

## ABSTRACT

FROYUM ROISE, CARISSA MAY. *Leaving the Street Alone: Cultural Training for Upward Mobility at an After-School Program.* (Under the direction of Barbara J. Risman.)

This ethnographic study examines the strategies that a nonprofit organization (Kidworks) used to create opportunities for working-class black kids. The mission of Kidworks was to help kids achieve their potential and become productive adults through youth development. Staff at Kidworks viewed their black clientele as at risk for failing and getting into trouble. They attributed the problem to street culture, and they prescribed middle-class culture as the solution. I examine how Kidworks went about meeting its mission and the consequences, using data from 21 months of participant observation, 40 interviews, and artifacts.

Kidworks' programming was designed to transmit middle-class cultural capital—middle-class presentations of self, self-determination, and rationality—to kids and to give them practice using it. Kidworks' attempts to transmit middle-class cultural capital were assimilationist and existed alongside a marketing strategy designed to build Kidworks' credibility among wealthy white donors. Despite the ideological colorblindness that dominated the organization, Kidworks itself was stratified along gender and race lines. The black direct-care staff, in response, defined themselves and blackness around dedication to the kids rather than money and status. They appropriated the superficially race-neutral mission as a way to mediate the effects of racism on the kids and themselves. They themselves code switched rather than assimilated.

In practice, it was black direct-care workers who were charged with culturally developing youth. How the staff established their own credibility, taught kids to interact with authority figures, and disciplined them often undercut their attempts to transmit middle-class cultural capital. I argue that gender also shaped how well they promoted middle-class cultural capital. They taught girls to be good girls who controlled their sexuality and took responsibility for

emotions, while they taught the boys to become real men through breadwinning. These lessons reinforced both working-class and middle-class cultural capital among the girls but mostly working-class cultural capital among the boys. I conclude that cultural training was necessary but insufficient for individual kids to access opportunities at Kidworks. It also came at the cost of reinforcing the perception of black culture as dysfunctional.

LEAVING THE STREET ALONE:  
CULTURAL TRAINING FOR UPWARD MOBILITY AT AN AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAM

by  
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## **Dedication**

In memory of my grandfather Stuart Berg

In honor of my grandparents Florence Berg, Betty Froyum, and Wally Froyum

## **Biography**

Carissa M. Froyum Roise grew up in the country outside of the small town Waconia, Minnesota. She graduated summa cum laude in 2001 from Concordia College in Moorhead, Minnesota, with a Bachelor of Arts Degree in sociology and English literature. Sociology offered the perfect blend of interviewing, thinking, and social justice. Following graduation, she moved to Washington, D.C., where she worked for a year counseling inner-city teenagers as a volunteer with the Lutheran Volunteer Corps and Americorps. Her experiences with the young people in D.C., as well as her relationships with her housemates and the events of September 11, 2001, guided her future research track. She earned her Master of Science Degree from North Carolina State University in 2004 and continued on to get her Ph.D. in 2007. Carissa returned home to the Midwest following graduate school. She works as an assistant professor at the University of Northern Iowa, where she teaches courses on inequality and conducts research on after-school programs. She lives with her partner Adam.

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**chapter one:**  
**Welcome to Kidworks**

*You used to talk a certain way on the corner and you got into the house and switched to English. Everybody knows it's important to speak English except these knuckleheads. You can't land a plane with "why you ain't..." You can't be a doctor with that kind of crap coming out of your mouth.*

*Five or six different children, same woman, eight, ten different husbands or whatever, pretty soon you're going to have to have DNA cards so you can tell who you're making love to.*

*Basketball players, multimillionaires can't write a paragraph. Football players, multimillionaires, can't read. Yes. Multimillionaires. Well, Brown v. Board of Education, where are we today? It's there. They paved the way. What did we do with it. The white man, he's laughing, got to be laughing. Fifty percent drop out, rest of them in prison (Bill Cosby).*

On May 17, 2004, Bill Cosby delivered a controversial speech at the gala commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of *Brown v. the Board of Education*. It sparked a media firestorm. Cosby's speech, excerpted above, pointed the finger at low-income black communities as the source of the problems facing black Americans—rather than discrimination or white racism. As he put it at another point, "The lower economic and lower middle economic people are [not] holding their end in this deal." Over the course of the next two years, Cosby took his message across the country in a speaking tour. To much applause and criticism, he said that he was airing the "dirty laundry" of blacks: teenage pregnancy, poor parenting, unacceptable grammar, a lack of respect, hip-hop culture, and absent fathers were all symbolic of the cultural downfall of poor blacks. They were the reason for low literacy rates among African Americans and mass incarceration.

Cosby's speech precipitated a public discussion over the state of black communities among Americans from all walks of life. Cosby himself made the talk show circuit, and TV programs and National Public Radio brought in experts to debate the validity of his position. In the national media, Juan Williams called on black Americans to "banish the bling" in order to purge the "culture of failure that taints black America" (Williams 2006). In "At the Corner of Progress and Peril," Michael A. Fletcher (2006) framed the problem this way:

What does it mean to be a black man? Imagine three African American boys, kindergartners who are largely alike in intelligence, talent and character, whose potential seems limitless. According to a wealth of statistics and academic studies, in just over a decade one of the boys is likely to be locked up or headed to prison. The second boy—if he hasn't already dropped out—will seriously weigh leaving high school and be pointed toward an uncertain future. The third boy will be speeding toward success by most measures.

The debate centered on what causes some boys to speed toward success and others to head to prison. Both the *Washington Post* and *The New York Times* ran series (feature and editorial) that tried to address these issues by examining black culture, particularly the “crisis” among men (Patterson 2006; Ross 2006), economic changes, and poverty.

The racial disparities in economic, social, and health indicators are alarming. Fewer than half of black Americans own homes, and their median household net worth is only a tenth of that of white Americans (Lemonik Arthur 2005). Despite an overall drop in poverty over the past four decades, black Americans are still twice as likely as whites to live in poverty (Lemonik Arthur 2005). The development of the “prison complex” over the past two decades has hit black Americans especially hard: incarceration rates are about eight times higher for blacks than for whites. Men born in later cohorts and who drop out of school are particularly at risk: a black man dropout born between 1965 and 1969 had a sixty percent chance of being imprisoned by the end of the 1990s (Pettit and Western 2004). In 2003, black Americans were about nineteen times more likely than whites to be diagnosed with gonorrhea and about six times as likely, syphilis (CDC 2004). Black Americans also have alarmingly high HIV diagnoses rates. Although they make up less than 13 percent of the U.S. population, African Americans constitute over half of all new HIV diagnoses each year. In 2004, the rate was 8.4 times that for whites (CDC 2005).

Debates rage on among researchers as to why these indicators continue to be so dire, particularly for low-income and urban black Americans. I began to consider these issues when I worked for a year doing counseling with poor inner-city black teens in Washington, D.C. I was an Americorps volunteer, and it was the first time that I really encountered young people whose lives spun out of control. They often faced danger. Violence, drugs, discrimination, and sexual abuse met them at many corners. I left after a year believing I had done little if anything to really improve the kids’ lot. After all, how big of an impact can “better decision making,” as we were teaching them, really make within this environment? I became increasingly interested in the roles that identity, ideology, and culture play in the reproduction of inequality from one generation to the next.

I entered Kidworks, a large national nonprofit after-school program with local chapters in the southern city Sherburne, wanting to understand the reproduction of gender and race inequality across generations from the perspective of the kids. When my observations started, though, I found myself surprisingly drawn to the staff members. I saw that they occupied a strange and somewhat tenuous position within the organization: they were the direct-care workers serving mostly black kids, yet they worked for a white administration. White people made organizational decisions, and they resented it. What I found particularly interesting was what seemed like ideological symmetry between the black staff and the white administration. Both groups seemed to want some version of what Bill Cosby described: to train kids to behave differently—to give them middle-class cultural capital—in order to secure opportunities for themselves. These observations raised a whole new set of questions for me: Where did the direct-care staff's emotional investment in the kids come from? How did they make sense of their work? Was this organization really creating opportunities for black kids when *it* was stratified by race? I realized that in order to understand the young people at Kidworks, I had to understand the adults who were in their shoes not long ago: the black direct-care staff.

What evolved from there was a much more comprehensive attempt to unpack the goings on at Kidworks. Having worked in a nonprofit after-school program myself, I knew some of the challenges involved: funding shortages, lots of kids, slow progress, staff turnover. I wanted to know what KW's strategy for change through cultural transformation meant and how the staff themselves made sense of it. To find my answers, I examined the different perspectives of the adults associated with KW in addition to the young people served by it. I wondered what staff wanted to accomplish through their youth work and what motivated them to stay put. I examined the hierarchical structure of the organization and the programming offered. My questions and foci continued to evolve throughout the two years of this project as I learned more about the people, more about KW's history, and more about the kids. By the end, all of the pieces came together around a single theme: training kids for upward mobility through cultural transformation. The result is this dissertation.

