on the part of another” peer or adult.⁸ Youth express a complex sense of situations that lead to trouble, as illustrated by Paul’s comments, a senior living in a densely-populated poor neighborhood of largely African American families west of campus. He was a senior when fieldworker Jerlyn Jones talked with him about trouble on campus:

Jerlyn: What kinds of situations are there on campus where people aren’t getting along?

Paul: Some of it [trouble] is with gettin’ treated right, you know. A guy hooks up with another girl and his girl, like, she get pissed. She gettin’ treated like shit, you know. You get some drama.I seen beefs with guys in a full classroom over a dirty look. It’s respect, you know. With adults, maybe a teacher’s a hardass or whatnot. Treats us like little kids; do this, don’t do this with no clear reason or just cuz they can say it. Most teachers is alright. Some not.

Jerlyn: What about problems off campus? Can they cause problems on campus?

Paul: People don’t bring stuff on campus too much. Nobody wants it here, kids, teachers, guards.... If you got bad stuff going on outta school with kids you see at school, you can give them room or even talk, you know. You can move around. It’s not like some places [in the community] where you go and somebody say, “who you?” or “where you from?” I ain’t afraid here.

Paul's observations highlight concerns about dignity ("gettin' treated right" or "gettin' treated like shit") and respect that throws into relief the social distrust that urban core youth can face off campus when interfaced with the normative expectations underlying how trouble is to be handled on campus. Although he observes that most teachers are "alright," he alludes to arbitrary exercises of authority from some teachers ("cuz they can") that leave youth feeling like "little kids". All young people experience these concerns at some level given their liminal position as "adolescents" and the asymmetrical power that adults in authority hold over them. In this liminal position, youth face contradictory expectations that sometimes leave them in situations where, as sociologist Gary Alan Fine notes, they are perceived by adults and perceive themselves to be "both adults and children".⁹ The challenges of this contradictory position and adult authorities, cops to teachers, ruling over them can become especially palpable for urban core youth, sharpened by the anxieties of social distrust and peer violence. Paul, who we came to know as a shrewd and keen observer of the campus, suggests how the campus ethos mutes these anxieties ("nobody wants that here"), which leaves him with less concern ("I ain't afraid here") than he might face in other places in the community. At Cotton River High, social trust moderates the suspicion and anxiety students face in many other parts of their lives off campus while everyday manifestations of compartmentalized fluidity ("you can move around...") further interrupt off-campus territoriality and defense of turf that could be imported on campus. As we saw in the previous chapter, most youth make loose and provisional claims on campus space amidst their constant spatial and relational circulation.

"Drama". As used by youth on campus, "drama" mixes concerns about dignity with gender and sexuality, especially cross-sex interactions involving youth or adults. Youth and adults at Cotton River High most often use "drama" as a cover term to refer to a broad range of

peer troubles involving interpersonal relationships among girls and boys, especially involving romantic “breakups,” triangles, and sexual exclusivity. “Drama” is also used less often to refer to competition among girls without male involvement. On occasion the term emerges in reference to off-campus problems with families and with violence associated with inter-neighborhood youth rivalries (sometimes involving named street gangs).¹⁰ Finally, “drama” encompasses situations of unwanted sexual attention involving only youth and youth and adults, and youth perceptions of discrimination by adults based on sexual identity and gender. In all of these situations, the respect for boundaries demarcating close relationships and the play of power, grounded in gendered and sexualized identities, are at stake.

As we noted in the last chapter, youth routinely cross and blur sociocultural boundaries but trouble can bring those lines to the surface, even reproducing them. Troy, who we met in chapter one, describes the “little dramas” he experiences with a girlfriend who became irritated by the fact that he spent “more time with his homies [male friends]” than her. Monica, an African American junior, describes the “drama” created by an African American sophomore, David, who has “feelings” for one of her friends but does not “know what to do about it.” Monica explained to us with a wan smile and in a slightly exasperated tone that “there’s constant drama with [David] and all of us [among her girlfriends]. Constant. He spreads nasty rumors about us all.” She elaborated on the trouble with David, noting that “Kiona [her friend] is hot. We all know that. I understand why he’s afraid; it’s not fair to the rest of us to havin’ him drag us through crap. He should cut the drama; ask her out.”

In the Cotton River High context, for a boy to label a set of concerns expressed by a girl as “drama” is to trivialize those issues and highlight particular definitions of masculinity that rest on mastery in romantic relationships and resonate with the exaggerated, heterosexual norms

current in most American high schools.¹¹ Troy illustrates this action as he trivializes his girlfriend's concerns by referring to them dismissively as "little dramas" and then talking about how his time with his male friends enables him escape from the "drama" surrounding his girlfriend. Who can rightfully create or participate in "drama" and to what extent also demarcates gender and power in interpersonal relationships. Monica's account of David's behavior speaks to gender in two ways. Her acknowledgement of Kiona as "hot" speaks to a girl's ability to attract boys as a key power dynamic and status marker integral to heterosexual relations among girls and boys on campus. At the same time, Monica acknowledges David's fear, even putting herself in his shoes, so to speak, for a moment. She also implicates the lack of dignity David affords her and her friends by spreading gossip that is "not fair" and notes how his inability to "ask [Kiona] out" undermines David's ability to be masculine, resonating with the masculinity-as-mastery theme in Troy's statements.

Girls-only "drama" is illustrated by two sophomore friends, an Anglo named Brittany and an African American named Cheryl. The "drama" involves Brittany's still-contentious and bitter disappointment over receiving the "second-highest" grade to Cheryl in a social studies class they both took during their freshman year. According to Cheryl, "We've been friends a long time. It's like middle-school all over again. The drama continues. Sometimes we joke about it and sometimes we treat each other badly. I guess that's friendship." At stake here is both mastery in the relationship and what it means to treat a friend with dignity over the bumps and bruises of life.

Cheryl also points to another aspect of "drama" that internet researchers Alice Marwick and danah boyd observe in their studies of youth relationships in face-to-face and on-line digital contexts, such as Facebook, Twitter, or Tumblr. They argue that youth can use the construct of

“drama” to “blur distinctions between the serious and frivolous...[and] what is just joking and what truly hurts.”¹² In Cheryl’s account, “drama” slides back and forth between trouble and non-trouble, and can be difficult to discern to participants or researchers without precise historical and current information about particular peer groups and romantic relationships. In Troy’s account, he and his girlfriend move back and forth between “laugh[ing]” about him “hanging out” too much with his friends and being annoyed with one another. Unlike adult-centered terms, such as bullying, that denote fixed roles and power asymmetries between perpetrators and victims,¹³ for youth, “drama” involves agentic roles among multiple parties in which victims and perpetrators can shift roles. References to “drama” enable teens to both constitute and interrupt power asymmetries in their relationships almost at the same time, saving face both with peers and adults as they talk about theirs and others’ participation in “drama”.¹⁴

Yet when “drama” involves unwanted sexual attention or unfair treatment by peers or adults due to one’s sex and/or sexual identity, power asymmetries must be carefully gauged and negotiated, especially by students. Such “drama,” sometimes referred to by youth as a “big” or “messy drama,” can occur without much public knowledge except for those immediately involved or curse through the social informational circuits of the school with great fanfare, dominating informal discussions among both youth and adults for weeks. Example of a private “drama” include a situation we learned about in which a male teacher continually made offensive asides in class about gays and lesbians that compelled a student of “ambiguous sexuality” to stop attending class. In this incident, the student never confronted the teacher directly but privately consulted with another teacher on campus who helped organized the “Gay-Straight Alliance” student club. The first teacher eventually came to see his actions as inappropriate and changed his behavior as a result of conversations with the second teacher all without the student in

question becoming directly involved. In another, more public “messy drama,” a female student filed a formal sexual harassment grievance against a male teacher who later was fired by the school and banned from teaching in the district.

Off-campus community “drama” can move beyond the realm of interpersonal relationships to encompass broader peer groups in competition for territorial domination over particular neighborhoods or blocks. This usage of “drama” resonates with sociologist David Harding’s findings regarding how inner-city African American and Latino male youth use the term to refer code-of-the-street altercations tinged with neighborhood allegiances. On-campus evidence for such dynamics occasionally appears in the form of graffiti on the outsides of campus buildings or walls near campus in which different neighborhood groups would signal their territory or presence. We would also see evidence of such graffiti in students’ notebooks. Yet, at no point in our research did we discern such signaling translating into inviolable and aggressive defense of territories on campus – consistent again with Paul’s observations above.¹⁵ Although adults would sometimes recount stories of gang “drama” coming on to campus that fueled open conflict, youth offered alternative explanations for such conflicts that did not revolve around inter-gang or inter-neighborhood conflict. As Paul notes, “nobody wants it on campus”.¹⁶

In accounts of “drama,” peer audiences also play important roles. At Cotton River High, youth note how relational “drama” circulates on and off the front- and back-stages of peer interaction, unfolding across multiple peer groups and extended networks. As youth audiences tire of a “drama,” like a play without patrons, it can end, mostly forgotten. Abby, an Anglo senior put it like this in an in-depth interview about peer groups on campus, “Dramas come and go all the time. There’s always a new one to follow.”¹⁷

“*Beefs*”. If “drama” largely encompasses cross-sex relations on campus with occasional reference to off-campus conflict, “beefs” demarcate a masculine world of trouble over relational competition and identity largely among male networks without the participation of girls. The Cotton River High usage of “beef” thus seems even closer to Harding’s findings regarding inner-city male “drama” to describe feuds over “respect” and “status” again minus the strong linkage of those concerns to the “protection of...home turf”.¹⁸ Whereas references to “drama” on campus typically involve socially-intimate peers and their attendant networks, references of male youth involved in “beefs” reach beyond campus to far-flung networks of youth who barely or do not know each other. Unlike discussions of “drama,” accounts of “beefs” do not blur the boundaries between trouble and everyday interactions among youth. To be in a “beef,” according to Pablo, a self-identified Mexican-American junior, is “to mean business”. Moreover, as Paul illustrates in his recollection of seeing “beefs...in a full classroom,” youth typically describe “beefs” at Cotton River High playing out on the front-stages with audiences in public settings that extend beyond the proximate peer groups or interpersonal networks to which the principals belong.

Ethnoracial Trouble. Although “drama” and “beefs” can be racially inflected at Cotton River High, it is rare for youth to invoke these terms to refer to trouble involving either peers or adult staff in which one’s ethnoracial identity comprises the primary issue of contention. Terms of art among Cotton River youth for ethnoracial trouble include, “racial stuff,” “racial shit,” or, as one Black youth provocatively put it, “skin-tone issues”. Youth also talk about ethnoracial trouble by reference to particular ethnoracial categories, such as “Mexican issues” or “Anglo problems”. Dignity and respect play key roles in these processes. Ethnoracial trouble, for example, surfaces among Latino/a youth who recount social tensions between newly-arrived

immigrant Mexicans and youth from Mexican-descent families who have resided in Cotton River for multiple generations. Mexican-descent youth vary in their abilities to speak, read, or write in Spanish and would sometimes demean newly-arrived Mexicans as “wetbacks without papers” all the while asserting their own cultural pride in being of Mexican descent. In addition to dealing with overt discrimination from their Latino/a peers, Mexican-immigrant youth make dignity claims while dealing with feelings of *vergüenza* (shame or embarrassment in Spanish) as they deploy their limited English abilities beyond the confines of ESL classes and the “Q” quad, particularly when dealing with Mexican-descent peers and school staff.¹⁹ For some Mexicanos/as, these experiences strengthen their pride in their own traditions and places of origin, also providing a base for calling into question the authenticity of Mexican-descent youth claims to being “Mexican”.

Yet, Mexican-descent youth and Mexican immigrant youth cross and blur the boundaries dividing them in various ways. Youth on both sides of this divide would sometimes poke fun at their own collective shortcomings and pretensions. As we saw in the last chapter, Latino/a youth with various identifications would collaborate (albeit grudgingly) in campus organizations, such as MeCHA even as members of both groups claim they could not “work together”. Moreover, some youth identify with multiple Latino/a perspectives and can fluently speak, read, and write in English and Spanish, and live in diverse neighborhoods with both long-established Mexican-descent families and newly-arrived Mexican immigrants. One such youth is Carlos, who we met in chapter three and identifies as “mixed” white and Mexican. He constantly tacks back and forth across sociocultural lines, constituting a bridging tie across Mexican immigrant and Mexican-descent youth.

In addition to interpersonal ethnoracial trouble, recall Abelena's observations (from chapter three) that the "doors can close to Mexicanos" on campus with regard to academic opportunities outside ESL and privileges afforded to U.S. born Latinos/as and other non-Latino/a groups. These statements speak to a perception of systemic ethnoracial trouble.²⁰ Parallel to their immigrant Mexican peers, African American males likewise discuss structural aspects of discrimination they face on campus. In these accounts, African American males reference their sense of the school using them for their athletic prowess and giving them preferential treatment only to discipline them more harshly than their non-Black peers should they, as one black youth put it, "get out of line".

School Discipline and Academics. Aside from its intersection with ethnoracial dignity and discrimination, youth assert how school discipline creates trouble in their lives, particularly when it involves suspensions in school or off campus, related to: fighting, relational aggression/violence, bringing to or using banned substances (primarily alcohol and marijuana) on campus, carrying weapons, disrupting classes or extra-curricular events (e.g., sporting events or dramatic arts presentations), vandalizing or stealing school, peers', or staff property; being truant or tardy; or violating school rules. Students also face trouble involving academic issues not involving discipline, such as failing classes or running afoul of district eligibility rules for attending the school.

