TITLE: The Gang's School: Challenges of Reintegrative Social Control

AUTHOR: Robert Garot

AFFILIATION: John Jay College of Criminal Justice

RUNNING HEAD: The Gang's School

STRUCTURED ABSTRACT

Purpose

This paper explores a necessarily ambivalent approach to gang members at an inner-city alternative high school, Choices Alternative Academy (CAA), as staff must both accommodate and monitor their often troubled students.

Methodology

The methodology of this study is ethnographic, drawing from participant observation carried out over the course of four years, and sixty-five informal, semi-structured interviews of a theoretical, purposive, snowball sample.

Findings

Staff in schools dominated by gang members must both accommodate and control them, which are often contradictory practices.

Research limitations/implications

As a case study of a single alternative school the study is limited in scope, but comprehensive in depth, as observations were conducted over a four-year period. Future research may focus on the

relationship of teacher experience and expertise to the desire to acknowledge the presence of gangs.

Practical implications

The paper advocates the utility of an ambivalent approach toward gang members in policy discussions, acknowledging the wide variety of discourses possible in regards to gang members.

Originality/Value of the Paper

While most studies of schools and gangs focus on large, mainstream schools, this study is unique for focusing on a school which specifically serves gang members, and the difficulties and dilemmas involved in that task.

KEYWORDS:

School/gang relationship, reintegrative social control, ambivalence, safe schools, drop-outs, student transfers

CATEGORY OF PAPER: Research paper/case study

During a large regional conference on urban issues in a high-profile hotel ballroom, a teen-aged African-American young man rises, and with tears in his eyes, demands to know, "How can you expect us to stay in school with all the gang violence? If you wanna do something about why so many kids leave school, why don't you look at that?" He stares at the presenters, a hard focused glare, and then sits. After a brief pause, a young man with dredlocks at the front table responds that violence is a real issue, but the gangbangers are part of the community too, and they also deserve an education.

(excerpt from field notes)

In many people-changing institutions in the United States, social control is disintegrative, punishing deviance through exclusion from community (Braithwaite, 1989). For instance, it is well known that administrators of urban public high schools tacitly encourage students to drop out (Fine, 1991), and actively look for ways to expel disruptive students (Bowditch, 1993), thereby fulfilling the prophecy that "at-risk" students are less likely to graduate. Similarly, Joniak (2005) shows how staff at a homeless drop-in shelter for street kids practice "tough love" (York, York and Wachtel, 1982), a "therapy" intended to alleviate conflict that paradoxically leads to sustaining conflict and justifying expulsion.

Yet in some social control settings, ongoing efforts are made to integrate even the most apparently socially undesirable clients. For instance, in their study of a neonatal intensive care unit (NICU), Heimer and Staffen (1995) find that mothers with "disvalued attributes" are likely to be viewed positively. According to Heimer and Staffen, such an approach to socially disvalued clients is understood in terms of two factors: the organization's lack of control over

the exit of deviants, and client/staff interdependence. As the authors note, "Labels are applied differently in systems that can evict deviants than in ones that must reform them" (p. 636).

Few clients are more disvalued than gang members in schools, since symbolically, schools and gangs occupy opposite ends of a moral continuum. At least since the reforming efforts of Horace Mann in 1846, authorities have viewed schools as "islands of order and moral strength in a sea of social chaos," "deterring delinquency and instilling positive social values" (Anderson, 1998:318). "Gangs," on the other hand, are portrayed as the progenitors of such chaos, instilling negative social values (Trump, 1996:45; Monti, 1993:383; Schwartz, 1989:323). In this way, "dominant constructions of the school-gang phenomenon 'imagine' that the institution is divided into two camps: the 'insiders' who conform and the 'outsiders' who disrupt" (David Brotherton, 1996:96, citing Pfohl, 1985). If any social group would appear to justify social exclusion, that group would be gang members in schools.

Yet one finds a clear distinction in the literature between those approaches which urge an exclusionary approach to gangs, and those which criticize such an approach.[1] As a clear example of the former, Kenneth Trump (1996) typologizes schools' responses to gangs on a continuum ranging from lack of awareness, to denial, to qualified admittance, to balanced and rational, to overreaction, and advocates that "everyone pull together" to offer a "balanced, rational, efficient, and effective method of managing gang violence" (p. 50). Toward achieving this, Trump proposes that school staff should be aware of "gang" identifiers in school, which he lists as "graffiti, colors, tattoos, handsigns and handshakes, initiations, language, and behavior" (p. 50). Once such behaviors have been identified, school officials, "should design a program of combined strategies based on strict enforcement of disciplinary regulations [such as dress codes] and criminal codes; provision of services to intervene with children displaying current

involvement or interest in gangs; and the use of education and training for preventing gang growth in the schools and overall school community" (p. 53. Also see Huff and Trump, 1996; Burnett, 1999; Bucher and Manning, 2003; Struyk, 2006). Many of the gang accommodation strategies at Choices Alternative Academy (CAA), discussed below, would appall one who supports the approach to gangs in schools which Trump advocates.

While Trump's suggestions may sound reasonable, many researchers point out the negative effects of such policies. David Brotherton provides perhaps the strongest argument in this regard, emphasizing the "anti-educational" dynamics that are set in motion when schools engage in "the gang problem." For Brotherton (1996:104), the sorts of surveillance practices touted by Trump lead to teachers moving "further away [from students], convinced of the intractable social and cultural distance between them." Ruth Horowitz (1983:141) also witnessed the fruits of such policies first-hand, finding that "most of the staff worry more about violence than about education and few help students make academic or career decisions" (also see Thompkins, 2000). For Audrey Schwartz (1989:324), the characterizations that result from such surveillance, "can evoke behaviors on the part of the school community that make the false conception come true... academic failure is the probable consequence of such stereotyping" (Also see Padilla, 1992:69-84). Some, such as Garrett Albert Duncan, suggest that this is precisely the point of such policies (Duncan, 2000). Nonetheless, at CAA, such monitoring and surveillance was seen as integral for maintaining a safe school.

Other researchers may not so clearly link gangs to the surveillance, alienation, and labelling of students, yet they still link gang development to some sort of failing on the part of schools. As Diego Vigil (1988b:422) notes, "indeed, degree of gang involvement can usually be gauged by how severe and deep-rooted the effects of racial and cultural discrimination have been

on an individual, or how family and school authorities have failed to influence and guide."