The following chapter details the history and organization of a nonprofit after-school program I call Kidworks. I begin by describing the historical context out of which Kidworks National, the national affiliation of the Sherburne's Kidworks programs, evolved and the changes within the national organization over the past century. I also describe the relationship between Kidworks National and local affiliates. Next, I illustrate the local chapter of Kidworks in Sherburne, including the historical development of six different sites and the current vision for the organization. I outline the structure of Kidworks at the local level, particularly the hierarchy of staff. In the next section, I draw a picture of two specific Kidworks locations within Sherburne where I conducted participant observation and interview research over the course of nearly two years. One of these sites, Girlworks, served black girls aged six to twelve years. The other, Boyworks, served black boys of the same age group, as well as teens (boys and girls) in a teen center. I describe the programs at each site and provide background information on the kids themselves. I follow up these descriptions by laying out the data collection and analysis techniques I employed in this study. I end this chapter by foreshadowing the analysis in the following chapters on the role of cultural transformation in Kidworks' attempts to create upward mobility for low-income black youth.

### **Kidworks National**

Kidworks National is nonprofit youth agency that provides after-school, recreation, and camp programs to American kids. The kids range from ages six to eighteen, and the organization prides itself on serving a wide range of ethnic and race groups, including non-Hispanic whites (36 percent of total population served in 2005), non-Hispanic blacks (31 percent), Hispanics (21 percent), Asians (three percent), and American Indians (three percent).

Kidworks National grew out of the changes brought about by industrialization and immigration during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, particularly in New England. Prior to industrialization, poor children worked as servants, apprentices, and farm labors (Illick 2002; Mintz 2004). The expanding economy and industry, however, fueled urbanization. Men, single women, black families, and children

migrated from rural areas to northern cities in search of factory employment (Illick 2002). Additionally, as Illick reports, six million immigrants from northern and western Europe arrived in the U.S. between 1877 and 1890, up from 5,000 annually at the beginning of the century. Working-class immigrants and migrants, often living below the poverty level, struggled to survive, while middle-class families tried to create social stability despite the rapidly changing social conditions.

As home-based production decreased and the apprenticeship system fell, juvenile delinquency and infanticide grew increasingly problematic, particularly in urban communities (Mintz 2004). Rural and urban households could no longer support the high numbers of destitute children. Population and economic shifts, then, sparked concern by women's groups and religious organizations over the treatment of the poor and young, as well as prisoners and the elderly. A movement of "child-savers" grew (Mintz 2004). These philanthropists affirmed childhood as a unique life stage. They viewed children as separate from adults, innocent, and in need of protection (Hays 1996; Kett 1977; Macleod 1998). At the same time, they considered undisciplined children to be dangerous to others (Mintz 2004). Children lacked order and discipline, child-savers thought, and they developed institutions such as orphan houses to create them. They concentrated their efforts on urban areas. Religious groups, who viewed humanitarianism and religious conversion as Christian priorities, supported youth organizations in cities. These groups mixed their mission of saving children from abuse and neglect with one of saving children from sin and misbehavior.

Kidworks National (KN) was one of the organizations that developed out of these social conditions.<sup>1</sup> In the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, KN established recreational, community-based facilities in New England. KN leaders rejected religious pressures to proselytize through the welfare movement and, instead, emphasized the need for recreation and adult supervision. Official histories claim that KN facilities allowed groups of boys to learn from adults rather than from gangs on the street. The organization garnered some support from political and financial groups in its early years. As Kidworks

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<sup>1</sup> Information on Kidworks National's history comes from official KN documents.

National grew at the end of the century, it began to spread across the country. Programs shifted to emphasize vocational skills on top of recreation.

Within the first 40 years of its existence, Kidworks National started 40 facilities for boys. The first all “colored” facility opened in 1903. Others cropped up in urban areas as African American workers fled the South into the North in search of industrial jobs. Despite these slow but modest changes, Kidworks National struggled during the early 1900s. National leadership turned over quickly, and there was little financial support for the organization. Adult men who worked with kids lacked formal training, and there was internal dissention over a merger with another youth organization. When WWI started, Kidworks National was beginning to reestablish itself. A new KN president took over, which began several decades of stable leadership. Boys participated in the war effort by tending war gardens and working on farms. KN grew solidly during the 1920s, expanding to serve more than 30,000 boys, and staff began to receive formal training. By 1926, the first black employee was hired at the national level.

The Great Depression and World War II brought new challenges to KN, as it did for the entire country. In Detroit, for example, staffers had to be paid in a local alternative currency and food. The national leadership waned, and direct-care staff became frustrated with it. As the Depression eased, the leadership grew in strength again, and a new Kidworks National president took over. He developed a national board, an official philosophy, and a national public relations campaign. In the 1930s, critical researchers started studying the effectiveness of Kidworks National programs, particularly in preventing crime. Their findings raised doubts about KN’s effectiveness. One study found that delinquency rates declined more slowly in a neighborhood with a Kidworks National facility than one without, for example. Another study criticized programs for having inadequate staffing and equipment. World War II brought more change. White women went to work in factories, and Kidworks National provided new swimming and lifesaving programs to prepare young people for war. Kids supported the war effort by selling bonds and gathering scrap materials. Following the war, Kidworks National struggled to find employees as veterans made use of the G. I. Bill. Despite these setbacks, by the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the organization was well-established.

The postwar era was one of prosperity for the middle-class Americans. Median family incomes increased by 70 percent between 1949 and 1959 (U.S. Census Bureau 2006), and millions moved to the suburbs (Massey and Denton 1993). The baby boom peaked in 1957 with 4.3 million births, putting “more kids at risk than ever before,” as an official KN history put it. Kidworks National began to sell itself as building “juvenile decency” in addition to deterring delinquency. KN continued to grow and reshape itself through the 1960s and ‘70s as new national leadership took over. The focus shifted to better training of workers, better management, and more advocacy on behalf of kids. There was also a concerted effort to promote KN on a national scale.

By the early ‘80s, KN was marketing itself through new logos and symbols. The high rates of working women (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1998), divorce (Ruggles 1997), and unemployment (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2006) brought new needs for families. Kidworks National tried to match these needs with new education programs and delinquency prevention. Girls were coming to Kidworks National programs in record numbers, which increased pressure on the organization to design and expand programming for them, too. A national campaign to increase enrollment and quality was successful, and Kidworks National began partnering with government and community agencies. By the mid 1990s, prevention became the cornerstone of Kidworks National programming. National political leaders took up KN’s cause, and celebrities promoted the organization through television and ad campaigns.

The focus of Kidworks National when I was at Kidworks, in the mid 2000s, was providing youth services to as many kids as possible. They had initiatives that expanded services to housing projects, downtrodden neighborhoods, immigrants, and American Indian reservations. These new programs allowed KN to center attention on disadvantaged kids and those viewed as most at risk for juvenile delinquency. Programming focused more on prevention and personal development and less on recreation and fun than in years past. Another focus was creating value for the organization by successfully fundraising and raising awareness about its programming. These strategies were successful on a national level. In 2004, Kidworks National secured over 85 million federal and private dollars, 40 million state

dollars, and 33 million in technological equipment. The operating expenses were nearly 67 million dollars in 2005.

### **The Relationship between Kidworks National & Local Affiliates**

Kidworks National had affiliated programs and facilities across the United States. Local Kidworks (KW) that had an enrollment of 100 young people or more were eligible to join KN for a membership fee. The national branch, in turn, provided resources, both monetary and programmatic, to local programs. KN commissioned a variety of life-skills, leadership, and prevention programs that local Kidworks used. Still, the affiliation between the national and local organizations remained loose. For example, resource developers for local affiliates were free to order fundraising materials produced by KN for a fee but had no obligation to. Although they shared the same mission, local KW directors were free to organize programs according to their local needs. Kidworks National offered grant moneys to local affiliates to institute its national initiatives. This granting system provided incentive to local programs to expand to new sites according to the national strategic plan and to institute KW life-skills and prevention programs. Local KWs gave data back to the national organization, including demographic information, grades, surveys of the youth for national reports, and pre- and post-test results from pregnancy-prevention and other programs. Thus, there was a reciprocal relationship of information sharing across the national and local levels that mutually served the needs of both. This relationship was increasingly tied to resource allocation from the national to the local level.