Trouble with the Material World. Finally, youth occasionally associate trouble with material exchanges involving theft, debt, and/or competition in illegal markets. The latter, for example, links to regular marijuana use among some youth on campus, which can create the conditions for disputes among peer "dealers" for market share, debt problems in the case of users who owe money for drugs, or "dealers" who take advances for promised drugs and then do not

deliver the goods. Some of these same dealers also supply access to drugs other than marijuana, most often alcohol (e.g., quarts of vodka or tequila, or six packs of beer stashed in car trunks) and much less often crack, heroin, or crystal meth. As one Latina senior put it in a interview about trouble on campus:

The druggies want their drugs; the drunks want their alcohol; the dealers want to sell stuff. If dealer ‘A’ thinks that dealer ‘B’ is coming on his scene [client-base], it can get a little tense. Nobody’s gon’ do nothing on campus. They’ll work it out. I heard stories of violence off campus. Don’ know if it’s true, but I heard stories.

Debt and theft also occur apart from illegal markets. One student, for example told a story about a peer stealing food, a radio, and other items from her school locker. Another student talked about having paid off a debt to a “friend” for some “concert tickets,” but that the “friend spread rumors” that the debt had not been paid off, much to the chagrin of the former debtor. Beyond the direct use-value of material possessions and money via theft or debt, material possessions can become an extension of the self in peer relations thus implicating dignity and signaling disrespect and a lack of validation of the victim’s tie to the possession. Likewise, becoming known as one who does not pay off debts (or is always borrowing money) can undermine one’s public identity among peers.

Adult Perspectives on Trouble Issues. Adult staff members by and large operate on the same page with youth regarding what fuels trouble among young people on campus. Teachers, for example, understand and sometimes invoke the terms, “drama” and “beefs” to refer to trouble among youth, and they will sometimes discuss the social tensions surrounding various groups on campus. Similar to youth, few adults mention conflict stemming from theft or debt. The biggest difference between adults and youth depictions of trouble issues, not surprisingly, concerns

academic and disciplinary issues. In some interviews, teachers illustrate adult-centered orientations toward youth conflict that focus on suspicion and distrust. In these interviews, some teachers portray classroom discipline almost as a “one-person” morality play with youth either as objects of their actions or as props to be rearranged in the classroom in an attempt to stem the tide against future, expected transgressions. As Simpson Brown, who we met in chapter one, noted to Morrill in response to a question about what Cotton River students think about him:

I guess kids think I’m a hardass or something. I seem to spend a lot of time dealing with or thinking about disciplinary issues, problem kids. I spend a lot of time moving people apart who are making trouble or telling them to go outside in the hall until class is over. It’s like moving chairs around the room. The kids aren’t all bad, but it does seem like we’re always on the edge.

In these comments, we see social distrust that resonates with what sociologist Victor Rios calls the “code of the state” – a “labeling hype” and constant punishment through which youth misbehavior and peer aggression become self-fulfilling prophecies even when youth do not engage in such behaviors.²¹ Classes where teachers exercise this view and engage in such actions always appear on the brink of collapse, animated by anxiety, if not uncertainty.²² By contrast, other teachers illustrate youth-centered perspectives tied more to the dominance of social trust on campus. Mrs. Robinson, who we also met at the outset of chapter one, talks about “keeping an ear to the ground” and intervening into youth problems in ways that facilitate youth dealing with their troubles on their own terms. These teachers do not shy away from disciplining youth when necessary, but it is not their first option and occurs on the heels of or mixed with efforts to facilitate youth development and success at managing peer relations. “Sanctuaries,” constituted by teachers during lunch and before or after school in their classrooms, offer a crucial

sociospatial context in which youth can deal with trouble off the front-stages of the school with adults in the background in case their efforts go awry. Other adult efforts involve direct, but informal support to help youth navigate peer trouble through counseling, serving as third party peacemakers to bridge antagonisms between youth or youth and other adults on campus, and intervening to help students negotiate the school or district bureaucracy.

The Social Distribution of Trouble Issues

Above, we portray youth sense-making about trouble issues on campus and what constructs they invoke to distinguish among these issues. By aggregating the primary issue underlying a trouble story or case, we can examine the prevalence and social distribution of different issues revealed by the students at Cotton River High. “Drama” and “beefs” fuel much of the peer trouble that youth write about in stories and that fieldworkers observed in cases, accounting for two-thirds of all trouble issues across the two sources.²³ In descending rank order, school discipline and academics (17%), ethnoracial trouble (12%), and material possessions (4%) account for the remaining one-third. The distribution of trouble issues across the stories and cases is approximately equivalent with two exceptions: “beefs” (which account for 24% of the issues in the stories and 16% of the issues in the cases) and school discipline and academics (which accounts for 15% of the issues in the stories and 28% of the issues in the cases).²⁴

The high prevalence of “drama” and “beefs” in both stories and cases comports with prior research demonstrating the salience of interpersonal tensions precipitating youth conflict both in and out of urban high schools.²⁵ That more students write about “beefs,” which express acute stereotypes of masculinity centered on mastery and power, than we discover in our observed cases of trouble issues may relate to a broader pattern of urban youth tending to over-represent

hostile processes of responding to trouble in their stories. We examine this pattern more closely later in the chapter. The differential rates of trouble related to school discipline and academics may underscore the importance of the historical context in which we collected the stories and cases. When we began our fieldwork, Cotton River High had just emerged from a period when administrators working with teachers and security personnel relaxed the security regime of the previous decade, but by the end of our first three years of fieldwork, a new security regime began to take shape on campus that would again throw the school into the grips of tighter, formal discipline. We collected most of the stories prior to the beginning of this implementation, although our observations on campus are more evenly distributed throughout this period.

Most striking is the low 12% of the stories written by Cotton River High students focusing on ethnoracial trouble with peers. Although there is not an abundance of research quantifying perceptions of ethnoracial peer trouble, other studies report substantially higher rates. For example, in a survey study of New York City public high schools, 71% of student participants reported that they had been the object of youth prejudice based on race or ethnicity and 70% reported witnessing youth violence that was “definitely” or “probably” motivated by racism or racial prejudice.²⁶ In another study using the “Adolescent Discrimination Distress Index” (ADDI) – a scale developed to measure discrimination experienced by youth by peers and adults – 57% of student respondents reported being “called racially insulting names” by peers.²⁷ Our finding of much lower rates of ethnoracial trouble could in part be a methodological artifact of students masking such trouble on campus for the benefit of researchers, although the rate at which youth wrote about ethnoracial trouble is approximately equivalent to the rate we observed on campus in the trouble cases. However, we are inclined to a substantive explanation for the relatively low rates of ethnoracial trouble among Cotton River High students related to the period

when we collected these materials. The constant crossing and blurring of ethnoracial lines on campus, detailed in the last chapter, tend to limit the conditions for out-group, negative stereotypes and cultural distance, which in turn help reduce the occurrence and escalation of ethnoracial trouble and enhance social trust across ethnoracially diverse groups. These dynamics do not inform every interaction on campus; nor do they ensure inviolable ethnoracial harmony, but we are confident they do reduce social tensions across different ethnoracial groups.

To further analyze these patterns, we examine ethnoracial and sex differences with regard to the trouble issues about which youth wrote.²⁸ The vast majority of youth in every ethnoracial grouping focus on “drama” or “beefs,” although there is significant variation in the attention youth devote to academic and disciplinary issues. Stories by both African American and Latino/a Cotton River High students focus on ethnoracial trouble with peers at about the same rate (20%), which is several times higher than the rates among either Asian/Pacific Islander/Native American (5%) or white (2%) youth. Twenty-one percent of the stories written by African American youth focus on ethnoracial trouble embedded in academics and school discipline as distinct from peer driven. This is higher than the 14% of the stories written by Latino/a youth, 13% written by white youth, and 9% by Asian/Pacific Islander/Native American youth. Of the 22 stories that African American authors wrote about ethnoracially driven academic and disciplinary trouble, 16 recount episodes of punishment, including on- and off-campus suspensions and arrests. Many of these stories concentrate on perceptions of unfairness because they are black – certainly a form of ethnoracial trouble – although some of the conditions under which youth experience discipline are unclear. By contrast, Latinos/as write about academic and disciplinary trouble at about an equal rate, and small portions of whites write stories about disciplinary issues. None of the Asian/Pacific Islander/Native American youth

write about disciplinary trouble. That African American/Black youth write about disciplinary trouble at higher rates than other ethnoracial groups parallels prior research that finds that African American youth experience school discipline at higher rates than other groups and are more conscious of disciplinary and legal injustice in schools.²⁹

Our findings reveal that suggest Cotton River High youth *do* experience various forms of discrimination and that particular ethnoracial groups, especially African American and Latino/a youth, bear an extra burden in this regard in their dealings with the adult authorities on campus revolving around issues of discipline and academics. However, Cotton River students write about ethnoracial peer trouble at far lower rates compared to reports from prior research.³⁰ We regard this substantially lower rate as an empirical tracer of the long-term, evolving commitment by campus youth and adults to sociocultural diversity and an anchor of their social trust **within** the school as presented in chapter two. Moreover, low ethnoracial peer trouble aligns with students' perceptions across ethnoracial groups that Cotton River High is a "school that works" as also reported in chapter two.

Turning to sex differences, girls write about "drama" at almost double the rate as boys (56% of stories by girls focus on "drama" compared to 32% of the boys' stories).³¹ Boys' stories also are more than five times as likely as girls' stories to be about "beefs" (43% compared to 8%). Although there are no tangible sex differences in stories about ethnoracial trouble or problems over material possessions, girls' (19%) stories are more than twice as likely as boys' stories (9%) to be about trouble related to academics and school discipline. A qualitative perusal of the kinds of academic and disciplinary issues that girls and boys write about is also revealing: Girls tend to write about academic concerns involving grades, attendance eligibility while nearly all the boys' stories focus on disciplinary problems.³²

Figure 4.1 represents the differences between what 9th and 12th graders write about with regard to different trouble issues.³³ 9th (45% and 24%) and 12th graders (38% and 28%) write in almost equal proportions about “drama” and “beefs,” respectively. Both grade levels also write in equally small proportions about trouble involving material possessions (4% among 9th and 6% among 12th graders). More striking are differences between 9th and 12th graders in terms of their writings about academic and disciplinary issues and ethnoracial trouble. The rate at which 12th graders (26%) write about academic and disciplinary issues nearly doubles that of the 9th graders (14%). Closer inspection of stories about academic and disciplinary issues reveals that ten of the twelve seniors who write about academic and disciplinary issues focus on concerns about problems with teachers and/or staff that might negatively affect their graduation. With regard to ethnoracial trouble, there is a precipitous decline in the rate at which 12th (only a single writer) compared to 9th (13%) graders write about this issue, providing further support for our claim that the ethos of trust grips youth, encouraging them to cross ethnoracial boundaries, move about and build campus ties that are marked by diversity yet respecting their desire to assemble within their local cultures of social heritage.³⁴

FIGURE 4.1 ABOUT HERE

An Inventory of Trouble Responses

An analysis of trouble issues offers insight into how youth make sense of peer trouble on the Cotton River High campus but may provide imprecise purchase for understanding how youth respond to trouble. When trouble issues are the only source of inferring the dynamics of youth conflict, researchers may conflate judgment with action and treat conflict as a discrete event

rather than a relational process involving multiple parties, including those who are not antagonists. Our sociolegal perspective, as described in the first chapter, demands inquiry of claims about trouble and actions to deal with trouble. One must unpack how relevant parties respond to a perceived offense or injury; for it is in these actions that the potential trajectories of trouble escalating and deescalating are revealed. To begin addressing these complexities, we first examine an inventory of trouble responses on campus. The great bulk of this inventory involves informal control efforts from the bottom-up that youth engage in to handle troubling behavior by peers and adults, but also implicates formal control efforts from the middle-out as school staff members intervene into youth trouble and/or sanction youth for infractions of school rules. As we noted in chapter one, the full range of informal control in schools has been neglected in the literature on urban youth conflict, yet may hold important clues for understanding how everyday school safety is sustained or undermined.³⁵

Trouble responses are interactional accomplishments embedded in the complexities of social relationships, however robustly or sparsely constituted. Such responses may be more or less recognized, ranging from highly visible to barely perceptible efforts and in some instances, difficult to discern even among those individuals integrally involved. We came to identify three broad clusters of trouble responses that youth and adults recognize, although not always in the same ways. Each cluster references constellations of particular trouble responses, demarcated by different local vocabularies used to describe them, senses of what is at stake in particular situations that gets underneath “issues”, and emotional linkages that interactionally tie persons and acts together.³⁶ These clusters form a repertoire that is sociospatially distributed across youth and links in different ways with the long-sustained ethos of social trust on campus.³⁷

Conciliatory-Remedial Responses. Youth refer to this cluster as “working it out,” invoking a sense of what the sociologist Robert Emerson calls conciliatory-remedial responses. These actions unfold in problem-solving directions, often oriented toward repairing or re-kindling an interpersonal relationship.³⁸ When youth attempt to “work it out,” they treat trouble as the result of an unintentional mistake or as adults and youth sometimes put it, a “screw up”. Such hassles are not without emotional consequences as youth talk about being “upset” or “kinda pissed” with their peers, which ties youth together and to trouble via annoyance, frustration, or mild anger. These emotional linkages are moored to the social trust and adult-enabled compartmentalized fluidity on campus. While “working out” trouble, youth typically tack back and forth between negative and positive emotional linkages, alternating empathetic and caring interaction with frustration and annoyance.