Daniel Monti (1993:399) links such involvement to the lack of activities and *esprit de corps* in high schools. As he states, "gangs also might be seen, therefore, as doing little more than filling a vacuum created by the absence or ineffectiveness of a more conventional culture in the school." Regardless of whether they advocate ways to suppress gangs, or show how schools de facto create gangs or at least the conditions for gangs, these studies continue to highlight the symbolic divide between schools and gangs, as well as assuming that gang members will oppose and perform poorly in schools.[2]

Another way to perceive the relationship of a school to local gangs is by emphasizing the ambivalence of school officials' orientations.[3] The work of Sudhir Alladi Venkatesh (1997, 2003) provides an apt model in this regard, as he explores how community members in Chicago's Robert Taylor Homes are torn between appreciation of the useful services such as security, trash pick-up and parties, which the gang provides, and resentment of the fear, violence and drug use which they also bring. At CAA, where the present study was conducted, the local gang, "Central," existed in the neighborhood long before the school was built, and staff members *know* gang members, and are often acutely aware of and sympathetic toward their familial and personal problems (see Heimer, 2001). Moreover, the school's mission is to serve just such students. On the other hand, gang members are seen to engage in activities outside of school which staff members do not condone, and they cause problems in school as well. The primary problem they are seen to cause in the school is to intimidate students from rival gangs, to dissuade them from attending CAA. Yet, rather than transfer students who are harassing, administrators at CAA transfer those students who are being harassed. In such cases, administrative staff respond to trouble involving gang members not as *deviance*, but as a *conflict*

between two parties, and "are tightly constrained... by practical institutional and situational factors" (Emerson and Messinger, 1977:129-130).

Below, after describing the setting and methods, I will show how an ambivalent approach to gangs, involving both the accommodation and monitoring of gang members, was vital in the founding of the school and the treatment of gangs in the classroom. Finally, I will examine a dramatic incident which highlights some of the difficulties entailed in this school's reintegrative policies.

Setting and Methods

Urban alternative high schools may seem to share much in common with large urban high schools and homeless drop-in centers, as they serve a similar clientele. Organizationally, however, they tend to be more akin to a neonatal intensive care unit (NICU). In terms of the two factors Heimer and Staffen emphasized, large high schools and homeless drop-in shelters both exercise significant control over the exit of deviants, and are not strongly dependent on their relationships with clients. For instance, since schools' state funding depends on their average daily attendance (ADA), pushing a student with shoddy attendance to drop-out may boost funding for a large school, and pushing out a student who is a discipline problem may relieve staff work-load. In the drop-in shelters Joniak studied, funding was not strictly dependent on attendance, and they did not suffer a shortage of potential clients. In Choices Alternative Academy (CAA), on the other hand, administrators depended on the attendance of a small and highly precarious population. Their small size made them vulnerable to funding reductions when students dropped out, and more dependent on the students they served.

Over a four year period, I participated and observed in and around CAA, a small inner-city alternative school designed for young people aged 14 to 21 who had dropped out of school

7

for 60 days or more, in a six census-tract area with some of the highest crime and poverty in the Western United States.[4] Initially, I was introduced to the school to survey school-to-work transition, and later I chose it as a setting where I could spend a sustained period of time with young people and be of service to them.[5] Every student at the school has significant experience with gangs. Built from a combination of federal and local funding, CAA is located in a large, highly populous, diverse county. Roughly half the students are Latino, half African-American, and some are from Asian-Pacific islands such as Samoa, or Central-American countries such as Belize. Roughly half the students are male, half female. Approximately 300 students are enrolled in the school, and due to attendance problems, about 200 show up on any given day. Students who are sent there often have histories of violence, drug use, truancy, dropping out of school, and teen pregnancy.[6] Approximately one-third are on probation, and about 30 have infants in the school-supported daycare center. I spent my time in the school hanging out in the classroom and on the yard, tutoring or finding other ways of engaging with young people. I rarely took jottings at the setting, but I did write extensive fieldnotes on the evening of each day's observations, following practices handed down by Emerson, Fretz and Shaw (1995). For the nuances of entrée and how I felt accepted by the students, see Garot (forthcoming).

After a number of weeks in the setting, I began to conduct interviews with students away from their classrooms. Eventually, I came to interview 46 students, six repeatedly, plus eleven of the twelve teachers at the school, each of the two administrators, one security guard, and a community activist. I chose the young people I interviewed based on a number of criteria, seeking a racial/ethnic balance that would mirror the neighborhood, and represent variation along the continuum from gang-banger to non-gang-banger, nonviolent to violent. I also sought to interview students with a variety of interests, including music, sports, and cars in addition to

8

gangs. I refer to those I interview as "consultants," as I use their accounts as resources (Heritage, 1984) to report events I was unable to observe first-hand. All names of staff, students, the local gang, gang colors, and schools are pseudonyms.

Interviews were semi-structured, open-ended conversations, lasting from one to twelve hours, and were taped and transcribed. Sessions with students spanned their life-history (see Vigil, 1988), covering such topics as places the consultant lived, reasons for moving, descriptions of fights, drug use, experiences in school, intimate and familial relationships, hobbies, and experiences with gangs. Transcripts were provided for consultants when possible, checked for accuracy, and used as the basis for further questions.

I coded and analyzed data according to the traditions of grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Charmaz, 2006) and analytic induction (Katz, 1983), as formulated by Emerson, Fretz and Shaw (1995) and Becker (1998). Validity is assured first and foremost through an in-depth, long-term commitment to the field (see Emerson, 1987), leading to a rapport which facilitates honesty, an understanding of the reputations of consultants, and opportunities to probe non-obvious ways of checking statements in order to avoid compromising confidentiality. Some consultants revised prior statements once they came to know me better, and many were interviewed more than once over the four-year period. A second check of validity occurs during coding, as similar statements are juxtaposed, and statements which do not "ring true" are set aside.

The Nuances of Ambivalence

The Challenge of Accommodation

CAA was initially founded as a storefront, through a special grant from the Department of Housing and Urban Development, in cooperation with local governmental and non-profit

9

agencies. Ms. Reynolds, who helped write the original grant for the school, was principal from the outset. She had substantial success as a principal of a nearby continuation school in an impoverished area, where she had numerous contacts and knowledge of gang members, but she had no contacts in CAA's neighborhood. As she states, "Coming to this area, I really didn't know anyone. It was a whole different gang structure, gang stuff going on." To make her way into the area, Ms. Reynolds worked closely with CGS, Community Gang Services, a community-based organization comprised of ex-gang members who specialize in working with kids in gangs. As she states,

> "We had CGS in the area, and many of those guys are former gang members. They knew the area and were from the community. They knew the gang bangers, and they were not afraid. So we brought them in, and that kind of paved the way. They introduced us to them. From that connection, that's how I got to know the area, that's how I got to know the kids, and that's how now we're well-known in the area, and I would say even well-liked by the area."