Kidworks National also provided conferences and training opportunities for KW staff. These trainings, which took place across the country, provided staff the chance to share information with other KW staff members about running programs and managing staff. Formal training ranged from management skills to conflict management. KN national also provided training to facilitate its life-skills and prevention programs, which local Kidworks staff members and volunteers were supposed to take before becoming group leaders. This training taught adults the standardized objectives for the programs and the best ways to execute the curricula.

Finally, KN provided local youth opportunities via its scholarship programs. These programs, including the Best and Brightest Youth scholarship contest, offered young people a chance to compete against other Kidworks members. The local winner went on to compete at other KN scholarship contests.

### **Kidworks in Sherburne**

I conducted research for this study at a Kidworks organization in the city of Sherburne between 2004 and 2006. Sherburne was a growing mid-sized southern city with moderate levels of racial residential segregation. The city became increasingly urban, rich, and densely populated over the last decade. There was also an influx of Latino immigrants from Mexico and Central America. Over the past twenty years, for example, the Latino K-12 student population grew from a half percent of the students to over eight percent. In 2005, seven percent of the citizens in Sherburne were Latino. Sixty-three percent were white and nearly 30 percent were black. There was also a small Asian population. Despite the high numbers of minorities within the city, there remained concentrated pockets of wealthy white neighborhoods and poor black neighborhoods, which residents recognized by name.

Kidworks in Sherburne opened its doors within an old church building in 1967 (see Table 1). This first facility, Boyworks, served only boys from the neighborhood. It was located near the center of the city in a neighborhood that would soon undergo historical preservation of its century-old houses. According to U.S. Census data, Sherburne's population was 22.8 percent black in 1970. Although there were strong black middle-class neighborhoods and higher education facilities, 36 percent of black families in the city lived in poverty. In those first years, Kidworks' black men employees served around 200 boys, mostly black but also some white. The programs were mostly recreational in nature. In 1973, Kidworks opened its first summer day camp. By 1978, Kidworks had outgrown its facilities and moved to a new location in a building designed for Kidworks and its programmatic needs. At the time of my data collection, Boyworks was located within a predominantly black, low-income neighborhood on the southwest side of the city. According to 2000 census data, over 88 percent of the people within KW's

census tract were minority. The median family income was under \$26,000 per year, and two and a half times more people rented than owned housing units.

Table 1. Kidworks' Facilities in Sherburne, Year Opened and Current Clientele

<b>Facility</b>	<b>Year Opened</b>	<b>Clientele</b>
Boyworks*	1967	Mostly black boys, ages 6-12; boy and girl teens
North Kidworks	1986	Variety of kids, ages 6-18
Girlworks*	1987	Mostly black girls, ages 6-12
East Kidworks	1997	Variety of kids, ages 6-18
Southwest Kidworks	2000	Mostly black boys and girls, ages 6-18
West Kidworks	2006	Latino kids, ages 6-18

\* Location of participant observation for this study.

Kidworks opened North Kidworks, its second location in the northern part of the city, in 1986. The program was housed inside a gymnasium at an elementary school and served mostly working-class kids, both white and black. This program site functioned like a community center, drawing kids from an assortment of neighborhoods. The program director for North Kidworks was a white man, who was hired at this facility in the '80s as the primary employee. Kidworks National had already instituted a number of life-skills programs that North Kidworks incorporated at the local level, including a leadership program, homework help, pregnancy prevention, and tobacco-use prevention. There were 60 to 70 kids who attended, but within a year, 100 kids attended. This made North Kidworks eligible to join Kidworks National officially.

Kidworks opened an all-girls facility called Girlworks in an old store the following year. At that time, Kidworks' expenses hovered just under one million dollars (in 2004 dollars; see Figure 1). Sisters of boys had already started to attend some programs, and in 1991, North Kidworks invited girls to participate fully. Girls' programs and staff were separate to begin with, including at North Kidworks.

Kidworks still lacked programs designed specifically for girls, but there would soon be co-ed sports leagues. Girlworks moved out of the store and opened its own facility two blocks down the street from Boyworks in 1992. The administration offices moved from the Boyworks to the Girlworks building at that time.

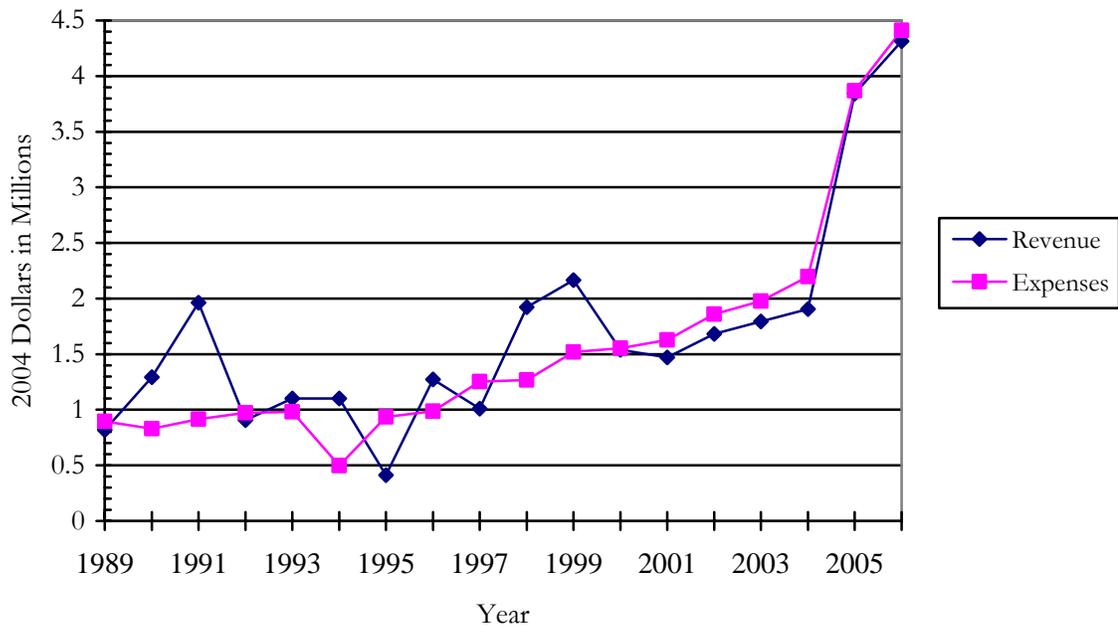


Figure 1. Kidworks' Revenue and Expenses between Fiscal Years 1989 and 2006.

The next decade was marked by rapid expansion and plans for future growth. A fourth location opened inside a school in eastern Sherburne in 1997. This location served kids from a variety of backgrounds, similar to North Kidworks. KW's expenses increased to \$1.25 million. Boyworks expanded to incorporate a teen center (for both boys and girls) inside its building in 1999. A fifth location opened across the street from a housing project occupied by black families. This program served mostly low-income black youth inside an elementary school gymnasium. Revenue and expenses continued to grow slowly. In 2006, a sixth facility opened within a Latino neighborhood in order to accommodate the growing immigrant population. There were also plans in place to move the teen center to its own building. Several new locations were in the works in surrounding communities, and the administration planned to create a twelve-million dollar recreational complex in the two blocks of land between

Girlworks and Boyworks. These plans included a large swimming pool among other facilities. The goal was to make KW accessible to every kid within Sherburne and the surrounding communities.

Sherburne had an extensive school assignment program that attempted to diversify the populations within each school. The official standard for diversity was no more than 40 percent of the student population could receive free or reduced lunch. No more than a quarter of students could perform below grade level. Because more than half of the black students within the school district and two-thirds of the Latino students were eligible for free and reduced lunch prices in 2004-2005, this initiative created racial and ethnic diversity as well as economic. For this reason, nearly all of the kids at Kidworks attended race-, ethnic-, and class-integrated public schools. A few of the kids, however, attended a small, mostly black charter school by their families' choice.

#### *Administration*

In 2003, Kidworks underwent an organizational restructuring in order to support expansion both monetarily and administratively. The administration, formerly consisting of the executive director, his assistant, and another office worker, grew by four positions. The executive director (ED) was an older white man who had been with the organization for decades (see Figure 2). Along with supervising full-time direct-care staff and the administration, the ED developed the vision for Kidworks and served as the liaison between KW and the donating public. He worked closely with the board of directors and spent time networking and raising money. The ED had a personal assistant, a white woman who had been with the organization for decades.

A full-time professional resource developer took over fundraising duties during the reorganization in the early 2000s. During the first part of my research, a white middle-aged woman occupied this position. She started Professionals for Progress, a group of young professionals in Sherburne who raised awareness and funds for Kidworks by hosting social events for other professionals. This group of volunteers was not nearly as elite as the board but envied their status and fundraising abilities. Just like the board, they were almost entirely white, and they included financial analysts, bankers,

real estate agents, and business owners. Their biggest event, the Kidworks Gala, was \$50-a-ticket social and auction at a ritzy department store. The resource developer also hired a part-time volunteer coordinator. After the resource developer was promoted to a national position, another white woman took over. She was a petite woman whose blond hair, charming smile, and fashionable style drew attention and praise from donors.