Adults also recognize “working it out,” but usually add “on their own” when referring to young people engaging in conciliatory-remedial trouble responses as illustrated by Mrs. Robinson’s observations in chapter one about teachers knowing when “...to intervene, give guidance, and when to let ‘em [youth] deal with it on their own.” Adults refer to “working out” trouble with youth when they handle a problem without explicitly exercising their official authority. A Latina senior, Ana, provides a sense of how teachers “work out” trouble in class while talking about why some students like some teachers more than others: “If a teacher is trying to get you not to talk in their class and is nice to you, talking with you about it, you know they can give you detention. They won’t but they could. I think it takes more work on their part because they have to really listen to you. It makes me respect them more.” From Ana’s perspective, teachers who attempt to “work it out” with students tend to keep their potential for exercising official discipline in the background of social interaction, playing more off of their

moral rather than their official authority. As such, social trust flows less through the official structures and more through the capillaries of everyday relational work among youth and adults on campus. Conciliatory-remedial approaches to adult-youth trouble thus carry more benefits than merely solving the problem at hand as they can bolster the legitimacy and moral authority of a teacher as they leave youth with a sense of dignity and that their voices have been heard.

TABLE 4.1 ABOUT HERE

To “work it out” with peers, youth also negotiate the currency of respect and dignity, engaging in a number of actions that range from explicit validations of peers’ concerns to attempts at temporarily putting “space” between troubling and troubled parties. Youth call one sub-cluster of conciliatory-remedial actions, “chillin,” intended, as one Anglo senior male put it, to “keep the temperature down” in problematic situations. A second cluster of actions associated with “working it out” involves what youth call “educating,” which refers to communicating one’s complaints and feelings directly to a troublesome party in an effort to change that person’s behavior. In either sub-cluster of “working out” trouble responses, youth often proceed cautiously under the assumption (and hope) that the trouble does not, as one senior put it, “get out of hand”.³⁹

Among youth at Cotton River High, youth “chill” trouble via *lumping* as they ignore or “cope with” troublesome situations and youth. They also attempt to *accommodate* troublesome situations and parties by changing their own behavior, feelings, or perspectives, referring to these actions in a number of ways, such as “stopped doing stupid stuff that made [him/her] upset” or “thought about it [the trouble] in a different way”.⁴⁰ When confronted with an accusation of

wrongdoing or a suggestion about how to correct troubling behavior, the first response youth attempt often is a *friendly denial* through which they quietly and calmly profess ignorance and surprise about a situation and/or explicitly claim a lack of responsibility for trouble.⁴¹ What may follow next is an attempt to *deflect* trouble by drawing attention away from actual or potential trouble with the use of a smile, humor, or verbal pretense, sometimes referring to this tactic as, “changing the subject,” “making a joke” or “laughing a bit”. Although not always emergent in a fashion, in the aftermath or amidst denials and deflections, youth may *move to a back-stage* either to reflect on or rehearse for further proceedings, or to have a more private footing on which to deal with troubling parties. Youth would sometimes refer to these practices as “moving the party” or “getting’ off the quad” (pointing to the particularly public gaze that occurs in the heart of the campus “downtown”). Other attempts to “work out” trouble can involve *apologies* through which youth ask for forgiveness from another party with regret the trouble that has occurred – even though it may be unclear who is at “fault” – and seek to recover or sustain a potentially imperiled relationship.⁴² “Chillin’” also can involve dyadic *storytelling* by multiple sides to trouble, such as when youth share aspects of their biographies to reconcile miscommunication and misunderstandings. These stories may recount experiences in families, schools, workplaces, or neighborhoods, but nearly always involve signaling the meaning of one’s identity and its various emotional connections while building identity with the other student who is party to the trouble. Youth sometimes refer to this action as “talking ‘bout where I come from” or “who my family is”. Such storytelling provides the basis for *verbal* or *nonverbal empathy* through which youth signal their recognition of the emotional state of another and validate their personhood or identity. At any point during their handling of trouble, youth may engage in *temporary avoidance* by withdrawing interactionally and/or spatially from a

troublesome situation or person for a limited period of time (“getting out of there for a while”).⁴³ In some long-term trouble cases, youth *exit* completely from a situation or a relationship, sometimes referred to by youth as a “bad breakup” in the context of a romantic relationship, or by leaving school permanently.

Other forms of “chillin’” can involve youth or adults not initially involved in a troublesome situation, such as when a youth uses friends as *third-party sounding-boards* to vent their frustration, annoyance, surprise, or confusion, seeking advice on how to correct the situation. Youth refer to this action as “talking with friends” who are uninvolved. When youth respond by calling in a third-party for a talk, they are seeking a kind of non-directed therapy in which the troubled party expects complete privacy (“goin’ confidential”) and does not want any direct intervention by their friends into the matter. Direct intervention or confidentiality breakdowns under these circumstances can themselves cause trouble. Under other circumstances, third parties involved in “chillin’” engage in direct intervention if they provide *third-party friendly support* or *peacemaking*.⁴⁴ Unlike the sounding-board role, these third-party roles often require split-second decisions at the point of trouble. Friendly supporters aid in “chillin’” by, for example, helping to deflect trouble through a humorous aside, a story that casts the troubled party in a positive light, or by facilitating the troubled party leaving a troublesome situation (while saving face) due to some unrelated prior obligation. Third-party peacemakers can be peers or adults, and operate in similar ways as friendly supporters but without partisan allegiance to one side or another. When adult staff members – often teachers or security guards – act as third-party peacemakers among youth, they straddle the line between invoking official authority and relying solely on their informal standing as responsive to youth concerns – as being youth-centered. For those youth-centered teachers, a Mrs. Robinson or Mr. Rupp for instance, their

capacity to invoke official authority in managing conflict among youth peers plays less of a role than their moral authority as adults in whom youth trust and respect. Although youth may test that trust in the heat of the moment, the credibility of such teachers always operates as an orienting benchmark for interaction with youth.

To “educate” a peer requires that youth directly engage the source of trouble and walk a fine line between escalating trouble to open conflict and “working it out”. Among youth at Cotton River High, apologies also entail direct social interaction between troubled and troublesome parties, but the focus is on forgiveness, sometimes even occluding the character of the trouble in question. By contrast, “educating” involves multiple overlapping moments in responding to trouble has attributes of the sociolegal dispute transformation model discussed in chapter one. The first moment involves the identification (“naming”) of trouble, including dissecting its sources and associated feelings. In a second moment, youth will voice their complaint to those they deem responsible (“claiming” and “blaming”).⁴⁵ Among youth, as we will see later in this chapter and in subsequent chapters, these moments do not necessarily unfold in the linear manner of the dispute transformation model. Youth can circle around a situation interactionally, attempting to discern what is definitively trouble or merely an unfortunate occurrence without a responsible party (e.g., as in the blurring of trouble and not-trouble found in interpersonal “drama”). If youth identify what they believe to be a source of trouble, their attempts at “educating” may be muted at first and only over time develop into direct complaints to a troubling party with associated encouragement to make constructive changes to ameliorate or end the trouble (*complaint making and correction*).⁴⁶ As noted earlier, the typical response to such actions is likely a denial as illustrated by the following statements in an interview about peer trouble with a male junior: “I was in this group project once and this girl said I was acting

all like I knew everything. Huh? Me? What was that about? I tried to be nice about it, but inside I was a little pissed.” Coupled with denials (if the issue is pressed by the troubled party) or when such denials fail, youth may respond to attempts at “educating” via *active compliance* (“getting with the program”) as they try to correct the troubling behavior identified by their peer in some meaningful way. In an interview about peer trouble on campus, Leteisha, an African American junior, recounted that: “Last year, a friend wanted me to stop partying with some people that was doing some serious drugs and such. She said I was changing. We talked it out. Let’s just say she was right. My grades were really bad at the time. I stopped partying with them and got with the program.”

Among youth and adults, “educating” also involves complaint making and correction, nearly always delivered by adults to students. For adults, “educating” can involve brief interactions, such as when Mrs. Rios, a math teacher, sat down next to a student who was reading and then thinking out loud about how to solve a math problem in class, and whispered, “Work out the problem on paper without speaking. It disrupts the other students’ thinking.” More often, “educating” veers into explicit adult concerns about both youth understandings of basic socialization into the norms of civility. In such instances, adults invoke a breached norm that “everybody knows” and tells the student involved how to correct their behavior. Mr. Jacobs, a P.E. teacher, puts it like this in an interview in response to a question about how he deals with trouble in his classroom: “You can tell a kid not to fight or get into trouble on campus. But kids need to be educated on how to treat other people. They don’t know the norms of good behavior, especially when they are just coming out of middle school.”

Moralistic Trouble Responses. Moralistic trouble responses mark a second cluster of informal control actions among Cotton River High youth.⁴⁷ Youth refer to this cluster in

multiple ways, talking about how one must “put ‘em in their place,” “take ‘em out” or “teach them a lesson they’ll never forget”. In each of these phrasings, a troubled party typically takes an accusatory tone with regard to troublesome peers. Unlike “workin’ it out,” when youth “put ‘em in their place” they do so with a sense that a troublesome peer or situation has, as one Latina junior put it, “crossed the line” through the commission of intentional harm or wrongdoing that definitively breaches a normative boundary. Operating within the “workin’ it out” cluster, the normative boundaries of trouble may be blurry or hazily operating in the background (consonant with some youth usages of “drama”), but they operate in the foreground when youth attempt to “put” a peer “in their place” (as in youth usages of “beef”). Moralistic actions to trouble reinforce or redraw particular moral boundaries among youth, leaving peers on different sides of these divides. As one Latina junior put it, “you get the good and the bad”.⁴⁸ Such boundaries only rarely diffuse beyond the immediate parties involved to a normative breach backed by groups of youth seeking to establish a peer hierarchy. The emotional patterns associated with “puttin’ ‘em in their place” also run hotter than when youth are “working it out” as peers on either or both sides of a trouble issue express humiliation, extreme anger, indignation, and contempt in being “totally pissed,” or “super-embarrassed”. This cluster thus departs from the dominant sense of Cotton River High as “a school that works” by undermining trust and its associated emotional linkages by, as one female Anglo senior put, “ratcheting up feelings in a bad way”. Multiple sub-clusters of trouble responses constitute “puttin’ em in their place”: Some of these involve hostile confrontation (what youth call, “beat downs”) and others involve hostile, covert action (“goin’ undercover,” in local youth parlance).

“Beat downs” resonate with code-of-the-street actions that accompany defenses of honor and reputation. In such dynamics, trouble responses project stereotypical images of masculinity

(mastery) by both boys and girls as they attempt to establish, in their words, their “reps” as “tough” or “bad ass”. At Cotton River High, youth most often administer a “beat down” without physical violence. Via *hostile accusations*, youth pinpoint in unfiltered ways a peer’s transgressions, sometimes laced with profanity and an uncomplimentary moniker, as in these examples from observations on the quad: “You been messin’ ‘round with my stuff, asshole!” or “You a skoochie” [a girl who sleeps around or in youth parlance, a “whore”]. Although denials of wrongdoing and responsibility can be delivered good naturedly in the face of hostile accusations, youth also meet them in kind with *hostile denials* that signal the accuser has crossed a metaphorical line in the sand as in this phrase observed on the quad during lunch in response to an aggressive accusation of cheating with the troubled party’s girlfriend, “I din’t do nothin’ with her asshole!” *Verbal threats* involve confrontations in which youth promise to inflict some physical or psychological pain, usually accompanied by a derogatory or profane label, as these verbal threats from youth stories illustrate: “I’m gonna whip his pussy ass!” or “He gonna get a beat down”. *Nonverbal threats* involve subtle manipulations of the body that in context are unmistakable in their intended menace: the long stare or sneer, putting one’s body in a coiled position as if ready to pounce, or by making a fist by one’s side as if ready to strike.

Physical “beat downs” occur rarely on campus, although 9th graders (as illustrated earlier in the chapter) write about them regularly as we demonstrate and discuss in the next section. The most common physical hostility among peers involves *physical jostling* or what youth call, “pushing” or “bumping”. “Pushing” occurs with the hands and unmistakably signals aggression (as in “Talking”) whereas “bumping” occurs via the upper body often without hands and, under some conditions, such as when youth are in a crowded line outside the snack shack or cafeteria, can be mistaken as unintentional. As one Anglo male sophomore notes, “If you gonna push

someone, you laying your hands on them”. *Physical fighting* (“kickin’ ass”) on campus takes one of two forms. One form involves aggressive wrestling among either boys or girls (we did not witness girl-boy wrestling) with few blows. In wrestling, injuries can occur if one or both of the protagonists fall to the ground, have their arms or legs pinned under their bodies, or scratch or rip at each other’s faces or upper body. The second form of physical fighting involves a few quick punches, usually to the face, either followed by wrestling or kicking one principal while they are on the ground. The latter form of fighting often produces the most blood and injuries, especially if someone lands a blow about the mouth or a glancing blow that stretches the scalp. Although we collected stories of youth carrying and having access to knives or guns (in the trunk of a car, for example, or hidden off campus in a nearby neighborhood), or using make-shift weapons (a baseball bat or an empty bottle), we only occasionally encountered the threatened use of weapons on campus. Yet another way “beat downs” occur is through third-party hostile surrogacy. In this action, a friend of a protagonist in a conflict will “jump in” to an altercation, taking an accusatory tone and aggressive stance in the place of the friend, even fighting an antagonist in place of a friend.