Ms. Reynolds highlights the centrality of CGS in this statement. First, as "former gang members," workers in CGS were "not afraid" of gang members. Secondly, as members of the community, CGS staffers were intermediaries between Central and CAA, to "pave the way" for the school by making introductions. CGS was clearly integral in the founding of CAA, despite strong warnings against hiring former gang members, found in such books as *Gangs in Schools* (Goldstein and Kodluboy, 1998:108). From her statement, it would seem that the neighborhood is so thoroughly saturated with the ethos of Central, that by developing good relations with this gang, the school became "well-known" and even "well-liked."

Below, the vice principal speaks of their continuing relations in terms of a "running pact."

"We have a running pact with the neighborhood gang around here," he tells me.

"Like an agreement?" I ask.

"Yeah. Verbal. You don't mess with my students here in school and I'll support you in whatever court endeavors you have. I used to send a lot of 'em to a friend of mine, go stay a few days. We'll make arrangements so they can have a place to eat and sleep."

Here the vice principal mentions two ways he assists local gang members, provided they do not "mess with my students here in school." First, supporting them in "court endeavors" means providing a ride to court, testifying before a judge, or sending a good account to a probation officer. Secondly, he may help them with food and shelter. Such shelter may provide a respite from a dangerous situation, or may simply provide human essentials which are lacking in that young person's life. As Mr. Griffin, a local community organizer told me, "You'd be amazed at how many of these young people are homeless." Nonetheless, the mere notion of a 'running pact' with gang members is anathema to advice offered by security-oriented 'experts' such as Trump (1996) on how to deal with gangs.

The accommodating stance toward gang members derives from the prevailing ideology at CAA, espoused by Ms. Reynolds, that they are children with needs. Below, she expresses the typical features of such a discourse, often reinforced in staff meetings.

"A lot of people are afraid to even deal with them, but they're humans, they're children too. Then if you treat them like a child, like you do the others, that's all they want. Many of them are from dysfunctional families. Some of the kids were living in houses that were really old houses, abandoned houses in the area. They had no other place to sleep. So

when you show them love, and you know they don't have any food, you give 'em money. 'Here, go get yourself something to eat.' Again, giving, helping, and they appreciate that. I think the fact of not being afraid of them and then willing to deal with them, and help them also to see that there are other things. They band together as gang members because of that need for family. So then when we extend ourselves as family too--you can come to us--that starts changing."

In this account, Ms. Reynolds tells of a number of the needs she recognizes in her students: familial, housing, and food. She then discusses some of the ways she extends herself to such students, to make the school accommodating. She juxtaposes love with providing money for food, and the importance of not being afraid of them. All these practices are based on the notion that young people go to gangs for a sense of family, so if the school can move toward meeting that need, they may exert a positive influence. Ms. Reynolds has structured this ideology into the school schedule, by referring to the fifteen minute period after nutrition as "Family," rather than "Homeroom." Teachers make announcements during this period, and as Ms. Reynolds states, "You're with that same teacher for Family until you graduate. So it's a sense of having that person you can turn to."

Below, the vice principal draws on his personal interactions with students to echo Ms. Reynold's sentiments concerning the school's perspectives toward gang members. According to this account, certain key moments showed him how students were lacking basic familial and housing needs, and he describes some steps he took toward accommodating such students.

"I remember one young man who was a student here at the school. Still comes by to see me from time to time. He was outside playing basketball. He had turned his ankle. We managed to get him over to the office. By this time, someone had come in and told the

assistant principal at that time of the incident. So the assistant principal hollered through the window, 'Mr. Merritt, call his parents, have them come and pick him up to handle that.' The little kid sat there and looked up at me and he said, 'Mr. Merritt, so and so knows god damn well that nobody here got any parents.' Even though I always kind of knew this, it hit me with enough lightning to make me review and reanalyze every child that I come in contact with now. Many times, we take for granted that our kids are coming from homes where there is parenting taking place; there is some kind of a family structure there. That is most definitely untrue. I approach each child with the intent of finding out what type of stability has been in their life. We don't know. Many times as educators, we go under assumptions, their parents should do that. Well, that child doesn't have any parents. So their parents didn't do that, or their parents were children, and they had no structure, so they had nothing to pass down. Many times, kids come in here and confide things in me that I'm never gonna share. That's going on now."

"I had a young man one day. He lived in the air conditioning vent on the roof of my bungalow at school. And I knew he stayed up there; he had no place to go. At morning he climbed down off that roof, and right about the time he thought I was coming to school, he'd be there sitting on the porch waiting for me. I'd take him to breakfast. I'd let him into the gym so he could shower and clean up."

Many gang monographs refer to large-scale social changes such as deindustrialization (Wilson, 1996) as a cause of gangs (Bourgois, 1996; Padilla, 1992; Hagedorn, 1988), accounts of CAA staff emphasized the psychological need for connection due to strained family ties. When gangs are the explicit topic of conversation, staff tend to invoke such explanations as overriding background features for explain gang involvement, as in the following statement of Mr. Dolan, a

teacher at CAA.

> "Essentially what I mean is that young people are looking for identification. They're trying to become a part of something. Many times the kids are desperate. They're hurting, they're in pain. And there's an association they made with some other people that gives them the false sense of strength, of self-esteem."

In this excerpt, Mr. Dolan, like Ms. Reynolds, implies a causal connection: that desperate kids who are in pain will look for a group to be a part of, which can provide support and a positive self-regard.

Not all staff at CAA share such a charitable view of the school's relationship toward students, however. Some teachers grow weary of what they see as students' misbehavior, and administrators' disinclination to address it. For instance, in describing how the school differs from a jobs programs in which students can be fired, one teacher states,

> "Here the kids get away with so much stuff! You can't just kick 'em out. You can't. I have a problem with that. I think the disrespect of adults is an issue. In the real world, you can't cuss your boss out and expect to be there the next day. Doing this is a disservice, to make them think, 'OK, we'll let you go this time.' The world is not like that. And that's the way it's always gonna be. Excuse me! That's not how life is."

This teacher is especially upset that a student (Buck) who was caught with a teacher's manual had not been expelled. As she tells me in an interview, "I was so appalled when I came back to school the next week and there he stood, looking at me and smiling as if to say, 'See what I got away with?' That kind of stuff pisses me off, OK?"

> In my interview with the principal, her response to such teachers is blunt.

"See, those kinds of teachers, they don't need to be here. They don't need to be teaching any student. Anyone who would say that, that's not the kind of staff member I would want on this staff. [...] I don't cherish having anybody on my staff with an attitude about students like that. Especially knowing this is why we exist.... They come to us with a lot of different problems, many. It's a tough group to work with. I'm not saying they're the easiest--it's tough. But this is why we exist."

Teachers are not always appreciative of such practices. Below, Ms. Grodem, a teacher at CAA, expresses her disdain in response to my question, "Is there any other kind of accommodation a teacher would need to make?"