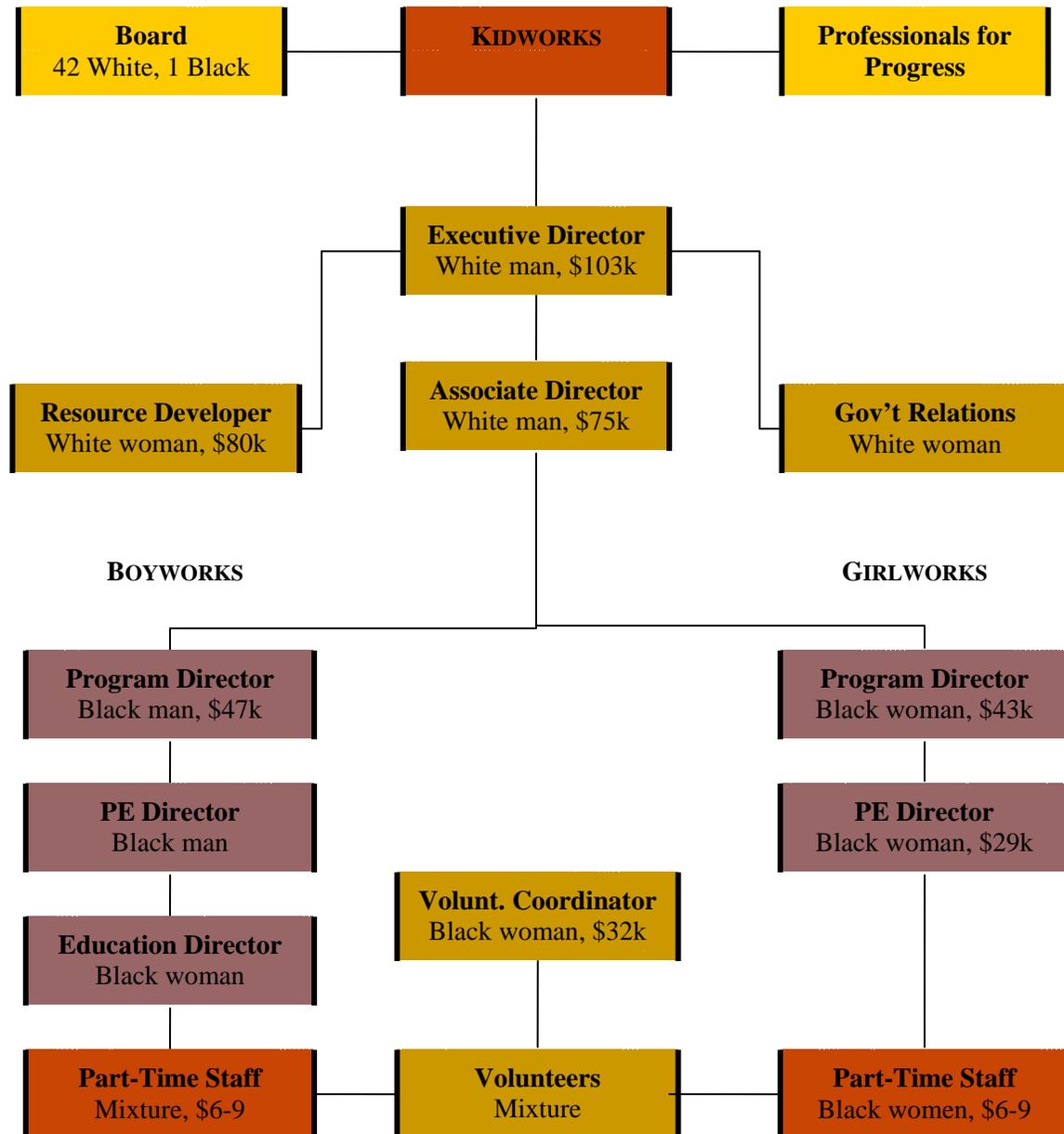


Figure 2. The Organizational Structure of Kidworks by Position, Gender, Race, and Pay.

The executive director and resource developer both worked closely with the board of directors. There were 43 members on the board in 2005, all of whom were white except for one black man. Eight were women. The board of directors had an exceptional reputation in Sherburne, which drew prestigious members and reaffirmed its status as elite. It consisted of well-established white businessmen and women philanthropists with elite social networks in the real estate, finance, and banking industries. Other members included a jeweler, physicians, and corporation owners (roofing, landscaping). When they invited new members to join the board, it was people from inside these networks.

While the board did make policy for Kidworks, its primary function was to fundraise and promote a positive public image of the organization. They were successful at both aims during the mid 2000s. KW was enjoying a time of massive expansion (as already mentioned, they were opening new sites and had grand plans for others) and public admiration despite the difficulty in fundraising for other nonprofits (Froelich 1999). Membership on the board came with the expectation to raise a minimum of \$5000 a year (individually or in a group). The top fundraiser on the board raised over \$33,000 in 2006, and the top fundraising team elicited over \$50,000 in pledges. In 2006, the campaign drive brought in over \$1 million dollars in contributions for the first time, a \$250,000 improvement over the previous year's target. Board members also individually sponsored kids to attend camps, and one family agreed to pay college tuition for a handful of kids. They supported kids by using their personal networks to find them tutoring help or even people to job shadow.

The organizational restructuring, additionally, included hiring a government relations employee who began lobbying at the state legislature and writing grants. The program director at North Kidworks became the associate director of KW (second in charge) and took over personnel duties, including hiring and firing full-time direct-care staff and running staff meetings with program directors from all six Sherburne sites. The volunteer coordinator/accountability officer was the only African American in the administration. Her duties included expanding the volunteer base, coordinating around 200 volunteers, organizing special events and fundraisers, and collecting data to satisfy some minimal grant accountability requirements. She was 22 years old when I started my observations in 2004. For over a year, she worked

part-time and made hourly wages without overtime. She became full-time in 2005 and quickly enjoyed a fifteen percent raise. She earned \$32,000 a year.

These administration changes brought dramatic increases in Kidworks' revenue and expenses (see Figure 1). The annual budget increased from \$2 million in 2002 and 2003 to \$4.4 million in 2006. KW received \$1 million state dollars from Health and Human Services and another \$400,000 in state funds to prevent juvenile delinquency, which it disseminated among Kidworks programs across the state. Sherburne's KW also received grant money from Philip Morris USA (over \$20,000 each in 2005 and 2006) to implement life-skills-based prevention programs which stipulated that a quarter of all youth participate (more on this in chapter five). Other funding sources, including a \$100,000 per year grant to match new funds and growth grants, also brought in new money (see Figure 3).

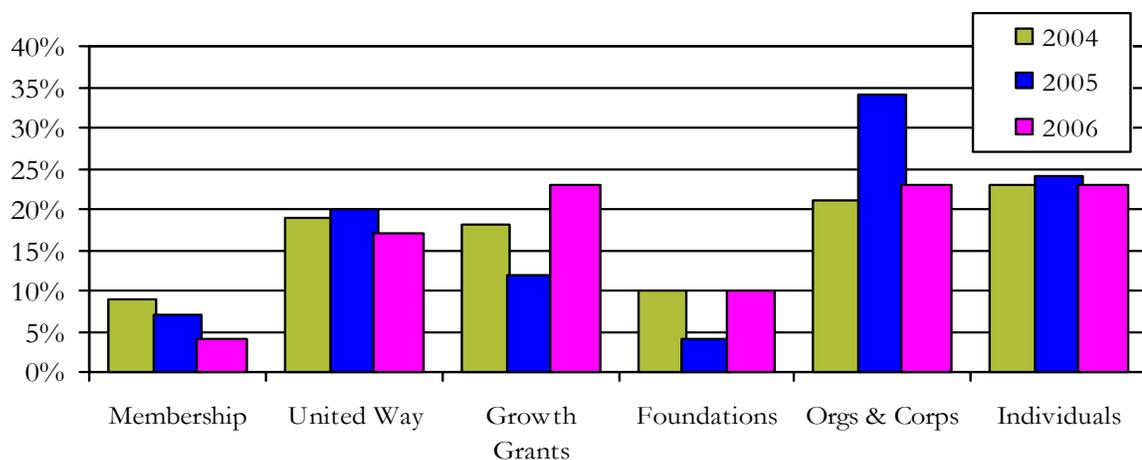


Figure 3. Funding Sources, 2004-2006.