When youth engage in covert actions to or exit from a troublesome party or situation, they do so without directly interacting with the source of trouble. Covert actions can involve multiple tactics, including *malicious gossip* (“starting rumors” or “spreading shit” in local parlance) that typically portray the troublesome party as a willful miscreant engaging in egregious behavior. In some instances, the troubled party appears as a central victim in gossip as it circulates through various peer networks while in other cases the troubled party appears only as one of several victims or not at all as the gossip assumes the form of multiple stories underscoring the general deviance of the troublesome party. When gossip takes these turns,

youth refer to it as “drama” but do so without the blurring of victim/transgressor roles common in so many stories that carry the label. Here, one can see the distinction between a trouble issue revolving around gossip and a trouble response in which gossip is a tool of covert action used by the aggrieved party. And, at the same time, the gossip unleashed by the victim can become the basis of new or extended trouble, or *trouble string* that we discuss below.

Hidden transcripts – to borrow from political scientist James Scott – illustrate another kind of covert action to peer trouble. Generally speaking, hidden transcripts involve creating back-stage social spaces in which “dissent to the official transcript of power relations can be voiced” and moral superiority of subordinate groups asserted.⁴⁹ Such voicing draws upon and transforms symbolic forms into micro-political action – a way to respond to trouble in moralistic ways without seeming to do so. Hidden transcripts certainly occur in response to trouble with school authorities, as we note below, but also occur among peer groups, particularly when one group perceives another group to be more dominant in the campus peer hierarchy. As we argued in the previous chapter, compartmentalized fluidity at Cotton River High creates uncertainty about dominance and subordination among peer groups on campus. Among peer groups, only Mexican immigrant youth perceive themselves to be, as Abelena, a Mexicana senior put it, “separated from the rest of the school” and at odds with other Latinos/as with whom they experience social friction and anxiety revolving around competition for cultural and social status. Mexican immigrant youth produce in their notebooks or in the margins of their textbooks multiple types of hidden transcripts aimed directly at Mexican-descent youth that involve cartooning, using various animal or sexual metaphors, or profane statements ornately written in difficult to decipher Spanish (e.g., “¡Chingan a los Chicanos!” [Fuck Chicanos!]). Mexican-immigrant youth also tell in Spanish jokes underscoring their perceptions of Mexican-descent

youth arrogance and lack of authenticity as true “Mexicans”. Here again, because many Mexican-descent youth do not speak Spanish, the language itself hides the moralistic meaning of such actions.

Still other less visible moralistic responses to peer trouble involve covert mobilization of *third-party surrogates* (“getting’ someone to jump in”) in which the troubled party seeks the intervention of an ally to punish a troublesome party through threats or physical violence. In some instances, youth talk about engaging in such actions without the troublesome party “ever knowing what hit them” or with their surrogate “delivering a message that you can’t fuck with me” [the troubled party]. Youth also recount “going undercover” to steal something from a transgressor that the latter values a great deal, typically a gift from a family member, romantic partner, or close friend. Such punitive theft (“takin’ shit they love”) can “hurt” a transgressor in multiple ways through rupturing a positive emotional linkage that an individual has to an object (replacing it with a sense of sadness or anger), the personal violation of his or her space, and what the loss signals or symbolizes with regard to the individual or individuals who gave the item to the person from whom it is stolen (e.g., symbolizes an impugned or broken relational tie).

Rule-Oriented Trouble Responses. A third trouble-response cluster invokes both the rules-on-the-books that youth encounter in the student handbook, on the school website, or in written, official instructions for accomplishing almost anything on campus, and the rules-in-action as teachers, guards, or administrators interpret, create and enforce them.⁵⁰ Youth often reference this cluster of rule-oriented responses with the phrase, “dealing with the system.” Youth view the “system” as both locally produced and tied to broader fields of legality visible on a daily basis by the presence of one or more Cotton River Police officers stationed on campus and the experiences of youth with the local criminal justice system, the school district, or other

legal agencies (e.g., various immigration agencies). From youth perspectives, the “system” operates as a complex web of rules, organizations, and individuals contingent upon who is involved and the trajectory of a particular situation. Trouble involving the “system” comes in many forms, but is captured in a phrase that youth use, “getting jammed up,” which means becoming ensnared in academic, disciplinary, or legal sanctions and constraints. Students who are arrested, for example, “get jammed up” as do students who find out towards the end of their senior year that they are short particular course credits to graduate. With respect to peer interactions, “getting jammed up” refers to the consequences of “system” intervention into peer trouble or conflict in the form of disciplinary sanctions on campus (including on- and off-campus suspensions), the mobilization of parents or guardians to help enforce sanctions, or arrest and/or time in juvenile detention, should the police become involved. Youth who mobilize the “system” to help them handle peer trouble or problems with the system itself (e.g., file a formal grievance in situations of sexual harassment by a teacher or to resist a ruling on their eligibility to attend the school) tell tales of both becoming ensnared in the “system” and the “system working for them”. These complexities also appear in the emotional linkages that are associated with actions constituting this cluster, ranging from connections of fear and anxiety with regard to “getting jammed up” and its consequences, to emotional ties that speak to the respect and investment many students feel toward Cotton River High teachers and some of the security guards, who as one Mexican-descent senior put it, “look after us”.

Youth invoke a series overlapping phrases to describe “dealing with the system”. When youth “play by the rules,” they either habitually or actively comply with the normative parameters of a particular set of rules or procedures. *Habitual compliance* involves relatively unreflective action, such as simply sitting quietly with a notebook at the ready in a classroom as

a teacher begins class. In this sense, habitual compliance has less to do with trouble or emotion than any of the other actions thus far discussed, for youth engaging in habitual compliance typically ignore or do not recognize actions that other youth view as trouble. *Active compliance*, by contrast, involves youth engaging in reflective, conscious action to conform or facilitate the conformity of peers to sets of rules and adult directives. The most poignant example along these lines involves youth who aid teachers in gaining control of a classroom in the wake of peer disruptions. In some of these instances, some youth refer to active compliers as “ass kissers,” especially if they are involved in signaling (“ratting out”) to a teacher or security guard peers who commit minor rule infractions (e.g., “Mrs. Roy, Renaldo’s eating a piece of fruit” when the teacher forbids it in the classroom) and become known as “snitches”. In both kinds of actions, youth, to borrow from sociologists Patricia Ewick and Susan Silbey, stand “before” the rules (and the legality that informs them), yet in very different ways.⁵¹ In habitual compliance, youth experience the rules as inevitable in the same, non-rational way that taking a breath without thinking or duress is “natural”. Situations of active compliance interrupt that inevitability and create contingency, if not uncertainty and anxiety among both youth and adults. The rules do not appear as natural phenomena formed in some autonomous realm by adults and then delivered whole cloth to youth. Rather, they come in piecemeal fashion, stitched together by youth and adults working together as much as in asymmetrical peer relations.

In many instances, active compliance blends into what youth refer to as “playing the rules”. When youth “play the rules,” they engage the “system” strategically both rationally and non-rationally. They weigh what they believe the consequences of their actions will be against what they expect from the “system” both in terms of their faith and trust in it, and what they fear the “system” might “do” to them. To “play the rules” is to navigate the system as a “game,”

resonant with Ewick and Silbey’s concept of “playing with the law”.⁵² The rules thus bracket the various moves that youth can accomplish but leaves those moves somewhat open ended, similar to the way that the rules of a game (e.g., basketball or chess) bracket the actions that players are allowed to make while still leaving room for innovation. To “play the rules” is to find something in the “system” for one’s self, to use the rules as both a tool and a strategic site for action. When youth “play the rules,” they don’t necessarily break rules or misrepresent their own behavior or goals. Instead, they ask questions, use information, or assemble facts in ways that enables them to achieve a particular goal (e.g., graduate on time, attend Cotton River despite living outside its catchment area, or avoid being suspended or expelled from school). Such navigation is often facilitated via *third-party adult support* either mobilized by youth or initiated by adults who provide advice, vouch for a youth’s credibility, or operate as a representative to talk about a situation to higher authorities. Such support can also occur covertly with respect to managing peer trouble as when one peer “sets up” another to take the fall for initiating a fight or overtly such as when students turn to guards or teachers to help protect them or settle a peer dispute. In such instances, adults may act as *third-party disciplinarians*.

Cotton River High students also talk about “getting played by the rules” when they discuss unilateral disciplinary-based trouble (e.g., “throwing the book at me for cheating”), third-party settlement of peer disputes by adults (e.g., “the guard broke up the fight and sent me to ISS [In-school Suspension]”) or surveillance (e.g., “that teacher’s always watching us, waiting for us to fuck up”). In this phrasing, youth attribute agency to both adults directly and the system collectively, although when pressed, youth make distinctions between the role of teachers and guards – adults who mix with youth on a daily basis – and administrators, who students perceive as more distant and inscrutable in their decision-making and behavior.

Finally, youth, in their words, “play against the system,” as they attempt to *resist* or *subvert* both the official authority of adults on campus and their peers who assume governance roles in student organizations, especially the student council. As with resistance to authority across multiple types of organizations, mass mobilizations rarely occur on campus and almost always seemingly in reaction to dramatic policy shifts or threats to the school as a whole, such as in the late 1980s or in the early 2000s when students attempted to mobilize against the administration’s turn to a “safe schools” disciplinary regime.⁵³ On an everyday basis, resistance more commonly occurs via students acting either alone or in tacit coordination with each other as they defy authority by refusing to comply with an adult’s directions or via less visible actions that are difficult for adults to discern as challenges to their authority. In these efforts, youth take advantage of the situation at hand, turning their knowledge of formal procedure into resources to sabotage classroom procedures, for example, implemented by teachers perceived as “hardasses” or “unfair”.⁵⁴ Youth turn to hidden transcripts in the form of pantomimes and imitations, jokes, cartoons, and profane writings in notebooks to tacitly express grievances against adult staff and, in some instances youth who hold positions of authority at the school. Some adults on campus ascribe “playing against the system” to immaturity among youth (e.g., “they should grow up”) or character flaws (“they’re making trouble because they’re lazy”). Yet other adults see resistance as an outgrowth of programs on campus that “don’t work” and need to be modified in some way, such as ESL tracking (at least as structured at Cotton River High in the 1990s and early 2000s), which teachers and administrators came to see by the late 2000s as a potential source of social conflict on campus by hindering the interaction of non-English speakers (especially Mexican-immigrant youth) with the rest of the student population. Youth likewise attribute some youth resistance to immaturity and character flaws, although are more likely to view it as a reaction to a

flaw or injustice in the “system”. What is interesting about “playing against the system” is that most youth personalize their resistance by pointing out in accounts that they target particular staff members or rules and procedures that they deem unjust. Only in the case of ethnoracial trouble do youth target their resistance at either what they deem to be systemic racism or discrimination by larger groups of peers (e.g., in the context of Mexican-descent and Mexican-immigrant youth) whose dominance is facilitated either implicitly or explicitly by the “system”. With this inventory of conciliatory-remedial, moralistic, and rule-oriented trouble responses in mind, we turn to patterns of their deployment as reported in their stories and observed in their actions of the trouble cases.

Image and Action in Trouble Responses

Figure 4.2 represents a comparison of the prevalence of trouble response clusters in stories and cases.⁵⁵ In the stories, 62% of the actions written about take moralistic directions, 20% involve conciliatory-remedial responses and the rest refer explicitly to formal school or legal authority. These written accounts echo many of the images resonant with the code of the street as youth recount about aggressive responses to both “drama” and “beefs,” citing the significance of “standing [one’s] ground” and “not backing down”. By contrast, 48% of the actions in the observed cases involve conciliatory-remedial responses, 31% take moralistic directions, and 21% invoke school or legal authority of some kind. The disjuncture between trouble responses represented in the stories compared to observed cases holds when examining trouble issues, ethnoracial identity, or sex differences.⁵⁶ Indeed, our observations underscore the campus as largely bereft of physical violence. We observed ten fights on campus during this three-year period with all but one involving dyads (three pairs of girls and six pairs of boys) and only two of which implicated neighborhood and peer group identities.⁵⁷ The number of fights

we observed on campus during this period also comports with official Cotton River school district statistics. In this three-year stretch, Cotton River High experienced the lowest rate of “on campus serious incidents” in the district at three per year.⁵⁸ The second-oldest high school in the district, Eastern High (a school well-known by youth as a campus rife with neighborhood, gang, and family rivalries) experienced the highest rate at 48 per year with the other three high schools in the district (including one enrolling largely middle- and upper-income students) ranging between 13 and 20 incidents per year.⁵⁹ Both the number of physical fights we observed and the official number of incidents on the Cotton River High campus compare favorably to national statistics during the same period, which report seven serious violent incidents per 1000 students per year on U.S. high school campuses.⁶⁰

FIGURE 4.2 ABOUT HERE

What is perhaps more revealing for sorting out the differences between how youth imagine and actually act on peer trouble can be found in figure 4.3, which represents several striking differences in how 9th and 12th graders imagine handling of peer trouble in their stories even as both tend to focus on single episodes, recounting one or two responses to trouble.⁶¹ Sixty-six percent of trouble responses in the 9th grade stories take a moralistic tone compared to 20% in the 12th grade stories. The reverse occurs with respect to conciliatory-remedial actions: 57% of trouble responses in 12th grade stories involve conciliatory-remedial responses compared to 17% in the 9th grade stories. Twelfth graders also write a bit more about their adventures with “the system” than do 9th graders: 23% of the trouble responses in 12th grade stories involve aspects of official authority compared to 17% in 9th grade stories. These patterns, coupled with

the large proportion of the stories in the analyses written by 9th (n = 497) compared to 12th graders (n = 48) may account for the overall skewing of stories in the direction of moralistic trouble responses.⁶² Moreover, 73 of the 94 observed cases involve 11th and 12th graders, and three-quarters of the 53 moralistic actions in those cases involve 9th or 10th graders. The age distribution for conciliatory-remedial actions in the cases is not quite so dramatic with 61% of the 79 conciliatory-remedial actions involving juniors and seniors.⁶³

FIGURE 4.3 ABOUT HERE

These findings indicate, as has previous research, that the transition from middle to high school is fraught with challenges for youth as they face considerable physiological, psychological, social, and institutional change.⁶⁴ A key challenge in this transition involves the management of peer relations of which handling trouble is no small part. 9th-grade students look toward their own and peer experiences in middle school and in their neighborhoods, as well as to broader media and cultural influences for clues on how to conduct peer relations. As such, the 9th grade stories echo to some degree these images, recapitulating their anxieties and instantiations of social distrust in focused, narrow incidents. 9th graders also look toward their older peers – youth who enjoy the immediate credibility of having come from many of the same neighborhoods and have experience negotiating the same school campus. Academic classes and sports teams largely segregate youth by age, although younger peers do experience some mixing with older peers in these and other extra-curricular activities. Access to older youth is facilitated by family ties as many entering students have older siblings who attend the school. Although peer-drawn age divisions certainly exist, we encountered multiple situations in which older youth

included younger peers in some of their small groups. The motivation for this appeared to be a sense of responsibility felt by older youth to socialize younger youth into the ways of the campus, to make sure, as one Chicano senior put it, that “kids coming in know how things are done at [Cotton River High]. Compartmentalized fluidity also plays a role in these dynamics as it creates numerous opportunities for young people to see how older students navigate the relational and spatial fluidity on campus. These processes relate to what sociologist David Harding calls, “cross-cohort” socialization,⁶⁵ which can be seen in these representative excerpts from the interview with Paul and from an interview with a Mexican-descent senior, Maria (conducted by Cindy Bejarano), about how they learned to handle interpersonal trouble on campus:

Jerlyn: How do youth deal with situations on campus where people aren’t getting along?