"For a gang? One thing I notice here is in my first year or two, when we got new students, the Centrals would try to mess with them. They would either jump new students, so they won't come back, or they would harass them a lot, so they're not safe. Instead of getting rid of the ones that are harassing, they let them stay here, and we lose the good kid. I've seen that happen several times. That, I don't understand."

Although Central "controls the school," I spoke with at least three young men, Shawn, Doogan, and Tom, who attended CAA despite belonging to gangs that are staunch enemies of Central. Below, first Shawn and then Tom speak of how they had to negotiate their passage into CAA.

"Everybody know, that's what they say, it's a Central school, because it's in the Central territory and whatever. And like I got into it once with one of them. I had to let him know how I am and who I am, and how I'm standing. I'm here by myself and I'm gonna be here by myself. But, if I have to come up here with problems, it will be handled."

In this case, Shawn's implied threat apparently pacified Central's overtures. Below, Tom is a bit more explicit.

> "Man, when I first came to this school, I thought I was gonna have problems, like for real. I used to have my homeboys from 40's come pick me up everyday. When I first came here, Infant, my first or second day here, he came and asked me where I was from. I told him I thought I was gonna have problems. I told him, 'I'm from 40's. I'm just here to come to school. I'm trying to get this outta the way.' He had a different point of view. He was like, 'Fuck this and fuck that,' which I didn't too much like. If I'm serious about getting my schooling done, I'm just going to have to hear that. Words is going to be words."

Once Tom swallows his pride, he is able to tolerate the sometimes antagonistic presence of the gentlemen from Central. Yet, notably, all three young men, Shawn, Doogan and Tom, maintain a low profile at CAA, never playing basketball and rarely socializing.

The Necessity of Monitoring

The expansion of CAA from a storefront to a campus stalled when one of their students was shot in front of the school. Below, Ms. Reynolds tells how she determined, "they got the wrong one."

> "There was a young man, let's call him Sammy, who enrolled from another area, and the word was out that he was from there. And I had to watch the kid. He was only with us like two weeks. But everyday I was so concerned about him, that it just seemed like he was a walking target. I knew he was nervous."

> "How did you know that?"

"Because when he enrolled I questioned him, I asked him, you know when they come in I talk to them to find out what they're involved in, what gang they're in, who they know and who knows them, and that kind of stuff. This particular kid had been into so much, and I just asked him, I said [to myself], 'If Sammy didn't live in that area, and I know if he had been into that, he had crossed somebody in that area before, and before long someone was going to know he was here.' So everyday I would talk to him, come in, say, 'How are doin'? How was your night? Is anyone saying anything to you? Is anyone looking at you? Do you know anyone where he said this or he said that, or they looked this way or they looked that way?' Then I have to remind all of the students that we're here as a group. We're not going to have any of this violence or fighting, you know just constantly monitor."

Ms. Reynolds tells how she inferred that Sammy was a "walking target," based on his nervousness, where he had lived, and his past activities. As part of her monitoring, she asks him to tell her of any warning signs of possible violence such as "anyone saying anything to you," or "looking at you." Soon, she found another program for this student, since, "I know this kid can not learn looking over his shoulder. It has to be very uncomfortable... We got him home, and low and behold, he was home by eleven o'clock and by one o'clock a young man who was enrolled in one of our educational programs... was killed right in front of the building." Later, after speaking with other social service agents who knew Sammy, "We came to the conclusion that that happened because they were after the kid who'd gone home that day."

This incident almost prevented CAA from becoming a regular, institutionalized setting. As Ms. Reynolds states, "It was a question as to whether we need to proceed with the school."

Her response to these hesitant officials was, "That's why we're here, that's the purpose, high crime, high poverty."

While the school must accommodate gang members, due to its location and neighborhood dynamics, staff also emphasized the importance of "constantly monitoring" them, bridging the discursive divide found in much of the gang literature. Administrators justify such monitoring not as a "gang suppression tactic" (Brotherton, 1996:100), but as a practical, managerial issue. First, staff are concerned that gang members tend to coalesce in case of a conflict, allowing them to, in effect, enforce their own agenda at school. As Ms. Grodem states, "You have to consider them being in a gang, because when conflicts happen between students, at least involving gang members, they will get their whole gang to come back and retaliate. That's a factor you have to worry about when people get into conflicts and fights."[7] Secondly, since gang members tend to be friends (in fact, they are referred to simply as "friends" by the principal), they tend to enjoy each other's company, which may be disruptive in a classroom, especially if lessons are not engaging.

Such monitoring continues with each student who enrolls at CAA. In light of the vice principal's "running pact" with Central, below he tells of how he asks those who enroll from *outside the area* if they're in a gang when they initially check into school. In other words, those students who live in areas in which Central is not active are especially subject to scrutiny.

"Generally if a child checks into here from outside of this area, first I'm gonna ask him, 'Are you bangin'?' 'Oh no, I'm not bangin'.' 'So, are you affiliated?' 'No, no, no.' 'OK now, you told me you're not in any gang and so forth. So my deal with the gang that's around here is hands off. But if I find out, and I will find out before the day ends, if you lied to me, and have been involved in gang activity, then you're out of here, simply

18

because you have now created a hostile environment on my campus.' Any student who attends school here and is not gang affiliated has a right to get a high school and college education, and that's what we're trying to push them toward. If they have had it in the past, and can prove that they're no longer associating, I will allow them in at that time." Such a statement provides some insight into the nuances of administrators' "running pact" with local gang members. In demonstrating how he presents these "general" questions to an incoming student, Mr. Merritt shows his knowledge of levels of involvement in a gang, asking first if he is "banging," and then if he is "affiliated," meaning he "hangs around" with gang members in some sense.[8] Mr. Merritt then demonstrates his conditional acceptance of the hypothetical student's claims, combined with a threat to expel the student, not for being in a gang, but for lying about it.[9] How would he know if they had lied? From the various students, many of them from Central, who regularly share information with him. Mr. Merritt's statement that such a lie may create a hostile environment on campus is overblown, for the "hostile environment" is already present, as we will see below.

While many "security experts" who offer advice to administrators on how to manage gangs, would have difficulty endorsing, or even fathoming such practices, they are understood by many as making sense in this local ecology. As one teacher, Ms. Rivers states, "The kids that come here that are in the Central gang pretty much can't go to any other school. They can't go to Fuller! Some of our kids, that's their home school. But they live in this neighborhood, and they can't go over there. They'd run 'em up out of there. The kids will beat 'em up or chase 'em home or whatever."

Students are often dumbfounded when administrators are not aware of such issues. Below, note Johnnie's stated exasperation at school officials at Fuller High who were unaware of

19

the dire transgressions of the local ecology they committed when they tried to transfer him to a school dominated by his rival gang.