The funding raising success also brought along hefty salaries, particularly for the executive director, the associate director, and the resource developer. In 2004, the executive director enjoyed a salary of over \$100,000 and another \$5,000 in benefits. The associate director made \$72,000 (an \$18,000 raise over the previous year) and almost \$4,000 in benefits. The white female resource developer had a salary of \$80,000 and \$4,000 in benefits. She was promoted into a national position because of her successful work in Sherburne. When the new resource developer started, with some experience but an unrelated master's degree, she made over \$50,000 a year, but she did not reveal the exact figure.

### *Direct-Care Staff*

The direct-care workers of Kidworks were primarily African American, except at North Kidworks, which had a large population of white youth and had an all-white full-time staff. While administrators wore suits and dresses, the direct-care staff were required to wear casual uniforms: a KW collared polo-style shirt tucked into khaki pants for “professional” employees and a plain KW T-shirt and jeans for part-time workers. “Professionals” were salaried full-time employees who had college degrees. Each program had a program director who managed the programming, budget, and staff. Across sites, program directors earned between \$31,000 and \$47,000 a year. That person was supported by one or two other full-time professionals: a physical education director and/or an education director. They ran Kidworks programs and supervised part-time staff, although I seldom saw PE or education directors directly supervising staff, instructing them, or reprimanding them. Their salaries started at \$28,500 a year.

The professionals on the whole worked together closely, and they developed relationships with each other across the various program sites. They enjoyed relative autonomy in their work because they controlled their own budgets and programming. The associate director was their direct supervisor, and the staff generally liked working for him. They found him to be both helpful and more respectful of them than other administrators. Professional staff had regular contact with the associate director at staff meetings. They also sought out his advice when they fired people or ran into programmatic challenges.

Part-time direct-care workers were usually college students with little or no experience working with kids. Some were teen employees who participated in the teen center. They ran activities and supervised kids. They earned between minimum wage (\$5.15 an hour for teen employees) and \$9 an hour with most earning around \$7. The program directors at each site hired their own part-time staffers, and these workers reported directly to the full-time direct-care staff.

### *Volunteers*

The other major players at Kidworks were the community members who volunteered directly with kids at Kidworks. These volunteers came from all walks of life and participated in numerous ways.

Some volunteered weekly at Kidworks programs by tutoring or coaching a sports team. Others worked the events that KW hosted like a Halloween festival, family celebration day, or spring fling. Others, such as the Professionals for Progress, focused on raising awareness or fundraising. There were approximately 200 volunteers at Kidworks, for whom the volunteer coordinator served as the liaison to the organization.

### **Entering Girlworks as a Field Site**

The focus of this study is on Boyworks and its partner facility Girlworks. Before this project, I had done research on an after-school program serving low-income black teens in Washington, D.C. After arriving at graduate school, I joined a Preparing Future Faculty research team headed up Barbara Risman. For this project, a group of graduate students and Barbara conducted interviews with young people aged twelve to fourteen years. In an effort to diversify our sample by race and class, the group interviewed four girls at Girlworks. Barbara had a professional connection to the volunteer coordinator, who happily accommodated our request to interview girls in the building.

Following these interviews, I consulted Barbara about potential dissertation projects, and we agreed that I should consider conducting fieldwork at Girlworks in order to extend my master's thesis project on peer cultures to a younger population. I was taking a course on fieldwork at the time and was looking for a project that would also satisfy the requirements of the course. Theoretically, I wanted to understand the role of peer culture in the reproduction of gender and race inequality across generations.

I approached the volunteer coordinator, Barbara's contact, with my request to volunteer and do participant observation at Girlworks. She was excited to have me participate in the organization. I discussed my plans with her and the resource developer more thoroughly during a volunteer orientation in October 2004, and the volunteer coordinator introduced me to the program director at Girlworks, a black woman in her late 20s who had been with the organization for a handful of years. I began participant observation and volunteering at Girlworks about two weeks later when my background check cleared.

Girlworks provided recreational, life-skills, and technology programs to girls between ages six and twelve. Over 95 percent of the girls were African American. Despite the low cost of the programs—under \$10 a year—GW attracted girls from a wide variety of class and family backgrounds. GW was well attended by girls, averaging around 150 to 200 a day.

The GW workers were all women and predominantly African American. When I first started fieldwork, there were two professional full-time staff members: the program director and a physical education director who was a white woman. The PE director left within a few months to move on to another job. She was replaced by a young black woman who was still in college but had run the summer program the previous summer. In the fall of 2006, she also left GW. GW's program director was the only female in charge of a KW facility in Sherburne. She was responsible for a \$100,000 a year budget, and she had five years of experience with KW. She earned around \$43,000 a year. GW's PE director made \$28,500 a year.

In addition to the two full-time professional positions, GW had around ten part-time workers, most of whom were college students. Some part-time staff members had worked at GW for a few years, including two African American women in their early twenties and a white professional artist who taught art lessons. The artist made \$9.25 an hour, but the other part-time workers generally made between \$6 and \$7 an hour. A few teenagers from the teen program at Boyworks also worked as summer or part-time staff. They made minimum wage if they were paid at all.

When I first arrived at the Girlworks building, it was quiet, calm even. There were few people around, and I could only hear the sound of the cars passing by on the street out front. The door to the building stood propped open, inviting people to enter. Only when I was just outside the door did I sense the thunder inside. It grew louder and louder with each passing step. When I opened the door, the noise smacked me, stinging my ears. It was deafening at times. The air was stale, stifling, sometimes rank if a toilet had overflowed. It was downright chaotic. Sound reverberated like in an amplifying gymnasium. Staff barked instructions to the girls over an intercom system. Children outnumbered them, sometimes even 50 to one.

The front games room was the main gathering place at Girlworks as it was at every KW Sherburne site (see Figure 4). The games room was almost always busy with girls checking in and out at the front desk, playing pool or board games, and running around. GW staff also held a daily announcements meeting in the games room with the girls seated in a bunch on the floor.

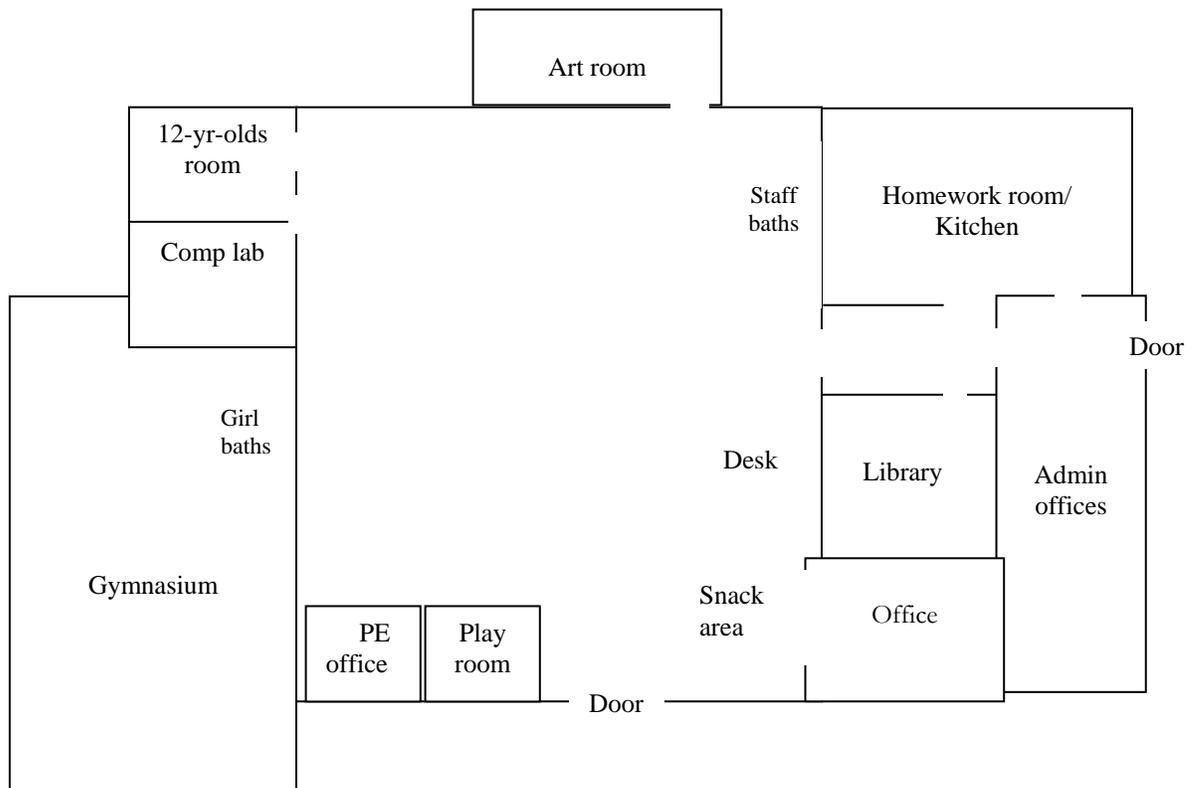


Figure 4. Layout of Girlworks Building.