Paul: Different ways, you know. When I was just coming into the school, you know, I would be thinkin’ about kickin’ ass. Now, I don’t do that. No fighting, you know? I’ll just let it slide. Or talk it out. They ain’t a lot who’ll get into it, you know. Everybody know. We all chillin’, you know.

Jerlyn: How did you learn to do that?

Paul: You watch older kids. How they handle themselves. You now, I hang out with older guys sometimes. You can do that here. They tell me cut that fightin’ shit out; educate me on that. They grew up with me in [his neighborhood] and they almost ready to graduate. They know what’s up, you know.

Cindy: How do youth deal with situations on campus where people aren't getting along?

Maria: That depends.

Cindy: Depends on what?

Maria: Like, 9th graders are more likely to get into it here, fight. Now, I'm not going to let someone rope me into that crap. I have a friend who's a senior at [Eastern High] and there's a lot of fighting there even with seniors. You really gotta watch your back. By the time you're a junior or senior here, you know better. You try to work it out. It's safe here. I wish my friend could transfer here. She'd do better here.

Cindy: How did you learn to handle trouble without fighting? Did anyone tell you not to do that?

Maria: I don't think anyone told me. I guess I watch older students sometimes. Sometimes I would get to know them in an activity [she is in various student clubs]. I would eat my lunch sometimes by lockers in a building when it was hot outside and after a while the older girls, they ate their lunch in the same hall, they talk with me and my friends when we were freshmen. I didn't ask them what was up. I guess I listened. I kinda learned it on my own.

Paul's account explicitly parallels the findings from the youth-authored trouble cases as he recounts his own inclinations while a 9th grader to handle peer trouble aggressively by "kickin' ass". He points to how his thinking has changed to the point as a senior, he either tolerates ("let

it slide”) or interacts with a troublesome party to “talk it out”. Paul also points to peer expectations about trouble grounded in social trust; how youth do not expect to “get into it” (escalate trouble to the point of open conflict) because they’re “chillin’” (another use of the term that denotes youth relating to each other peacefully). With regard to older generations, Paul signals their importance in socializing (“educate”) younger generations into the school culture and to the credibility these youth carry given they live in the same neighborhoods and are making their way towards graduation. These processes parallel our historical evidence from the 1970s (recounted in chapter two) of cross-cohort socialization as older youth attempted to shield the campus from incursions of neighborhood- and gang-based conflict. Mary’s account resonates with Paul’s sentiments and offers both a cross-cohort socialization and comparative spin. She points out that older students on campus “know better” than to handle interpersonal conflict in hostile ways, contrasting her experiences at Cotton River High to her friend’s at neighboring Eastern High where “there’s a lot of fighting...even with seniors”. As with many students we talked with who had friends at other schools in the district, Mary points out that her campus is “safe,” even hoping that her friend could “transfer” to Cotton River High. Mary recognizes how older students model trouble handling as she talks about a small group of older students she and a friend joined during their first year on campus. She also demonstrates her sense of independence by asserting that she learned how to “work out” trouble “on her own”. Mary and Paul’s comments thus suggest, as do the patterns in the stories and observed cases, that the repertoire of trouble responses among students narrows the longer they are at CRHS: Over time, youth draw more on the conciliatory-remedial cluster to handle peer trouble, a bit more on “the system,” and largely sidestep moralistic responses.

Trouble Strings: Working Things Out across Time, Place, and Ties

Until now, we have treated trouble responses as relatively discrete analytic units in order to understand their association with individual youth attributes. Both trouble stories and cases, however, underscore the interactional processes through which youth tie together different trouble responses to make sense of and act on trouble.⁶⁶ At the heart of each story and case is a sequence of contingent actions, which we earlier identified as a trouble string.⁶⁷ From this vantage point, each trouble response in a story or case is not a disembodied action unconnected to other responses but unfolds within a flow of action within and across relationships, geographic space and time. To illustrate what we mean by a trouble string, consider the sequences of trouble responses that comprise the two examples with which we began this chapter, “Started Talking” and “Going off the Breezeway”.⁶⁸ The string from each example is particularly rich, offering a sense of the micro-dynamics that comprise interactional sequences for handling trouble and how trouble responses unfold over time and space. We represent each trouble response as a conciliatory-remedial (CR), moralistic (M), or rule-oriented (RO) interaction. In addition, we note when particular responses involve spatial moves (S) and whether adults (AT) or youth (YT) intervene into conflict as third parties:

Trouble String for “Started Talking”

M → M → CR → (S)M → M → CR → (YT)CR → CR → CR → (S)CR

Trouble String for “Going off the Breezeway”

M → CR → CR → M → CR → M → M → (S)CR → (AT)CR → (AT)CR → (S)CR → CR → CR

The author in “Talking” recounts ten responses over a multiday period while in “Breezeway” Morrill records thirteen in a forty-five minute period. Both of these strings accent conciliatory-remedial responses with six in “Talking” and nine in “Breezeway”. In each string, conciliatory-remedial responses interrupt moralistic responses as trouble begins escalating and

then forms into a run of consecutive conciliatory-responses. This run involves third-parties as acquaintances of principals act as friendly peacemakers in “Talking” and an adult intervenes first as a friendly peacemaker and then as a supportive monitor in “Breezeway.” The spatial and temporal aspects of each string are also apparent as “Talking” involves a move from off-campus to on-campus early in the string and then a move from the quad in “downtown” to a back-stage in the “refuge” towards the end of the string. In “Talking, the spatial moves occur once in the middle of the string as the principals move their troubles off the quad to the “refuge” and then towards the end of the string as they move to the “fields”. The presence of meaningful personal relationships the opportunities to find spaces where youth can more easily constitute back-stages out of the public gaze of their peers, and their capacity to invest time into handling their situations help sustain conciliatory-remedial efforts and constrain the trouble strings from developing in either moralistic or rule-oriented directions.

An examination of the observed cases from a trouble string perspective reveals that some strings carry greater potential for alternative pathways of action and the transformation of meaning, while others seem to unfold in path-dependent fashions through which earlier moves in the string tightly constrain later moves. “Talking” and “Breezeway,” for example, comprise trouble strings that build toward conciliatory-remedial path dependencies. Moreover, some strings unfold linearly toward some sort of resolution (again illustrated by “Talking” and “Breezeway”) while others cycle back and forth through multiple types of trouble responses without a definitive resolution. In the aggregate, 52 out of our 94 observed cases contain trouble strings with a predominance (modal number) of conciliatory-remedial responses, averaging 4 plus responses (nodes) per string with better than two geographic moves across different campus areas.⁶⁹ Seventeen observed cases contain trouble strings in which rule-oriented responses

predominate, averaging nearly 3 responses with less than one geographic move per string. In thirteen strings, moralistic trouble responses predominate, averaging a little over 2 responses with less than one geographic move per string. A dozen multi-modal strings average 4 plus responses per string: Nine are bi-modal with combinations of moralistic/conciliatory-remedial, moralistic/rule-oriented, and conciliatory-remedial/rule-oriented responses; one trouble string is tri-modal. Conciliatory-remedial and multi-modal trouble strings reveal the persistence, if not the patience, of youth to work things out as they steer interactions across multiple spatial moves and kinds of interactions. With some exceptions, the relative brevity of trouble strings that take moralistic directions suggests that such responses find little interactional traction as they unfold in aggressive bursts. Rule-oriented responses typically involve unilateral adult interventions by teachers and security personnel into youth trouble, which in many cases abruptly stops peer trouble by separating the principals.

Trouble strings also differ in terms of how much they rely on a particular response or a variety of response strategies. Among the 52 conciliatory-remedial dominant strings, 36 contain only conciliatory-remedial responses. In these strings, youth focus on multiple ways of “working it out” with peers, often interacting again and again with a troubling party (or friends) to figure out and handle whatever trouble they are experiencing. Of the remaining sixteen conciliatory-remedial dominant strings, thirteen include moralistic responses (illustrated by “Breezeway”), two contain rule-oriented responses, and two contain all three clusters of responses (conciliatory-remedial, moralistic, and rule-oriented). In six of these thirteen, conciliatory-responses trump earlier moralistic actions. This means that when youth attempt to deal with peer trouble on campus via conciliatory-remedial responses, their efforts rarely unravel or escalate in moralistic directions. And when they do escalate, youth still attempt to punctuate

moralistic dominant strings with reconciliation (as suggested by both “Talking” and “Breezeway”). The pattern is quite different in rule-oriented trouble strings in which adults often act unilaterally to intervene into peer trouble or situations and trouble handling rarely steers back into youth hands.⁷⁰

These patterns compare in interesting ways to sociologist Robert Emerson’s findings of peer trouble responses by college roommates to each other – an older and more educated set of youth who may also have important social class differences relative to Cotton River High students. Emerson found that roommates – who are often bound in temporally finite relationships at least for a year or semester – feel an “obligation” to try to reconcile trouble and turn as a last resort to moralistic actions or formal authority (e.g., complaining to a residence hall counselor or even calling the police). When roommates resort to moralistic responses, such as punitive acts intended to harm or inconvenience a roommate, or formal authority, these approaches usually end a long, drawn out dispute with either behavioral changes or exit from the relationship by a roommate. Like the college roommates that Emerson studied, Cotton River students most often engage in a series of multiple conciliatory-remedial actions, but contrary to Emerson’s findings tend to attempt reconciliation even after they engage in moralistic actions. They also engage in shorter trouble strings when rule-oriented responses are involved. The differences between Emerson’s findings and our findings at Cotton River High may lie in the differential social trust among college roommates compared to students at Cotton River High. Although college roommates may feel obligated to try “working things out,” their relationships are grounded in shorter-term or shallower legalistic or bureaucratic footings (e.g., they were assigned as roommates), which generate relational obligations only up to a point. Once youth at Cotton River High move down a conciliatory path to handle peer trouble, their early efforts exert

metaphorical gravitational pull on subsequent actions and tie into the underlying campus ethos of social trust that pushes away from both moralistic or rule-oriented responses (except in some instances). At the same time, rule-oriented responses also exert a pull and appear to quickly end strings with the involvement of school staff and/or the campus safety officer that obviates the autonomous involvement of youth.

The composition and timing of different responses within trouble strings also are contingent upon relational and spatial contexts. Overall, strings that surface and stay in “downtown” tend to be shorter (averaging under 3 responses per string) compared to those that move (averaging a little over 4 responses). Forty-three of the 52 conciliatory-remedial dominant strings involve troubled parties with strong ties to each other and with supporters who become involved, however marginally, with handling the trouble. Of these 43 strings, 31 surfaced in “downtown” and moved from there to either the “refuge” and/or the “fields” while five that surfaced in either the “refuge” or the “fields” moved either between those areas or off campus. Of the remaining eleven conciliatory-remedial dominant trouble strings, six involve troubled parties without strong ties to each other, but strong ties to friends who played major roles in both moderating the trouble before it escalated to open conflict by joining in the interactions between the principals and helping them move their troubles to areas on campus away from the “downtown” staging area. The remaining five strings involve weakly-tied principals who engaged in multiple conciliatory responses only after moralistic responses; in effect, they built relationships through trouble handling rather than enjoying pre-existing social connections.