"They tried to send me to Eldridge [high school]. Wouldn't attend a DAY in that school."

"Why not?"

"Bloods. And not only Bloods, but niggas I knew didn't like me, and I didn't like 'em, didn't get along with 'em."

"So they like, 'We sent your transcript to Eldridge.' 'What the hell you mean, you send my transcript to Eldridge? I ain't fittin' to go to damn Eldridge! What the hell wrong with you?' And luckily I end up here, CAA. (...) I was like, I'm not goin' to Eldridge. My life would be in danger. I'm talkin' about serious danger. And trust me, I'm not about to die, just to go to no damn school. I'd be better off goin' to Columbine, ya know?"

Such a vast disjuncture in adults' and children's understanding of the local ecology of knowledge (Anspach, 1987; Weinberg, 2000) is common in research on the inner city (Anderson, 1999). In working to develop a reintegrative approach to gang members at CAA, staff were constantly working to bridge this gap.

When I ask how a student could prove they're no longer associating with a gang, Mr. Merritt's response tells how he *monitors* gang members by working with other agencies to document their gang record.

"How could they prove it?"

"Birth certificate, shot record."

"To prove that they're not in a gang?"

"Yes."

"How would that prove they're not in a gang?"

"Well, in their birth certificate, see you get that information, look up the prints

downtown, they'll feed it into the computer (snaps fingers) tell me if this person's on

probation, is he being detained, is he on parole or anything. So I kind of utilize those

people. (...) I guess its part of the job, just part of the job."

Hence, Mr. Merritt uses his relationship with outside agencies as a further check against a

student's account (see Emerson, 1991).

Teachers may also determine quite readily if a student has been involved in gang activity,

not through an initial interview, but by watching how other students respond to the new student,

as Mr. Thurman, a teacher and part-time administrator, discusses below. He also describes what

Mr. Merritt may have meant by a "hostile environment."

"When they first come into this school, you find out very quickly, because if he's from

somewhere else--we had a gentleman come here during the summer when I was here, and

he came over, and he was from a place that's only a mile away from here. When we let

out during the daytime, you'll notice there's a large group outside this area out here.

What happens here is they're part of a local group [i.e., Central]. As soon as he got here,

he wasn't here two days, and he had nerve enough to tell somebody [he was from a rival

gang]. Shoot, by the time he got ready to walk out of that gate the second day he was

here, they were standing in front of that gate waitin' for him to come out. Mr. Merritt and

I were here, and we were standing in front of the gate at the time he walks out, and the

first thing they say is, 'You from 40's?' He said, 'What are you talking about?' They

said, 'Yes you is.' He said, 'Why?' They said, 'Cause a lot of them 'bout to break out

you punk bitches, that's why.' So he turned around and came back inside that gate rather

than go outside that gate, 'cause they were all up and down the street. They had already set up and were ready for him. So I took him home that day. I actually physically put him in the car and drove him home. Next day, I talked to his mother, and we discussed the situation, and he himself said he was involved in that. He also said he was a little concerned because one of his friends had just been killed by someone who came out of this area. [...] Needless to say, he didn't come back after that day, so we lost him after two days."

Here, Mr. Thurman discusses the problems of a young man who "had the nerve to tell somebody." Thurman replays how members of Central "banged on" the student, asking the loaded question, "You from 40's?" foreboding future violence as gang related. At this point, the addressee loses his nerve, responding with a question that denies any gang relevance, but the members of Central counter that denial with 'Yes you is,' and further humiliate him by emasculating him and his gang. Such interrogations are instantly recognizable by the student and the teachers present as a powerful interaction ritual to immediately produce humiliation, foreshadowing and justifying a potentially violent confrontation (Garot, 2007). Thanks to Mr. Thurman's intervention, the young man is able to make his way home safely, only to drop out of yet another another high school.

Accommodating and Monitoring Gangs in the Classroom

Mr. Don Moses, an old head of the Philadelphia black community advises, "Keep your eyes and ears open at all times" (Anderson, 1999:23). Similarly, according to Mr. Merritt, "I tell the teachers to watch everything. Things can happen spur of the moment, with the snap of a finger [snaps fingers]. So you have to always watch what goes on; you have to always listen to what goes on." One way administrators monitor students is by checking schedules to assure they

will not place too many gang members in the same room, according to Mr. Thurman. Avoiding grouping gang members can be especially difficult during state testing, when students must be arranged in an ad-hoc fashion.

I ask, "Would being a gang member make any difference, you think, in terms of the classroom attitude or participation?"

"Sometimes. If they're showing off for their peers. But usually we don't keep that many in one class. The way it works out, you're not going to have them all sitting together. The only time we do is when we have those free periods, like for instance the other day we had testing. So only a certain group of kids were being tested. So now the rest of the groups are allowed to choose which classroom they want. And because of their affiliations, they want to choose to be with each other. So they'll flock toward one classroom where the discipline is least strict. And they'll hang out in that classroom as long as they can, and they'll cause problems. That's how we got that graffiti there the other day. They wrote all over that building."

Ms. Reynolds, however, claims that since so many of their students are gang members, to try to separate them in different classes would be a logistical "nightmare." Instead, after scheduling, if there is a problem they will make adjustments, as they would in any class where too many friends are congregated together, causing a disruption. As she states, "We schedule everybody. But if there's a problem, it's gonna stick out like a sore thumb, and then we make the changes. But initially, no, we don't, because we deal with so many of them. But if there's a problem created because there's so many *friends* in one, then we try to spread them out."

Often, teachers invoke gangs as an accounting device to provide a way to understand a student's behavior, as well as a justifiable reason for a class to appear poorly managed. In such

cases, actions are interpreted in terms of what Garfinkel (1984:76-103) referred to as the "documentary method." As Garfinkel (p. 77) stated, "[B]y waiting to see what will have happened [one] learns what it is that [one] previously saw" (also see Heimer and Staffen, 1995:639).

At times, teachers make such assessments on the spot, as an interpretation of a setting's features. The following occurs during a time in which students' schedules are changed for standardized testing. Teachers report this as one of the times when they have difficulty preventing gang members from being grouped together.