The GW building blended the sense of warmth and familiarity of an oversized elementary classroom with the rugged impersonal feel of a warehouse. The walls were painted a pleasant cream color with pastel bathroom doors. The art teacher prominently displayed art projects, which changed often: self-portraits, then Halloween greetings, then paintings of friends and neighborhoods. The decorations created a sense of childhood innocence to newcomers and visitors. At the same time, large air ducts lined the black ceiling, and large-brick walls gave an industrial feel.

The walls were covered with inspirational messages and posters designed to foster a sense of community and inclusiveness. Next to a trophy display at Girlworks, for example, sat a small poster that read “Catch a Dream and Run with It.” Above it hung pictures of kids from all walks of life: a black boy in business attire, a white girl holding a basketball, an American Indian in headdress. A nearby bulletin board reminded girls to keep the right sorts of attitudes. “Victory is sweetest when you’ve known defeat,” it said. “A person shows what he is by what he does with what he has.” “To be early is to be on time, to be on time is to be late, to be late is to be terminated.”

Off of the sides of the games room sat staff offices (one each for the program director and PE director), a well-stocked computer lab, an arts and crafts room, a library room, an education room, and a kitchen. A main attraction was the nearly full-sized gymnasium where soccer tournaments and basketball games were held. Staff stayed busy checking kids in, supervising the games room, tutoring kids, organizing games and activities, teaching computer skills, disciplining kids, greeting parents, and answering the telephone, which was hardly audible over the roar of kids.

The girls were as varied as their artwork. Some were petite, young, and almost doll-like. Others were surprisingly tall for their age and tomboyish. They were often smiling, their hair disheveled from a hard day of playing. The younger girls (under ten) were especially friendly and affectionate; they greeted strangers, shared hugs with me, and tried to sit on my lap despite a rule against it. Many of the girls nearing puberty were more reclusive. They sat by themselves along the edges of the room or in a group, ranging from five to ten girls. On the whole, the girls typically were colorfully but plainly dressed in sweats, jeans, T-shirts. In general, the kids struck me as well-behaved. There were few fights or serious disagreements, and girls seemed to respect the staff. They were, in fact, much like me when I was their age.

Most of the time, the girls occupied themselves by playing in the games room or doing homework in a noisy nearby kitchen or library designated for tutoring. Sometimes, they participated in other activities which community volunteers or staff organized. Grants required that a quarter of the girls participate in life-skills and prevention programs, which were held in the library. At other times, girls

rotated between art lessons, Girls Scouts, soccer, cheerleading, computing, leadership club, and quilting. Girls were also required to participate in a study program where they accumulated points for doing their homework and won prizes. These activities, along with mentorship by the staff and sponsorship by the board, were designed, in the words of one staff person, to “close the divide” between what advantaged and disadvantaged kids had access to.

### **Expanding to Boyworks**

I expanded my volunteering and observations to Boyworks in July of 2005. The volunteer coordinator introduced me to the program director at a volunteer appreciation dinner, and he and I immediately hit it off. The long-term program director had just retired, and a new young and energetic 20-something program director started. Boyworks provided the same recreational, life-skills, and technology programs to boys as GW did for girls. Their clientele was also aged six to twelve years, even though the teen center served older kids. While BW drew boys from all parts of the city, most came from the surrounding neighborhoods. The boys were over 95 percent African American, but more than half of them came from poor families: 53 percent got free or reduced lunches at school. Although reporting by families was too incomplete to report an exact figure, a large portion of the boys came from single-parent households. The boys’ attendance fluctuated more than the girls and averaged just over 100 kids a day. The boys routinely intermingled with adolescents from the teen center.

BW had four full-time professional staff members, all of whom were black and one who was a woman: a program director (a twenty-something man who BW attended as a child), a PE director (a twenty-seven year old man who attended as a child), an education director (a middle-aged woman), and a director of teen programs (middle-aged man). Each of the full-time employees had a college degree. The program director had five years of experience with the organization and made \$47,000 a year, but no one else reported their income. BW had a budget of \$150,000.

Just like GW, BW had several part-time employees, but they rotated more frequently than at Girlworks. Part-time staff members generally supervised kids in the games room or in specific programs.

Two part-time workers were black women, both of them in their twenties. The art instructor was a white woman. The rest were all men with one part-time white man. Most of them were college students, and they made wages similar to part-time staffers at GW (\$6-9 an hour).

Despite the difference in professional staffing levels, GW and BW were comparable buildings and programs. BW had a similar layout with a central games room, staff offices to the side, a gymnasium, library, computer lab, art room, and education room. Yet until a dramatic paint job in the summer of 2006, Boyworks had a dreary institutional feel to it. The building had gray carpeting, visible rafters and brick walls. The walls were painted a stark white color that showed dirt and stains. Piles of dirt (sometimes swept and left there) laid on floors in the snack area and the gymnasium. The paint was peeling off the walls in the gym, and the entire building had a distinctively strong smell of body odor. It, too, was noisy and chaotic as the building's construction amplified rather than deadened sound.

The boys were required to do their homework, although the staff did not take as much care at tracking them as they did at GW. They also participated in life-skills and prevention programs in accordance with grant money. The staff held these programs in the gymnasium. During free time, which was most of the time, the boys occupied themselves by shooting around in the gym, playing pool and ping-pong in the games room, and challenging each other in games of *Uno*, I declare war, and spades. The staff enjoyed close relationships with the boys, and I routinely saw them play sports and cards with them.

I quickly came to enjoy my time at Boyworks. Just like the girls, the boys struck me as well-behaved. There were few fights and disagreements, except in the springtime. While boys did spend more time rough-housing than the girls, they were affectionate and welcoming.

## **Method**

This study is an ethnographic study based on 21 months of participant observation, over 40 in-depth interviews with various players at Kidworks, and hundreds of pages of KW documents. As Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw explain (1995), the ethnographic technique centers on gaining “a deeper

*immersion* in others' worlds in order to grasp what they experience as meaningful and important." It merges social participation with science so that the researcher is both member of a community—an insider—and student of the community—outsider (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995). This is the general approach I used in my data collection and analysis so that I could learn directly from the people at Kidworks, in their own contexts and environments.

I employed an inductive approach to data collection and analysis (Charmaz 2001; Glaser and Strauss 1967; Goodwin and Horowitz 2002; Lofland and Lofland 1995). This approach is designed to explicate and theorize social processes by generalizing across social situations or specifying the influence of context on particular processes. In general, I used a strategy similar to that described by Charmaz (2001) in which the researcher *simultaneously* collects and analyzes data. The research begins with general concepts and gets refined as the process goes along. My analysis focused on understanding the meanings and ideological frameworks through which staff and kids made sense of KW, as well as the social processes that took place there. I analyzed people's explanations for their actions, their unstated assumptions, and the consequences of their actions.

Unlike in grounded theory research, I was well aware that I entered the field with a particular theoretical interest and preconceived ideas about the kids. I expected the kids at Kidworks to be similar to the low-income teens I worked with and later studied in Washington, D.C. They were, however, quite different. Despite the rhetoric of Sherburne adults, the kids did not seem like typical inner-city kids. Few kids seemed to be poor in the ways that many of the D.C. kids were. There was less malnourish and fewer dirty clothes, for example, and there were far fewer signs of street culture. KW kids got in less trouble and were more responsive to the staff in general. There were far fewer incidents of violence than in D.C., and I saw no obvious signs of drug dealing or gangs at KW. There was more class diversity at Kidworks, too, than I expected because of smaller, more expensive after-school programs available in Sherburne. Parents routinely wore business attire and drove cars far nicer than my Saturn. It struck me that the kids' families had more free time than the D.C. families did, which allowed them to be more involved in the kids' lives. At Kidworks, parents routinely came inside the facilities and picked up their

kids, for example. It was not uncommon for men to come into Girlworks and Boyworks, often holding little kids. This, too, was rarer in D.C.

The staff and programs were different, too. The direct-care workers at KW were younger but had more education. They were paid better than I was expecting, and the administration lived much more comfortably than I anticipated for people who worked in a youth service nonprofit. Perhaps most surprising to me, though, was the absence of discussion or programs that dealt with race and racism openly. The program I worked with in D.C. was Afrocentric: counselors used hip-hop to illustrate points to the kids, murals of Africa and African leaders adorned the walls of the building, kids were well versed in black history, kids talked about racism openly, and programs incorporated African dress and cultural symbols. None of these things was emphasized at Kidworks. Instead, KW seemed to pride itself on a bland version of multiculturalism.