By contrast, of the 30 trouble strings that contain predominantly moralistic or rule-oriented responses to trouble, 17 unfolded among weakly-tied youth without discernible influence from other friends with 11 of these strings surfacing in “downtown” and the other six

strings surfacing in other parts of the campus. Of the strings that surfaced in “downtown,” all but one stayed in “downtown” and of those that surfaced in other areas of the campus, all but two eventually moved to “downtown”.⁷¹

Where and how trouble routinely surfaces and travels forms regular spatial patterns across campus geography as represented in figure 4.4. Although trouble can begin in a variety of areas around campus, there are some places on campus, denoted by triangles in figure 4.4., where trouble surfaces most often and more dramatically. Not surprisingly, trouble most often emerges: (1) in “downtown” on the quad or in the cafeteria (55 of the trouble strings begin there), (2) in particular classroom buildings, especially “L” and “F” (which do not have classroom “sanctuaries”), (3) outside the gymnasium (“G” building) where multiple youth congregate especially after 9th grade P.E classes, and (4) on both parking lots in the half hour just before or after school. The geographic routes taken by trouble strings are contingent upon the sequences of actions taken to handle trouble. Like well-worn trade routes, strings that contain a predominance of conciliatory-remedial efforts tend to unfold from “downtown” up the main breezeway to the grassy areas between “J,” “K,” “L,” and “M” buildings, also moving into classroom buildings where there are “safe haven” classrooms in “D,” “K,” and “M” buildings. Although some youth engage in conciliatory-remedial responses to trouble on the quad and cafeteria, there is also another route that originates on the quad and extends into the “sanctuary” classrooms in “Q” building – where multiple teachers keep their classrooms open for students during lunch and before and after school.

Moralistic-dominant strings take very different routes, typically either staying in “downtown,” gripped by the pressures and expectations of peer audiences or via attempts by youth move them off campus after school (as indicated by the dashed-line oval around the quad,

open toward both parking lots). Finally, the movement of rule-oriented trouble strings tends to gravitate toward the “B” building where the administration and safety offices are located. When beginning in “downtown,” they move from the quad or parking lots to “B” and when originating from the “refuge” (in the “L” or “F” buildings, or outside the gymnasium), they move first to the parking lots (to avoid the crowded quarters and narrow confines of the main breezeway) where students are typically driven to “B” via one of the golf carts that the security guards use to patrol the campus. Overall, the sociospatial character of trouble strings suggests that conciliatory-remedial strings tend to piggyback on the flow of compartmentalized fluidity as youth make their way to the “refuge” (or “sanctuaries” in “downtown”) to constitute back-stages for more relationally sensitive interactions while both moralistic and rule-oriented trouble strings either stay cabined in the areas where they begin or in the latter case, travel to the physical embodiment of official authority on campus in the “B” building.

FIGURE 4.4 ABOUT HERE

Conclusion

Much of the peer trouble that youth experience at Cotton River High revolves around concerns about dignity and respect bound up in “drama” (involving romantic and friendship ties involving both boys and girls) and “beefs” (involving only boys). Amidst social trust on campus, such issues often do not escalate into group conflict and/or resolution via acts aggression and violence. Cotton River High is a relatively non-violent campus – a claim supported not only by our direct observations, but also official school district data that renders Cotton River High as the safest of the five high schools in its district during the period of our

fieldwork and compares favorably with national data on school violence. Our fieldwork reveals that informal and formal social control on campus is constituted through a repertoire of conciliatory-remedial, moralistic, and rule-oriented actions. In their day-to-day lives at school, Cotton River High students persistently weave together multiple responses to interpersonal trouble that attempt to repair peer relations or at least move trouble both socially and geographically away from conditions that might lead to escalation. Youth play off the sociospatial dynamics of compartmentalized fluidity as they move off the front-stages of campus to areas where they can more easily deal with trouble away from the social pressures of public peer audiences. Adults aid these processes less often via direct intervention than indirectly through the establishment of “sanctuary” classrooms that help instantiate trust youth feel on campus. Although youth generally express trust in school staff, especially teachers and some of the security guards, they also encounter and constitute trouble as they “deal with the system” of formal school authority most often related to disciplinary sanctions, academic problems, and difficulties navigating the school and district bureaucracies.

Our disaggregation of these overall patterns provides a more nuanced view of how youth trouble is handled at Cotton River High. Although ethnoracial discrimination or harassment occurs at Cotton River High (acutely perceived by newly arrived Mexican-immigrant youth with regard to their U.S. born, Mexican-descent peers and by the school administration), youth-authored stories suggest that such problems do not grip the consciousness or fuel the anxieties of most youth on campus. Indeed, incidents of ethnoracial trouble represented in stories appear at much lower rates than in previous studies of urban high schools. Moreover, youth (including Latinos/as) in our observations of daily life on campus do not tend to deal with ethnoracial

conflict via aggressive, moralistic responses, but rather with conciliatory efforts or less often by mobilizing school authority.

Yet, youth entering Cotton River High in the 9th grade decidedly imagine conflict in code-of-the-street terms, which dramatically contrasts both how 12th graders write about their experiences with peer conflict (illustrated in “Talking”) and how youth overall on campus actually manage peer trouble. Some of these discontinuities undoubtedly link to developmental differences between fourteen and fifteen year olds, on the one hand, and seventeen, eighteen, and nineteen olds, on the other. However, previous portraits of urban youth conflict in the context of social distrust typically do not paint such dramatic differences in peer conflict management across these age spans, instead noting the increasing sophistication and deadliness of peer violence (especially tied to weapons and gangs) as young people reach their upper teens and early twenties.⁷² We also note that despite the fact that 9th graders tend to write about peer conflict in moralistic terms the seeds of reconciliation exist in some of the stories, as illustrated by the youth-authored trouble case we presented earlier in the chapter.

Our analysis of trouble strings in the cases reveals that at Cotton River High conciliatory-remedial efforts at dealing with peer trouble appear to carry a momentum of their own that rarely lead to moralistic, aggressive actions (unlike those depicted in the youth-authored example presented earlier in this chapter). How youth handle peer trouble is not, however, without variation across social and geographic space. Youth who are relationally closer to one another tend to be more likely than more socially distant youth to attempt to reconcile their troubles. On the front-stages of “downtown,” especially on the quad, trouble is more likely to surface and be handled via aggressive, moralistic actions that echo code of the street (but without the pre-emptive or place-based violence) than on the back-stages of the “refuge” or the broad expanses

of the “fields”. The exceptions to these patterns occur in certain classroom buildings that do not have “sanctuaries” and where there are unusually high concentrations of 9th graders, such as in front of the gymnasium. At the same time, trouble strings come to have regular routes as youth stay in one area or move about campus to handle trouble: Quick efforts at reconciliation can occur in “downtown,” but typically stretch out in time and space as youth walk their troubles northward up the main breezeway into the “refuge” or less often to the “fields”. The sequences of trouble responses that constitute moralistic-dominant trouble strings tend to be more compact temporally and spatially, staying in “downtown” or occasionally moving off campus. Trouble strings involving rule-oriented responses typically move, both on foot and by security golf cart, to the main administration building in “downtown”. Aside from these findings, our overview of trouble on campus also suggests multiple implications for processual approaches to studying youth trouble, the role of peer groups in youth conflict, and the everyday governance in schools that work.

Scholars have long argued for the importance of examining the social interactional processes that constitute conflict and its management.⁷³ Ethnographers of urban youth conflict have typically adopted this perspective by examining both the social contexts of and the processes through which youth engage in interpersonal violence.⁷⁴ What has been missing from this work is a more complete view of the social interactional and geographic moves that youth make to arrive at, sidestep, or deal with trouble. In this sense, previous research has largely bracketed urban youth conflict *as* violence, often ignoring or eliding other forms of non-violent trouble responses that may precede or accompany peer violence. Trouble strings provide both a conceptual and methodological approach to examine what falls outside these analytic brackets by examining sequences of multiple types of trouble responses as they unfold in context. This

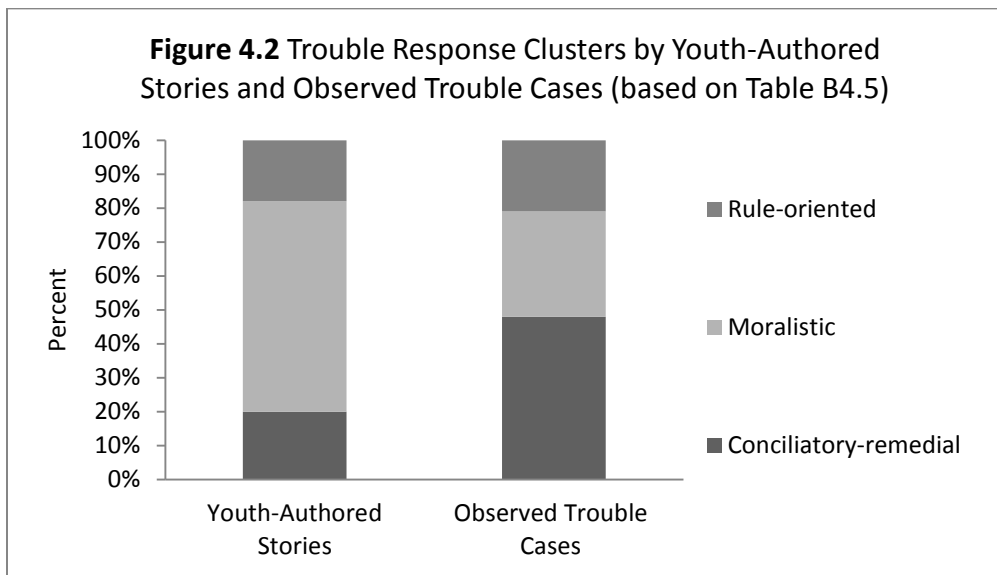
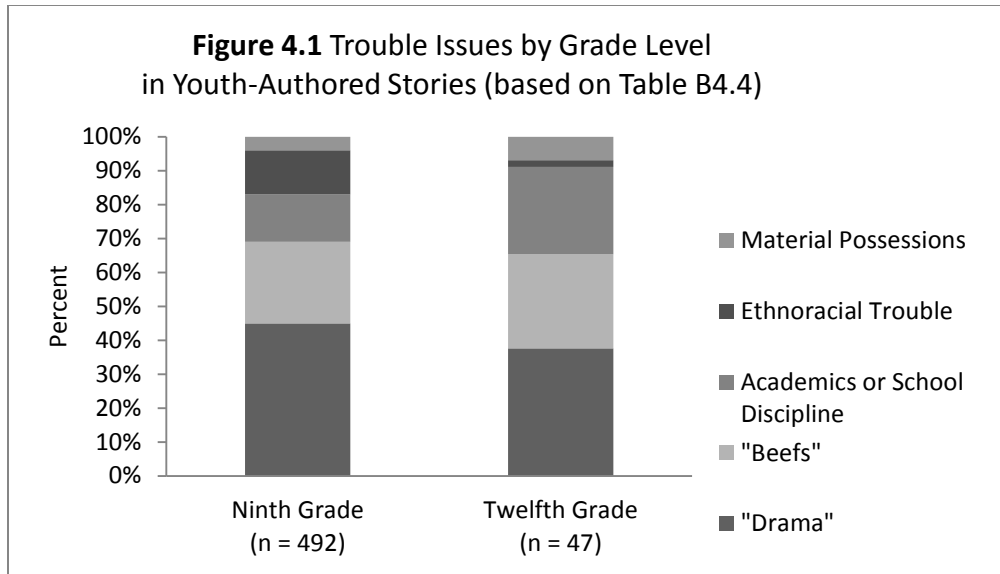
approach, then, takes seriously the emergent character of trouble responses over time and space, including the alternative pathways not taken. At Cotton River High, youth engage in violence only occasionally and in sequences that typically include conciliatory-remedial efforts both before and after violent episodes. Without close examination of peer conflict from the vantage point of a trouble string, *how* such conciliatory actions break down or what they accomplish leading toward or away from aggressive conflict and violence are difficult to discern. Aside from examining how youth handle peer trouble on their own, trouble strings may also enable an examination of the interactional conditions under which youth turn to adult intervention, including law, to handle peer trouble. The character of trouble strings at Cotton River High suggests that youth rarely turn to adults once they have exhausted their conciliatory-remedial efforts but in the midst of them. This pattern may partially be the result of school staff carefully monitoring many youth efforts at handling trouble by ensuring they continue on a conciliatory-remedial pathway, only directly intervening when trouble escalates to open, moralistic and potentially violent conflict. At the same time, the dynamics of peer groups on campus – marked by compartmentalized fluidity – also enable conciliatory-remedial dominant trouble strings.

Researchers in the code-of-the-street tradition argue in poor neighborhoods beset by territorial rivalries peer groups operate both as mechanisms of socialization into youth violence and as a means of protection and victimization.⁷⁵ Within peer groups under conditions of pervasive distrust, members experience pockets of social trust, although always mixed with anxiety and fear about who might be lost to violence in intergroup conflict or to legal authorities through arrest or violence. The ethos of social trust at Cotton River High, together with the daily practices of compartmentalized fluidity, shifts the roles of peer groups on campus. Students sometimes still feel social pressures to perform public identities that echo the code of the street

on the front-stages in “downtown,” and group membership matters (at least in the moment) for how youth respond to peer trouble. But on campus, peer groups do not operate as hard compartments rooted in inviolable territorial boundaries or status hierarchies the crossing of which can lead to collective violence. The practice of compartmentalized fluidity on campus means that peer groups constantly form and reform over time and space so that many youth have multiple places in which to perform identities and make meaningful relational connections. In this way, compartmentalized fluidity facilitates the social embedding of youth not only in particular peer groups at different moments in time and space, but also assuring a place in the overall student population. These actions lead to the development of multicultural navigational skills, which feeds into youth capacities to develop empathy and relational connections in contexts of cultural difference. Peer relationships also facilitate conciliatory-remedial responses to peer trouble by helping move trouble off the front-stages to the back-stages and once there, offer a place where youth can slow down the events to take stock and cool down hot emotional linkages to trouble and troubling parties. To be clear, peer groups can only accomplish these activities in a context where youth and adults operate together to build and sustain social trust. Such trust pervades the campus, but is especially thick in the “refuge” and “Q” building, where teachers hold open their classrooms as “sanctuaries”. The security instantiated in these “sanctuaries” extends beyond them to the hallways and areas immediately adjacent as teachers keep a supportive eye out for trouble.