> Robert is tagging on his desk. "Don't write on your desk," Mr. A says, giving him a piece of paper. Robert writes in his scrawling gang script on it, saying, "I'm gonna send this to somebody." Two other young men are in the room, one with a big tiger on his shirt, another with a green sweater with a picture on the back of a man flexing humongous biceps and wearing sunglasses. The sweater reads, "My homie...I'll never forget you," in medieval script. The one with the tiger shirt [who is walking around the room] pulls an antenna out of his pocket and extends it. "That's off someone's radio," Mr. A notices [I also see how it could be used as a stinging weapon]. The student whips it around, but eventually ends up breaking it and throws it away. Another runs around, rattling dice in his hands and gathering dollar bills from the others. "Let's go, let's go," he says excitedly. Finally, Mr. A says, "Hey, you can't play dice in here." Meanwhile, his aide sits at her desk in the back, showing utter disgust. "These aren't my students," Mr. A says. "These are Mr. B's students." Mr. B comes in, looking tense, telling Mr. A, "There's too many Centrals in this room. We gotta break them up." They discuss the matter, but soon realize there is nowhere else for them to go.

In this scene, only two features can justifiably be interpreted as gang related. First, a student tags on a desk, and then on a piece of paper provided by Mr. A. This, however, is not necessarily connected to Central, since many students tag as an alternative to gang involvement (see Garot, forthcoming). Moreover, tagging is simply something to do when no other work is provided, akin to doodling. The second ostensibly gang related feature is the student's green R.I.P. sweater, which is in Central's colors, and features a medieval gang-style script. This, however, is a passive feature in the setting, which is not invoked by the members. Many other features of the setting: the student walking around, whipping an antenna, and another walking around rattling dice in his hands, are not overtly gang related. Such behaviors could occur in any classroom, like this one, in which students have been provided with nothing to do, and the teacher exerts little control. By labeling them as "gang related," teachers are able to shift responsibility for behaviors from themselves to the students. While many scholars have pointed out how an emphasis on control contradicts pedagogical concerns (McNeil, 1988), some classrooms may be characterized by neither control nor pedagogy (see Garot, forthcoming). In such situations, the invocation of "gangs" is useful as an attempt to rationalize the scene that ensues.

Many students with some variety of involvement with a gang feel it is counter-productive for teachers to confront them about being in a gang, as Marco states,

"Talkin' about where you from, what you did, you know. I don't like those kind of questions, especially from a teacher. Tryin' to get in all mine, and I told him yesterday, 'You know what?' Cause I was mad yesterday, I was mad as hell. And he was, he was talking to me, you know. I just told him, 'You know what? Stay out of mines. 'Cause as soon as you step into this class it's mines too, you know. But it might be somebody

else's, it might be yours too and somebody else's, but with me, it ain't going like that. What's mines is mines and that's it.' That's why I don't talk back to nobody and I stay calm. You know. 'What's wrong wichu?' 'Stay out of mines man, just stay out of it, you know.'"

Here Marco is resentful that a teacher is interested in a personal matter, and also that such an interest could lead to trouble. Although he claims 18th Street to start fights, Marco has been affiliated with Vernon Locos, rivals of 18th Street. At the time of this field work, members of 18th Street were the dominant Latino gang at CAA. When he states, "it might be somebody else's," he implies that members of 18th Street may hear the teacher's question, and perhaps come to discern Marco's gang identity, which he is trying to maintain as a private affair. Asking a student "where you from?" or "what you do" (Garot, 2007) may bring more troubles than a teacher might realize, contrary to Trump's suggestions.

Rather than simply asking a student his gang affiliation, teachers have more discrete ways of gathering information. As an important aspect of monitoring students, they routinely share what they've learned about them. Below, during my taped interview with Mr. Dolan, he and Mr. Pope discuss a rivalry between various girls at the school for the attention of Billy, a charismatic leader of the Central gang.

Mr. Dolan: I took Francesca to the office three times today. I keep bringin' her back. They wanted to jump on her. I talked to her mom too.

Mr. Pope: Who wanted to jump on her?

Mr. Dolan: Billy's girl. Francesca told her to come outside. 'What you lookin' at, bitch. You need to come on outside. We can handle this.'

Mr. Pope: Billy's girl?

26

Mr. Dolan: Yeah. And Amy. You know why?

Mr. Pope [lowly, as if avoiding being overheard]: Cause she likes Billy too.

Mr. Dolan: Used to. But he dissed her already.

Mr. Pope: I know. But it doesn't matter what he did.

Mr. Dolan: Nah--

Mr. Pope: No, She tryin' to get the female outta the way so she can get back into the picture.

In this exchange, the teachers, like some of Anderson's (1999) informants, demonstrate to each other how they watch and listen to students, by sharing intimate information about students as a means of foreseeing and perhaps preventing future conflicts. Mr. Dolan, the more experienced of the two, could even be seen to be schooling Mr. Pope, asking, "You know why?" Mr. Pope then affirms his competence, telling Dolan, "I know," and then provides a summary statement for the exchange. Below, we will see how this conflict between Francesca, Amy and the others risks blowing up into a situation which threatens Ms. Reynold's authority, as well as the "running pact" they have developed with Central.

"Clowning"

Teachers often interact with students on the yard as a way of gaining rapport, towards reintegrating gang members, as Mr. Boden, a teacher who often plays basketball with the students, explains. "I think the fact that I carry myself the way I do helps me out a little bit. It helps me out a lot, really. I clown a little bit with them. (...) Get to know 'em a bit intimately, they'll do more for you." Such clowning includes verbal play, such as the following.

Mr. B criticizes Andy's dirty shirt. "Looks like you rolled in the street or some'in," he says. "And look at them socks. You gotta bleach them." "Nah," Andy says. Mr. B continues, getting a few laughs from the other guys sitting around.

Such clowning tactics could become rather physical, as I notice while I wait to interview Mr. B. It is difficult to pull Mr. B away from students for the interview. I see he has taken a girl's purse and is holding it over the trash can. She wants it back, but when she pulls on one of the shoulder straps, he does not let it go. Eventually he does let go, and comes over to join me with a big smile on his face.

As can be imagined, some of the experienced teachers at CAA criticized Mr. B for "clowning a little bit," yet he discounted this as "professional jealousy."

While gangs may appear heinously threatening in police or media accounts (Katz, 2000), at times students' identities as gang members are used as a common resource for humorous interactions among staff and students. Below, students capitalize on the vice principal's knowledge of local gangs to engage in light-hearted banter. As I stand near the gate at the end of a school day, three Latinos quiz Mr. Merritt on the meanings of various acronyms of tagging crews, jokingly referring to whether he has been studying his sheet which lists them.

"Have you been studying your sheet?" Daniel asks.

"Oh yes," Merritt says.

"So what's LAK?" he asks.

"LA's coolest?" Merritt responds tentatively.

"LA Killers," Jack says and laughs. The students continue, asking if LOL is on his sheet, or BBC.

This quiz is delightful for the students (although perhaps not as humorous for Mr. Merritt) on many levels. First, they are reversing traditional pedagogical roles, posing questions and judging the adequacy of Merritt's responses. Secondly, they allude to knowing "inside" knowledge of Mr. Merritt's sheet, and the irony that he has to study what to them is practically second nature. Third, the challenge is an unfair one, since the meanings of the acronyms of tagging crews are ever-changing, as crews dissolve, reform, split and merge on a continuous basis, so his task is practically hopeless.