I entered the field wanting to understand the reproduction of inequalities across generations. Through my previous research, I became interested in peer cultures, particularly as a form of interpretive reproduction (Corsaro 1992; Corsaro 2005), that I also brought into the field with me. As time went along, though, I began to think that the staff occupied a much more interesting position within the organization than the kids did.

I also entered the field keenly aware of the sharp power imbalance between an adult researcher and child participants (Corsaro 2005; Ferguson 2000), and I wanted to equalize it as much as possible. Research shows that in interactions adults generally approach children in order to direct them or correct behavior. Children, thus, find themselves at the receiving end of adult control, while simultaneously developing cultures that are oppositional to adult formulations (Corsaro 2005). The adult-child power imbalance, of course, plays out in ethnographic research when kids view adults as authority figures. Thorne (1993), for instance, noted that kids turned to her to resolve conflicts during her fieldwork, especially at first, and even accused her of spying on them when she took notes.

My first year on site centered on integrating myself into the setting and building relationships (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995). I made a conscious attempt to distance myself from authority at

Kidworks, despite my official volunteer status. I sat on the floor with the kids rather than standing with the adults, for example. I dressed in casual clothing, and I played with the kids when the staff did not. I interjected as an authority figure as little as possible, and I conscientiously deflected kids' requests for my intervention to a staff person. I made a point of explaining that I was *not* a staff person. I tried not to enforce the rules, and I occasionally broke the rules when kids invited me to do so. I was at least minimally convincing because it was not uncommon for kids to ask me if I was a teenager or to reject my claims to be in my twenties or married.

This alignment with the children came neither naturally nor easily to me. When a girl stormed away crying from another girl, I had to remind myself not to run over to intervene. I often found myself making the kinds of small talk and gestures that only adults impose on kids: shaking hands or asking them what they did at school. At other times, the staff and even some kids seemed to become frustrated with me for not enforcing the rules. On other occasions, I did intervene in kids' interactions when not intervening might have jeopardized my standing with the staff, or when it was an opportune time to gain another perspective. I broke up a fight my first day at Boyworks' summer camp when two boys were pummeling each other and there were no staff in sight. Another time, I asked one girl to tell another that she had called me "cracker" just so that I could see her reaction. I wanted to know if they really knew what it meant.

This approach to participant observation allowed me to build rapport and to establish trust with kids, especially young kids, during the first year. While it is the case that "no matter what one's intentions, [adult researchers] cannot pass unnoticed in the society of children" (Fine 1987), adult researchers often *do* minimize the power imbalance and gain the confidence of kid participants. By distancing from authority, researchers position themselves as someone who won't "do anything" in response to rule breaking (Moore 2001). I learned their routines, colloquialisms, and social habits that I otherwise might have missed. By showing me what different behaviors or words meant to them, for example, participant observation produced a rich understanding of their cultural meanings. I often found myself sympathizing with the kids. When I sat on the floor with the kids during announcements, I felt like the staff were

monitoring me and might rebuke me for talking out of turn, particularly at Girlworks. I was self-conscious of our rule breaking and the potential consequences. Other times, I felt lost when I didn't know who to play with or what to do, just as I imagined the outsider kids felt.

As I mentioned, I started attending Boyworks in July of 2005. I sat in on life-skills groups and played football with boys who insisted that it was weird that I threw a spiral. The boys were incredibly friendly and welcoming for the most part. Throughout my time there, a few boys, though, made sexual comments to me (asking about my sex life, claiming a male staffer was my boyfriend, telling me that certain boys had crushes on me). I tried to use these moments as a way to generate more data by asking them what the program director would say if he overheard them, but they frustrated me and I occasionally told them to stop.

I was an outsider in the beginning for other reasons, as well. I am middle class and white with light blond hair and blue eyes, so I always stood out. Even though I was often not the only white person in the room, everyone seemed keenly aware, at the very least, that I was white. There were countless moments that someone called attention to my whiteness, especially when they were getting to know me. Some seemed benign, like the kids' curiosity about the red shoe marks left on my leg after sitting for a while. Others—when a staff person asked me if I wanted to dance down the soul train line during a sleepover—left me feeling self-conscious. Several others, however, drew attention to racial inequality with sad poignancy. A teen, for example, sometimes asked me, “Are you racist?” While I was trying to be culturally competent, there was no hiding that I was different from most of the people there. All these interactions and my reflections upon them served as data.

Especially in the beginning, my interactions with the women staffers too left me feeling uncomfortable and out of place. The volunteer coordinator told me the story of a volunteer who complained to her about her time at GW: “She was white and she felt like she didn't get any respect from the black staff, or no one tried to really help her.” There were times when I felt that way, too. I would walk into KW, and the staff seemed to ignore me. Several times, the GW program director addressed kids who stood beside me but barely said anything to me. These interactions made me feel like I stood

out like a sore thumb. This feeling was exacerbated by the lack of structure and instruction for volunteers at Kidworks.

I slowly began to see the importance of understanding the staff, and I changed my approach to them. Rather than aligning myself with the kids, I began to give the staff more of my attention. I instigated informal conversations with them about their work and their personal lives. I also spent more time at KW events, where the volunteer coordinator and I talked. She vouched for me to other staffers by telling them how much she admired me and wanted to be like me. (She was interested in pursuing graduate education.) As I began to feel more comfortable and the staff came to see me regularly, our relationship evolved and became more personal.

By the time I started conducting interviews with the staff in the late fall of 2005, we were friends. After each interview, staff members opened up more to me and approached me to initiate conversations. The GW staff and I developed a teasing relationship, where they laughed together at my Midwestern speech. A particularly meaningful interaction happened in December 2005, as my notes described:

When I finished the interview with Sharice, I stepped out into the games room. There were a few kids around, and Casey was sitting chatting with someone. I headed towards the library to make copies of the forms that Sharice had given me. I walked by Casey, who said to me, “Dang, you were in there talking to Sharice for *two hours!*”

Carissa: “I can’t help it.” She was playing around with a girl and teasing her. I joked to Casey, “Casey, you are so good with children.” And I laughed.

To this, Casey said, “Are you making fun of me?”

I laid it on more thickly, “You are the best, Casey,” and I gave her a hug.

Casey: “Are you being serious?”

Carissa: “Yeah, I’m serious.”

Casey: “When are you going to interview me? When’s my interview?”

Carissa: “I can set up an interview with you anytime. When are you available?” We set up an interview.

I walked into the library. There was one girl sitting doing homework. I could hear Casey talking loudly in the other room, so I walked out of the room to rib her some more. “Casey,” I said in an exasperated voice. “Someone’s trying to do homework in here. I can hear you all the way in the other room.”

Casey gave me an exasperated look back. She got up to follow me. “Who’s doing homework in here?”

She came in and saw the girl. Casey turned her attention to me, “What are you doing?”

Carissa: “I’m trying to figure out how to use the copy machine to make some copies.” I couldn’t figure out how to turn it on and how to feed the paper into it. “I see the copier’s fixed by now.” It had been broken.

Casey started teasing me now, “Okay, handy dandy!” She laughed at me, covered her mouth with a balled-up, sideways fist. Danielle had told her that I said “handy dandy” during a life-skills group.

Carissa: “What? She told you about that?” I was being really dramatic. I pretended to kick her. This made Casey laugh even more.

Casey: “Handy dandy!”

Carissa: “That’s the way I talk. Are you making fun of the way I talk?” I went over and fumbled with the copier some more.

Casey: “What are you doing? Here.” She grabbed the papers and started making some copies of it for me.

While she was doing this, Sharice came into the room and was looking around. She joked with us for a minute and then left. Casey and I (well, Casey) finished with the copies. Casey moved towards the doorway.

The volunteer coordinator (VC) came into the room and walked towards me. “How are you, Carissa?”

I was really silly by this point, and I told her. “Casey’s making fun of me. She’s trying to chase away your volunteers. She called me a stupid white girl!” At this, I broke out laughing hysterically because it was complete and utter bull. I thought it was really, really funny.

Casey’s jaw dropped open, and her eyes got really big with surprise. She was shocked by my comment and was at a loss for words. “What? I didn’t say that! I didn’t call her that!” She was pleading her case to the VC. I was bent over laughing because I caught Casey so off guard.

The VC was surprised, too, and laughing. I missed her reaction because I was laughing.

Sharice came back into the room, which we had turned into a little party by then. “What are you all doing in here?”

Carissa: “Casey called me a stupid white girl!”