This last point connects to an implication concerning everyday governance and its relationship to the relative autonomy of schools. At Cotton River High, as we saw in chapter two, being able to get along with and trust diverse peers, as well as adults, is a long-standing source of student identity and pride. These inclinations carry over with regard to how youth

“work out” trouble (aided by a portion of the teachers and at various junctures by the administration) and illustrates what anthropologist Laura Nader calls a “harmony model” of social control: “an emphasis on conciliation, recognition that resolution of conflict is inherently good...[and that] harmonious behavior is more civilized than disputing behavior.”⁷⁶ Harmony models can generate repression such as when colonial regimes or third-party nation states impose reconciliation on warring factions without considering aspects of the local context that might solidify lasting peace.⁷⁷ When harmony models emerge from below, they become a resource for preserving local autonomy. On a daily basis, conciliatory-remedial responses at Cotton River High provide just such a resource, signaling as one African American senior girl put it, how youth “can take care of their own business”. In this way, everyday governance remains largely in the hands of students and teachers, with the mobilization of formal authority and control less visible, thus feeding into the school’s cohesion and constraining the intrusions by external authorities. But what do the nuances of “working it out” in context look like on a daily basis? It is to these dynamics that we turn in the next chapter.



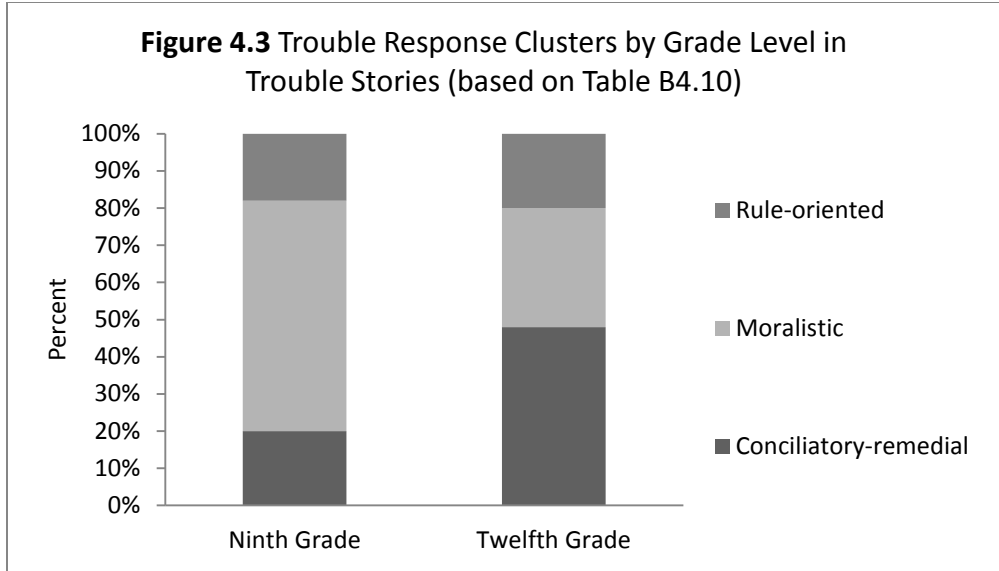


Figure 4.4 Trouble String Routes on Campus

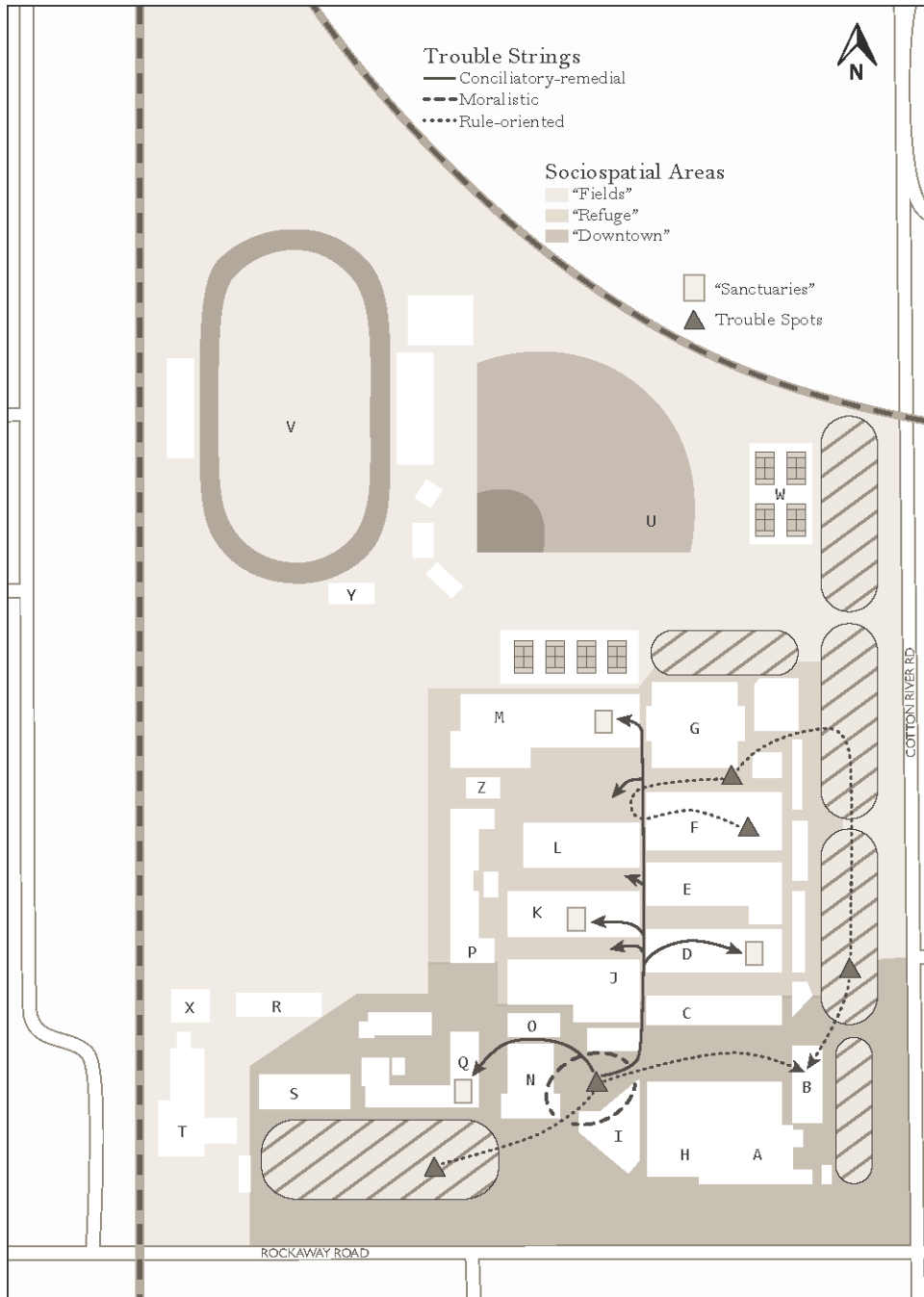


Table 4.1 Youth Trouble Response Clusters

<p>Trouble Response Cluster →</p> <p>Components</p> <p>↓</p>	<p>Conciliatory-Remedial (“Working it out”)</p>	<p>Moralistic (“Puttin’ em in their place”)</p>	<p>Rule Oriented (“Dealing with the system”)</p>
<p>What is the underlying definition of trouble?</p>	<p>Hassle, mistake, bother (e.g. “screwing around”)</p>	<p>Intentional disrespect and violation of dignity (e.g. “crossing the line”)</p>	<p>Becoming ensnared in official disciplinary or academic sanctions and constraints (e.g., “getting jammed up”)</p>
<p>What emotional linkages are typically constituted?</p>	<p>Annoyance, frustration, mild anger (e.g., “upset,” “kinda pissed”)</p>	<p>Humiliation, indignation, extreme anger and fear (e.g., “super-embarrassed,” “totally pissed,” “scared shitless”)</p>	<p>Pride, liking, fear, anxiety, sadness, contempt (e.g., “worried,” “feeling down”)</p>
<p>What trouble responses constitute each cluster?</p>	<p>“Chillin’”: lumping, accommodation, deflection, temporary avoidance, friendly denial, apology, sharing biographies, verbal and nonverbal empathy, moving trouble to a back-stage, exit, complaining to a 3rd party sounding board, 3rd party friendly support, or 3rd party friendly peacemaking</p> <p>“Educating”: complaint making to the troublesome party</p>	<p>“[Giving a] beat down”: verbal and nonverbal threats, physical pushing, physical fighting, hostile accusation, hostile command, hostile denial, 3rd party surrogacy</p> <p>“Goin’ undercover”: malicious gossip, hidden transcript, covert mobilization of 3rd party surrogates, punitive theft</p> <p>“Movin’ on”: banishment</p>	<p>“Playing by the rules”: active and passive compliance</p> <p>“Playing the rules”: overt or covert 3rd party adult support or intervention as disciplinarian</p> <p>“Played by the rules”: subject to discipline, surveillance, 3rd party settlement by adults</p> <p>“Playing against the system”: non-compliance, sabotage, hidden transcript, mass mobilization</p>

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- ¹ Paulle 2003 (see also Devine 1996; Sánchez-Jankowski 2008).
- ² Harding 2010, 101. See also, Devine (1996); Hagan, Shedd, and Payne (2005); Rios (2011); Welch and Payne (2010).
- ³ Per our discussion in chapter one (see also Emerson and Messinger 1977; Emerson 2008), we regard trouble as inclusive of conflict, but with conflict as a mode of trouble when antagonisms escalate toward more public and aggressive modes of action.
- ⁴ Llewellyn and Hoebel (1941/1983, 21) first developed the trouble case approach in their study of dispute settlement among the Cheyenne. They define trouble cases as instances of “hitch, dispute, grievance, trouble...and what was done about it”. The distinction between trouble story and case is not always made in ethnographic studies of trouble. Llewellyn and Hobel (1941/1983), for example, derive all of their trouble cases from stories told to them by participants in their study. Other researchers meld observed and story sources together (Nader 1990; Baumgartner 1988; Morrill 1995). We maintain the distinction between “case” and “story” for analytic purposes in order to examine continuities between account and action. Appendix A contains detailed methodological accounts for both trouble stories and trouble cases.
- ⁵ Emerson and Messinger 1977 (see also, Emerson 2008, 2011; Goffman 1971a, b) first developed the concept of “trouble response”.
- ⁶ Anderson (1999, 179; see also Fagan and Wilkinson 1998) likens the code of the street to the ancient biblical code, “an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth”. Harding (2010) emphasizes the neighborhood and turf character of code-of-the-street peer conflict.
- ⁷ This dynamic is explicitly recounted in Devine (1996).
- ⁸ Emerson 2011, 9. “Trouble” is an umbrella term of which conflict is a part. From our perspective, conflict signals trouble that has escalated to a point when the principal parties explicitly perceive a divergence or incompatibility of interests that is tied to emotional excitation in some visible way (e.g., Felstiner, Abel, and Sarat 1980-1; Morrill 1995; Pruitt and Kim 2004; cf, Morrill and King Thomas 1992).
- ⁹ Fine 2001, 163.
- ¹⁰ The use of “drama” to refer to inter-neighborhood youth rivalries parallels how the inner-city African-American and Latino youth that Harding (2010) studied used the term.
- ¹¹ Pascoe 2012, 7.
- ¹² Marwick and boyd 2011, 2.
- ¹³ Olweus 2011.
- ¹⁴ Marwick and boyd 2011, 5. Such ambiguities can also be seen between Cara and Fay in “Breezeway” before their trouble escalated, and to some degree in the author’s recollection in “Talking” as he denied doing anything other than talking with his antagonist’s sister. Youth references to perceptions of unwanted sexual treatment and/or unfair treatment by peers or adults due to one’s sex and/or sexual identity would often been viewed as a “big” or “messy drama”. This “drama” often would occur without much public knowledge except for those immediately involved. Examples include a situation in which a student believed a teacher treated him unfairly because of his “ambiguous” sexual orientation and a series of incidents that led a female student to file a formal sexual harassment grievance against a teacher who later was fired by the school and banned from teaching in the district.
- ¹⁵ This observation contrasts sharply, for example, Sánchez-Jankowski’s (2008, 321) observation of Los Angeles inner-city high schools: “Changes in the ethnic composition of a neighborhood...influen[ces] the social order of the...local high school. The most common change that resulted in the high schools was the domination of specific locations by each ethnic group. When geographic boundaries were violated, physical fights followed.”
- ¹⁶ One could argue that youth might deny gang involvement to protect themselves and their peers. Our point here is that when adults typically saw gang involvement in peer violence on campus, youth did not. As we note elsewhere, gang members did attend Cotton River High, but all our evidence points away to significant gang involvement, per se, in violence on campus.