At other times, teasing moves in the opposite direction, as teachers tease students about alleged gang affiliations. Such is the case when I walk down the street with Mr. Dolan after school, and we notice the following.

Jerry curbs his brand new, shiny, royal blue SUV across the street from the school and gets out, his big gold necklace jangling around his neck. "Where can I get some wheels like that?" Mr. Dolan asks him. "Huh?" Jerry says, as he exits. "Where can I get some wheels like that?" "Huh?" Jerry repeats, tilting his head slightly, walking across the street. "You heard me, I wanna know how I can get me some wheels as nice as you got." "Huh?" Jerry says again, busting into a grin. Mr. Dolan shakes his head, also grinning. "Whatever he's doing, I'd like to know!" he tells me. "That's some fine car!" Later, Jerry returns with Billy and Marcus, and they pile in and leave.

The Challenge of Reintegrative Control

While members of the Central gang were integral in facilitating the establishment of the school, and they constitute the bulk of the students, their presence could be quite problematic when they took a proprietary perspective toward the school. Mr. Griffin, a local community organizer, was familiar with the exploits of Darin, a leader of the gang.

"Darin and his Central pals used to beat up all the kids from outside the neighborhood. I asked him, 'Are you fighting?' 'With everything I can get my hands on,' he said. 'With chains, baseball bats, anything we can get our hands on.'" He tells me how Darin knew CAA was supposed to be a neighborhood school, so he "and his Central pals" were beating up anyone who wasn't from the hood.

"Sounds like he needed some negotiating skills," I say.

"Oh, he had those." He tells me this was a kid who was on the board and went to meetings, and he wanted the school to benefit this neighborhood, so that's how he did it."

Many local residents substitute the name of the local gang for the name of the school, akin to changing it from "Choices Alternative Academy" to "Central Alternative Academy." Ms. Reynolds also spoke of Darin's efforts to assert control.

"I mean the school was known as Central High School. They had taken ownership of it to that extent. Darin didn't beat 'em up personally, but he intimidated them with his friends. And all they had to do was stand on the corner, and these kids had to pass by them. Just think of the fear many of them had, with these Centrals across the street, on the corner, and they have to go to the bus stop. What are they gonna do to me? Are they gonna rob me? So they were intimidated."

Central's territoriality at CAA is recognized by many as a response to their exclusion from other campuses "owned" by their rivals. Despite what administrators understood as the necessity of accommodating students involved in the Central gang, parents were not always in accord which such policies. In fact, they could respond to them quite lividly, as is apparent in the episode witnessed below.

Suddenly, a woman comes out of Ms. Reynold's office screaming that nothing had been

30

done about a large group of girls harassing her daughter. "What kind of place are you runnin'!! I have been up here over and over, and nothing's been done!" She comes out of Reynold's office, shouting to whomever will listen, and Sally [a secretary] tries to whisper to her to calm her down, and eventually moves her outside the office. There, she speaks with three police officers who were on the campus already for a student who had hit his mother. Ms. Reynolds comes out and watches her complain to them from the rail, until the police tell her, "It's OK Ms. Reynolds, we've got it," and she goes inside.

The next day, Ms. Reynold's clarifies the meaning of her confrontation with the parent as she enters the staff meeting, conducted in one of the classrooms.

Ms. Reynolds enters strongly proclaiming, "First time in 31 years!" She walks to the microwave by the sink in the left rear corner of the room to heat up her sweet potato pie. Reenacting her meeting with the girl's mother, she often mimicks how the woman spoke and gestured. She says, "The mother asked if I could guarantee her daughter's safety at this school." Ms. Reynolds looks out at the teachers with an exasperated expression, and a few start saying what her impression implies, and what she then articulates: "I can't even guarantee my own safety!" She says that when she told the mother she could not guarantee her daughter's safety, the mother started "gettin' loud." Enacting the mother's response, she states, "Well I don't know what kind of school you think you're runnin' up here!"

Speaking for herself, Ms. Reynolds says, "So then I stood up, and she saw when I stood up, that I wasn't going to listen to her anymore. That's when she went out of my office and started making all sorts of noise. Sally tried to calm her down, and eventually had to take her outside. She was sayin' she was going to call the police on us! It just so

happened we did have three police officers here, and I was happy to leave her with them." Then Ms. Reynolds implies that the parent was on drugs, based on how she smelled.

A teacher asks what was going to happen with the young girl who was transferred. Ms. Reynolds says she advised the mother to place her in another school. "She went off when I told her this, but basically, the police said the same thing. We can't move the six Central girls that she feels are harassing her daughter. If she does not feel her daughter is comfortable at this school, she needs to put her daughter in a school where she feels more comfortable." Ms. Reynolds says she has no children of her own, but the students at the school are all her children.

Such an excerpt provides a glimpse into the dilemmas of being a principal at a school like CAA. As workers at an alternative school, staff at CAA are mandated to assist students who have dropped out or been expelled from traditional high schools. Furthermore, staff at CAA have *had to* develop a relationship with the local gang, first in the initial founding of the school, and secondly in developing a "running pact" with them. Third, their desire to help inner-city teens leads them to try to create a family-like school atmosphere for some of the most ostracized of the ostracized: gang members. On the other hand, as Ms. Reynolds states, "Central can wreck havoc in an area." The contradictions of such ambivalence are reconciled by Ms. Reynold's maternal concern, in stating that the students at the school are all her children. Presumably she would rather lose one than six, staying on good terms with the local gang, instead of losing six students for the sake of one, and risk that Central might "wreck havoc." Such havoc at least would affect CAA's already problematic attendance.

Conclusion

32

This paper has begun to explore the profound ambivalence of some inner-city service providers toward gang members, and the consequences of this ambivalence for the ways they construct and monitor gang members. Mr. Griffin recognizes Darin as a drug dealer and a gang banger, yet is willing to mortgage his house for Darin's college education, out of a recognition of his gifts as a leader and a poet. Ms. Reynolds can tell of a student killed literally on the school's doorstep, and yet argue, "that's what we're here for." These are positions that are as much courageous as strained, as much heroic as tragic. Yet they are also pragmatic and realistic. Insofar as gang members are predators, boding the destruction of a community, they also comprise that community, and are both products and victims of it. The prosecution of gang members may be the prosecution of a drug dealer and a murderer, but it may also be the prosecution of a vital and treasured neighbor, student, and friend.