- ¹⁷ In the digitally-networked world of contemporary youth, audience consciousness and participation in peer “drama” may be extended far beyond the confines of the physical and temporal boundaries of school, thus magnifying both collective memory and the impact of drama on its participants. We collected much of our data on youth conflict just as networked publics were forming and so focus on face-to-face dynamics of youth trouble, returning to the question of youth conflict in the context of networked publics in our concluding chapter.
- ¹⁸ Harding 2010, 18-19.
- ¹⁹ Bejarano 2005, 132.
- ²⁰ In this sense, system ethnoracial trouble parallels Feagin’s (2006) concept of “systemic racism”.
- ²¹ Rios 2011, 72-3.
- ²² McFarland (2001, 655) notes that at the beginning of school years, a high school classroom is an “uncertain terrain” on which teachers attempt to establish their control such that youth will focus primarily on academics. If that control is not established early on, teachers can face increasing disruptions and may have to use penal tactics to gain back control.
- ²³ For details, see Table B4.1 in Appendix B. We report the overall descriptive statistics across the stories and cases, noting that there are slight differences in the relative percentages of trouble issues across these sources, but they are statistically non-significant above the .10 level.
- ²⁴ These percentages are based on a total of 633 issues, one for each story (n = 539) and case (n = 94).
- ²⁵ Anderson 1999; Garot 2009; and Milner 2003.
- ²⁶ Pinderhughes (1997, 129) cites these figures from the 1990 “Study of High School Students and Educational Staff on Prejudice and Race Relations”.
- ²⁷ Fisher, Wallace, and Fenton 2000, 689. This study is based on a purposive sample of 177 students in an “urban, ethnically diverse” high school with approximately equal distributions of youth self-identifying as African American, Latino/a, of Chinese or Korean heritage, or non-Latino/a white. The School Rights Project (SRP) – a multi-method study of 25 public, private, and charter urban high schools in California, New York, and North Carolina – reports that 37% of the 5,105 student respondents in the survey portion of the research reported ethnoracial discrimination by a teacher (Morrill et al 2010, 671). Youth were not asked about ethnoracial trouble involving peers.
- ²⁸ Ethnoracial differences in the trouble issues that youth wrote about are statistically significant at the .001 level (see Table B4.2 in Appendix B for details). These ethnoracial categories preclude us from representing students who identify as “mixed” or with different Latino/a identifications. In our qualitative data in subsequent chapters, we delve into these important differences. We used these categories at the school’s request so that an evaluation could be conducted of a curriculum on conflict and communication skills based on the youth-authored troubled cases. Musheno worked with a curriculum designer and multiple Cotton River teachers to design the curriculum, which was then evaluated by a team lead by social psychologist William Fabricius (Fabricius et al 19nn). Results from the Fabricius study indicate that youth significantly increased their discussions of alternatives to handling peer conflict after being exposed to the curriculum in freshman English classes. The curriculum was suspended in the early 2000s after the state implemented rigid testing standards.
- ²⁹ Hagan, Shedd and Payne 2005; Welch and Payne 2010.
- ³⁰ Fisher, Wallace, and Fenton (2000, 689) in the ADDI study found that 84% of East Asian youth, 50% of non-Latino/a (white) youth, 47% of Latino/a youth, and 36% of African American reported being “called racially insulting names” by peers in school. In a qualitative study, Rosenbloom and Way (2004) found that a disproportionate number of the Asian youth they interviewed reported ethnoracially-motivated trouble with peers while African American and Latino/a youth reported ethnoracial discrimination by teachers and far less ethnoracial trouble with peers of different ethnoracial groups.
- ³¹ See Table B4.3 in Appendix B for details. Sex differences in the trouble issues that youth wrote about are statistically significant at the .001 level.
- ³² Of the 55 girls who wrote about academics and school discipline, 34 (62%) wrote about academic issues and the rest about disciplinary problems. Of the 24 boys who wrote about disciplinary problems, 18 (75%) wrote about disciplinary problems and the rest academic issues.

- ³³ Grade-level differences in the rates of trouble issues that youth wrote about are statistically significant at .05 level.
- ³⁴ Again, we use caution in interpreting these comparisons given the small numbers of 12th grade narratives.
- ³⁵ Williams and Guerra (2011), for example, demonstrate that self-reported incidences of school-based bullying declines with perceptions that both youth and adults will engage in informal control for the common good (a key dynamic of what they call “collective efficacy”; see also Sampson 2012).
- ³⁶ The underlying logics of conciliatory-remedial and moralistic clusters parallel what Emerson (2011) calls “conflict-resonant” and “deviant-resonant” responses to trouble in interpersonal relationships. While we draw a great deal of analytic insight and guidance from Emerson’s formulation (see also Emerson 2008), we hesitate to refer to conciliatory-remedial responses as “conflict-resonant” because for youth and adults at Cotton River High (if not more generally), conflict carries a sense that pushes toward the moralistic and hostile, which is more akin to a “deviant-resonant” sense of trouble.
- ³⁷ As described here, trouble responses represent in some sense, “ideal types” Weber (1968, 19-22), in that they disaggregate actions apart from the strings of overlapping sequences through which youth (and adults) deal with trouble on campus and which we examine in later in this chapter.
- ³⁸ Emerson 2011, 5; Black 1993. Linguistically, how youth (and adults, when they are involved) talk about “working out” trouble is relationally-oriented in that the focuses on the rupture and repair in interpersonal relationships (see generally, Conley and O’Barr 1990). At a more macro-level, Nader (1990, 2) refers to such orientations to trouble, conflict, and disputing as “harmony ideology,” which we discuss later in the chapter.
- ³⁹ The actions that comprise “chillin’” resonate with findings from prior research about how adults generally attempt to handle trouble in conciliatory and remedial ways (Baumgartner 1988; Black 1984, 1993; Black and Baumgartner 1983; Emerson 2008, 2011; Emerson and Messinger 1977; Felstiner 1974; Goffman 1971a; Morrill 1995).
- ⁴⁰ Emerson (2008, 493) calls this, “self-directed changes”.
- ⁴¹ Emerson 2008, 500; Conley and O’Barr 1998, 84.
- ⁴² On the social functions of apology, see Tavuchis (1993).
- ⁴³ On temporary avoidance, see generally Baumgartner 1988; Felstiner 1974; Morrill 1995.
- ⁴⁴ We draw the concepts of the third-party partisan/supporter and third-party friendly peacemaker from Black and Baumgartner (1983).
- ⁴⁵ In Hirschman’s (1970) formulation, this moment is called voicing and in the dispute transformation model, it is referred to as grievance expression (Felstiner et al 1980-81).
- ⁴⁶ This observation parallels Emerson’s (2008: 486) regarding the remedial functions of interpersonal, dyadic responses to trouble.
- ⁴⁷ Emerson 2011, 5; Black 1993; Morrill 1995.
- ⁴⁸ Lamont 1992, 2002
- ⁴⁹ Scott 1990, xi.
- ⁵⁰ Our phrasing invokes the classic distinction in sociological research between the “law-on-the-books” and the “law-in-action” (Seron and Silbey 2004).
- ⁵¹ Ewick and Silbey 1998, 57-107.
- ⁵² Ewick and Silbey 1998, 134-137.
- ⁵³ The rare occurrence of mass mobilization in organizations is underscored by Zald and Berger (1978), Morrill, Rao, and Zald (2003), and Ewick and Silbey (2003).
- ⁵⁴ On this general process with regard to power, see Ewick and Silbey (2003).
- ⁵⁵ The percentages are based on 1056 responses from the stories and 310 from the cases. See Table B4.5 in Appendix B for details. Differences in rates of trouble responses across youth-authored and observed trouble cases are statistically significant at .001 level.
- ⁵⁶ Sixty-eight percent and 75% of the trouble responses in the stories about “drama” and “beefs,” respectively, involve moralistic actions (see Table B4.6 in Appendix B for details). Parallel to the actions in all the observed cases, 59% of the trouble responses related to “drama” and 48% related to “beefs” revolve around conciliatory-remedial actions (see Table B4.7 in Appendix B for details). Regardless of ethnoracial identity or whether one is a female or male author, the most common trouble responses represented in youth-authored trouble cases

involve moralistic actions (see Table B4.8 in Appendix B for details). However, some statistically significant differences appear across stories by male and female authors (see Table B4.9 in Appendix B for details). Moralistic responses comprise 68% of the actions in male-authored stories compared to 56% in the female-authored stories, whereas Conciliatory-remedial responses comprise 24% in female-authored stories compared to 16% of the actions in the male-authored stories.

⁵⁷ We hesitate to use the term, “gang,” to describe the peer group conflict because much of our evidence for the incident points away from gangs, *per se*; we discuss this case in chapter eight.

⁵⁸ “Serious incidents” are defined as peer violence involving assault and battery with and without weapons, rape or attempted rape, and/or “illegal activities” involving arrests or other kinds of intervention by school staff members working with the on-campus Cotton River Police safety officer or officers called to campus.

⁵⁹ As we note in chapter eight, the rate of incidents reported to the Cotton River Police rose during the ascendance of “safe schools” policies from 2000 to 2005, declining from 2006 through 2011 as safe schools policies were relaxed. During a more recent three-year period, 2008-2011, the average rate of “serious incidents” per year at Cotton River High also stood at three while Eastern High’s declined from 60 a decade earlier to 48 and the other three schools in the district remained constant compared to their late 1990s rates.

⁶⁰ The period covered is 1997-2000 (Robers et al. 2012, 96). Serious violent incidents are defined as “rape, sexual assault, robbery, and aggravated assault.”

⁶¹ See Table B4.10 in Appendix B for details. Differences in grade-level trouble responses are statistically significant at the .001 level. We also note that the length of stories across the 9th (234 words) and 12th grade (258 words) do not differ much.

⁶² We asked students to write only about their high school experiences (dropping from the analysis stories about middle school) and, as result, the experiences open to ninth graders to write about were bounded by their relatively short time on campus. In those 29 youth-authored cases that we dropped from the analysis because they focused on pre-high school settings, we note that 20 of them involve middle school and 14 of those cases involve moralistic trouble responses often invoking various forms of physical violence. We also note that 12th graders tend to focus on situations that occurred to them in their junior or senior years, rather than reach back to their early years in high school.

⁶³ Fifty-seven percent of the responses in the 12th grade stories involve conciliatory-remedial actions, which is a slightly higher rate than the overall rate in our observed trouble cases (48%). Moralistic actions also appear at a lower rate (20%) in the 12th grade stories than in the observed cases (32%). These findings may reflect the grade-level composition of the principal actors in the fieldwork trouble cases.

⁶⁴ Crosnoe and Johnson 2011.

⁶⁵ Harding 2010, 72.

⁶⁶ Emerson (2008; see also Emerson and Messinger 1977) argues that such emergent, ambiguous sequences are characteristic of all informal control efforts, especially within the contours of interpersonal relationships.

⁶⁷ The concept of trouble string draws inspiration from several processual approaches to social conflict, especially interactional perspectives on trouble (Emerson and Messinger 1977; Emerson 2008), anthropological perspectives on the disputing process (Nader and Todd 1978), and sociolegal approaches on the transformational processes of meaning through which people mobilize legal, quasi-legal, and extra-legal mechanisms to settle disputes (Felstiner et al 1980-1; Morrill et al 2010).

⁶⁸ Each trouble string represents the surfacing of responses to particular episodes of trouble and each node in the string represents either different responses or shifts in venue that separate similar types of responses by space and time. Although we run the risk of left or right censoring in a trouble string – that is, that they may not contain a complete set of responses that occurred before or after the string we detail begins or ends – we are confident that our fieldwork adequately represents when trouble surfaces and when it dissipates (again, without necessarily a definitive resolution).

⁶⁹ Each trouble string begins when trouble surfaces among some set of principal actors. Initial nodes (trouble responses) may at first be difficult to discern and can last for short (a few minutes, hours, or part of day) or longer periods of time (a week or month).

⁷⁰ In only three such strings do rule-oriented and conciliatory-responses combine; in two strings, youth attempt to “work out” trouble in the aftermath of a rule-oriented response and in one string they attempt reconciliation

before engagement with the “system”. Yet another pattern emerges in the eighteen moralistic dominant strings of which eleven involve mixes of different responses: five involve rule-oriented responses, four involve conciliatory-remedial responses, and two involve both conciliatory-remedial and rule-oriented responses. All five moralistic-dominant strings involving rule-oriented responses involve fights with the moralistic actions preceding rule-oriented actions as either interventions into the fights as they occurred or as “mop-up operations”. The other four moralistic-dominant strings also involve fighting and attempts at reconciliation, but before and after multiple moralistic actions, but never *only* before moralistic actions. This pattern again comports with our earlier observations that when youth embark on conciliatory efforts at school, they rarely lead to moralistic actions by peers. A final pattern appears in the dozen trouble strings in which there is not a single modal type of trouble response. In eight of these strings, moralistic and rule-oriented responses appear an equal number of times as informal control oscillate back and forth between moralistic peer aggression and rule-oriented interventions by adults. Of the remaining four strings, two oscillate between attempts at reconciliation and moralistic actions, and two shifts between conciliatory-remedial and rule-oriented actions.

⁷¹ Eight of the dozen bi- and tri-modal trouble-strings surfaced in downtown with six moving from downtown to another area on campus and the rest staying where they emerged. These strings vary considerably with respect to the social ties that surround them, including seven with close ties between the principals, three with weak ties with the principals but strong ties to other friends who become involved, and two with only weak ties between the principals.

⁷² Anderson 1999; Fagan and Wilkinson 1998.

⁷³ Emerson 2008; Emerson and Messenger 1977; Fagan and Wilkinson 1998; Morrill and King Thomas, 1992; Morrill and Rudes 2010.

⁷⁴ Anderson 1999; Fagan and Wilkinson 1998; Harding 2010; Jones 2010; Rios 2011;

⁷⁵ Harding 2010.

⁷⁶ Nader 1990, 2.

⁷⁷ A version of top-down harmony models swept through American schools during the 1980s and 1990s in the “peer mediation movement,” which attempted to teach students conflict management skills based in reconciliation regardless of the context and power asymmetries to which those skills were being transplanted. As we detail in Appendix A, our access to Cotton River High began when Musheno was approached by Cotton River High teachers to help implement a peer mediation system in the school. On assessments and critiques of peer mediation in elementary and middle schools, see: Philipson (2012), Long et al (1998).