Out of staff ambivalence arise numerous dilemmas. A common refrain in inner-city communities, heard in both the opening quote of this chapter and a statement from Ms. Rivers, are that gang members are children too, and they need an education. Yet, as both the tearful young man in the high-profile hotel ballroom and Ms. Grodem state, they "scare away the good ones." Here we find "the gang problem" linked to "the dropout problem." Alternative schools are explicitly designed as places where students who are a threat to others, and interfere with the learning environment, are provided an education. Yet such students are often a threat to each other, and the school is unable to resolve such conflicts by itself.

Aside from dramatic steps such as school transfers, many uneasy tensions are a tangible part of daily life at CAA. Whether teachers might adequately accomplish what passes as "teaching" at the same time as a student is hoping to accomplish a demonstration of gang affiliation is an ongoing question. It is also an ongoing question whether students who are and

those who are not affiliated with a gang can peacefully take classes together, and whether students with differing ways of affiliating with different types of gangs can peacefully coexist. Usually, they do, but not without concerted efforts. As a school of last resort (Emerson, 1981), which is highly dependent on its students' attendance for funding (Heimer and Staffen, 1995), such efforts are an everyday necessity.

The ambivalent dilemmas faced in conceptualizing gang members is a practical working problem for individuals serving gang members, and also for researchers and writers of gang-related dynamics. While it may be rhetorically tempting to simply collapse an argument into one side of a dichotomous schema, choosing to represent gang members as either vicious thugs or as needy children, ambivalence may prove a more useful analytic tool. To not at least recognize gang members' humanity is to condone the historic conditions that give rise to gangs, and ratify their continuance. At the same time, it is short-sighted indeed to overlook the innocent bystanders, neighborhoods and gang members who have been victims of gangs. Even if gang members construct their identities as monstrous or inhuman, those who provide services to gang members learn to see beyond such constructions. On the other hand, recognizing that many gang members are indeed needy children does not obviate the necessity to monitor them, in light of the distinct possibility that one might end up murdered literally at the school's doorstep. In an increasingly exclusive era (Young, 1999, 2007), in which maintaining a "running pact" with a gang might be considered colluding with terrorists, we might take note of the challenges faced in providing even the most marginalized with opportunities, and spaces for reintegration.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

[1] See Donileen Loseke (1993), regarding victim-victimizer contests.

[2] Compare Werthman (1983), who shows in vivid ethnographic detail how resisting educational goals is only relevant for gang members in classrooms where they interpret teachers' grading practices as arbitrary.

[3] The notion of ambivalence is central in many ways for understanding gangs. Diego Vigil, (1988) drawing repeatedly from Erikson's (1968) developmental model, stresses how the ambivalence and unpredictability which characterizes the status crisis in the transition to adulthood, if not resolved, may lead to gang-related crises. Garot (2009), drawing on Klein's (1988a and b) theories of psychosocial development (see Gadd and Jefferson, 2007), explores how young men in the inner-city must reconcile themselves to emotive dissonance and ambivalence when structural ties, such as those to fellow gang members, inhibit one from retaliating. More broadly, Gadd and Jefferson (2007) draw upon Klein's theories to understand how criminal behavior may result from an inability to reconcile oneself to ambivalence. Shadd Maruna (2001) analyzes the reverse of such processes, showing how ex-convicts struggle to come to terms with past crimes, and reintegrate into society by learning to accept perceived harms without resorting to retaliation. On "the dialectical ambivalence of adversarialism and mutualism," see Barak (2003:281-282).

[4] According to the local police department, the area around CAA ongoingly experiences the highest percent of "gang related crime" in the city, measured at 14.3% of all gang crime in the city in the year before the school was built. One of the CAA census tracts charted the largest increase in violent crime in the city between 1980 and 1988, at 92.2%. On the other hand, the invalidity and unreliability of gang statistics are notorious, as Katz (2000) and Klein (1995) point out. Meehan (2000) provides an revealing insider's view of how such statistics are constructed. I

provide them here to give a sense of the data available on the area. For a discussion on how the number of gang members at CAA is impossible to determine, see Garot (forthcoming).

[5] Fieldwork was conducted in and around the school over 116 days of observation, primarily in two periods, from January to June of 1997 (33 days of observation), and November 1999 to June of 2001 (83 days of observation), with the period between spent working as a full-time teacher and substitute in a nearby school, with frequent visits to the fieldsite. Detailed fieldnotes were maintained over 489 hours of participant observation.

[6] Alternative schools such as CAA have been conceptualized as an increasingly common response to school safety concerns. In a national survey of school boards, National School Boards Association (1993) 66% of responding boards claimed to have an alternative program or school in place as a setting for placing violent students who have been expelled from a traditional school setting. 85% of urban districts report having such a program in place, 66% of suburban districts, and 57% of rural districts. Policy makers often advocate such settings as an alternative to expelling students, thereby balancing the rights of violent students to receive a free education, with the rights of all students to a safe environment (see Leo Klagholz, 1995). Many students at CAA have been transferred there for frequent episodes of fighting and violence, although others were transferred for dealing drugs, and others are simply drop-outs from traditional high schools, who have sought out CAA as a means to achieve a high school diploma. Michelle Fine's (1991) thorough examination of the ways inner-city schools produce drop-outs, Deidre Kelly's (1993) detailed exploration of the history and contradictions of continuation schools, and Betsy Rymes's (2001) analysis of the political and social dynamics of an alternative urban high school, provide an apt backdrop of the issues in which alternative schools are enmeshed.

[7] Nevertheless, since the overwhelming presence of Central at CAA is so obvious, it often

prevents conflicts. First, students fear antagonizing the gang, and secondly, gang members try to minimize violence on campus in order to avoid attracting undue attention from the police. For further discussion, see Garot (forthcoming).

[8] Although Merritt uses the masculine pronoun, such questions apply to young women as well as young men. On the varying levels of gang affiliations, see Garot (forthcoming).

[9] Some students have claimed that they have been expelled from school not for being gang affiliated, but for appearing to be affiliated with the *wrong* gang (this student denied any gang affiliation).

Bill: Like when I was in San Francisco, I always wore--I liked the blue. I always wore blue. In schools I went to, they was like, 'You can't wear this here.'

RG: What'd they say you can't wear?

Bill: They say I can't wear blue.

RG: Who said that?

Bill: The students, teachers, whoever. They was like, it was like it's gang affiliated.

RG: Where did they say that?

Bill: North State Middle School. Just like, it was gang related, 'You can't wear this color here.' And the whole school is like wearin' nothin' but red and all that, and I'm like, this is gang affiliated? Everybody around here is gang affiliated. And they was like, 'You either gotta check outta this school, or change the colors you wear.'

RG: The teachers said that to you?

Bill: Yeah. And I'm like 'Damn.' So I had my mom check me out the school and from there we moved out here.

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