Casey reacted again, and she defended herself against my charge, “No, I didn’t! Don’t believe her! I didn’t say that.” She was laughing. We were all laughing.

From the point of this interaction—when we had a great laugh over my whiteness—onward, Casey trusted me. She opened up to me and talked to me about racial issues. She sought advice from me about how to handle workplace stress and not having any money. I also appreciated her more: her sense of humor, her religious convictions. When Casey and I reflected on the incident during an interview, she told me, “I never heard a white person say something like that.” We had become friends through laughter, it seemed.

I became closer to other staffers, as well, and spent more time talking with them. Tamera invited me to her birthday parties. When Louise’s mother died, Darin asked me to sign the staff’s sympathy card. I helped create Danielle’s wedding favors. I even made a fool of myself by going dancing with Danielle, Libby, and Terri, all of whom were black women in their early twenties and much more fashionable than I. The staff began to notice when I *wasn’t* at KW rather than when I was, and I missed them when I was gone. When I interviewed Tamera for the second time, I asked her to reflect on whether there were any white adults whom she viewed as truly fitting in at KW. This was her reply:

Tamera: That I know of, other than you?

Carissa: Well I'm an outsider too.

Tamera: But you fit in now, you've become part of that Kidworks community. You've become part of that family. They accept you. If they didn't accept you, nobody would deal with you.

I had become accustomed to spending time at GW and BW. When I went to South Africa for a conference, I bought several staff members souvenirs as tokens of my thanks and friendship. I returned from the trip to hugs from the kids and staff alike. One staff person told me, "You'll always be welcome here."

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

My observational data collection took the form of in-the-field written jottings, extended field notes, analytic notes, self-reflection notes, and artifacts collected in the field (Burawoy 1991; Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 1995). I generally carried a small notebook with me and during opportune times (when I would attract less attention), I took verbatim notes in it. My observations focused on descriptions of the field sites (sights, sounds, smells, feelings), the verbal and nonverbal communication of the staff with the kids and myself, the kids' interactions and verbal exchanges with each other, and their styles and rules of play. Additionally, as several kids were curious about my notebook and had taken to drawing in it, I also collected art that they produced. Each day outside of the field, I wrote detailed extended fieldnotes. Full notes included sketches of the scenes, descriptions of episodes of action and dialogue, and fieldnote tales that connected series of episodes (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 1995). These descriptions were descriptive in form rather than narrative so that I imposed my interpretation on the data as little as possible. Finally, I wrote theoretical memos, self-reflection, and note-on-notes (Burawoy 1991; Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 1995; Lofland and Lofland 1995) as early forms of analysis. I coded fieldnotes and analyzed data more thoroughly into extensive analytic memos, the pieces of which became the basis for the chapters that follow.

By spring of 2006, I was at BW and GW so often and for so long at a stretch of time that I simply could not document everything any more. At that point, I homed in on matters that directly tested or reflected on my emerging hypotheses. By the end of my time at KW, I had participated in life-skills

groups, sports, art, organized and unorganized play (especially cards and pool), volunteer orientations, volunteer appreciation events, the Kidworks Gala, the Halloween festival (twice), Celebrating Families, and the campaign finale celebration. I also served as a judge at the Best and Brightest Youth contest. I spent around 300 hours in the field and collected around 2,000 pages of fieldnotes and transcripts.

In addition to the fieldwork, I also conducted in-depth interviews with 40 adults and children associated with Kidworks (see Tables 2 and 3). As Seidman (1998) explains, qualitative interviews capture the experiences of people, as well as their interpretation of their experiences. These experiences center on events: happenings themselves, interpretations of them, the processes leading up to them, or the consequences that follow them (Weiss 1994). Other times, they consist of the mundane structuring of life (Spradley 1979), such as everyday activities, decision making, or exchanges with other people. The best interviews produce concrete descriptions and reactions to one's experiences. They are rich with details (Hermanowicz 2002; Seidman 1998; Weiss 1994). This approach to interviewing lays the foundation for understanding the subjectivity of KW staff and kids (Blumer 1969; Seidman 1998; Smith 2005), which was the starting point for my analysis.

I interviewed members of nearly every part of the organization, including direct-care staff, administrators, volunteers, fundraisers, a board member, and kids (See Table 2 and Table 3). I selected interview participants that represented the full range of experiences at Kidworks (Charmaz 2001; Hammersley and Atkinson 1995). I interviewed four administrators, six direct-care workers at GW (including both full-time employees), six direct-care workers at BW (including all four full-time employees), three direct-care staff from other KW facilities in Sherburne, and seven volunteers who took on an assortment of roles for a total of twenty-six interviews with adults. While I had general topics that I wanted to cover in interviews, the staff's responses to my questions and probing directed our conversations. Interviews with adults covered their work (how they came there, their training, what they did and thought of their involvement), the nature and their interpretation of their relationships with kids and staff, their perspectives about which kids would likely be successful or not and why, their relationships with the administration, and their understanding of race relations growing up and now.

They generally lasted between one and a half and two hours. Some stretched as long as three hours. Everyone I interviewed seemed to enjoy it, particularly the adults. The staff at Girlworks came to joke about how much I liked to ask questions and said that I was like their “counselor.” Casey told me that she talked with me about things that she hadn’t talked about with anyone else. I received no negative feedback from interviews with adults.

I also interviewed fourteen kids at GW and BW (see Table 3): some who had been attending for years and some who were newcomers, some who participated in nearly every activity and others who participated in very few, some in two parent households and others who lived with single parents. Ninety-three percent of the kids came from working-class families. Fifty percent of the kids came from families headed by single mothers, while 29 percent came from two parent families. During these interviews, I focused on what kids did at KW, what they liked about it, what they disliked, the conflicts they had had with staff or other kids, and the ways they resolved those conflicts. These interviews lasted around one hour, and I gave them snacks and an NC State wristband for their participation. The younger kids, particularly those who were ten and under tended to last around forty-five minutes as the kids grew tired more quickly.

Table 2. Adults Interviewed by Organizational Position.

NAME	POSITION	RACE/ETHNICITY & GENDER
<b>Administration (4)</b>		
Carmen	board	
Edward	Fulltime	
Tamera	Fulltime	
Wanda	Fulltime	
<b>Direct-Care Staff at Girlworks (6)</b>		
Amber*	Parttime	Black woman
Casey	Fulltime	Black woman
Danielle	Parttime	Black woman
Jonie	Parttime	White woman
Libby	Parttime	Black woman
Sharice	Fulltime	Black woman
<b>Direct-Care Staff at Boyworks (6)</b>		
Alex	Parttime	Black man
Ben*	Fulltime	Black man
Darin*	Fulltime	Black man
Louise	Fulltime	Black woman
Tabitha	Parttime	Black woman
Warner	Fulltime	Black man
<b>Direct-Care Staff at Other Kidworks Facilities (3)</b>		
Ashley	Fulltime	White woman
Martin	Fulltime	Black man
Pedro	Parttime	Hispanic man
<b>Volunteers (7)**</b>		
Ester	Fundraising, worked at another KW	White woman
June	PP	White woman
Karly	PP, direct care	White woman
Miranda	PP	White woman
Samuel	PP	White man
Walter	Public speaking, mentorship	Black man
Yolanda	Tutoring	Black woman

\* Staff who attended Kidworks as children.

\*\* Professionals for Progress, PP, is a fundraising and awareness building group for young professionals.

Table 3. Kids Interviewed.

NAME	AGE	Race/ Ethnicity	YEARS AT KW
<b>Girlworks (7)</b>			
Alicia	9	Black	NA
Ayanna	17	Black	10
Bethany	10	Black	5
Dorothy	8	Hispanic	2
Emmy Sue	10	Black	< 1
NuNu	10	Multiracial	5
Portia	12	Black	6
<b>Boyworks (7)</b>			
Aaron	12	Black	4
Brooke	7	Black	1
Clifford	12	Black	6
Gary	8	Black	2
Mathias	12	Black	< 1
Tavin	10	Black	3
Vashon	12	Black	< 1

The final form of data I collected and analyzed were Kidworks documents. During my observations, I collected artifacts from all aspects of KW life, including promotional brochures and curriculum books for the life-skills and promotion programs. Posters, websites, fundraising materials, volunteer mailings, print ads, and newspaper articles on KW were also documents I collected. For both the interviews and artifact data, I used the same inductive data analysis strategies as I did with the fieldnotes.

### **The Analysis Ahead**

The result of the data collection, reflection, and systematic analysis are the chapters that follow. The analysis highlights the struggles of one nonprofit organization to provide meaningful services for black kids while maintaining a white public's interest in them. At the heart of the struggle are issues of identity, discrimination, and the dream of a middle-class life brought to the fore in Bill Cosby's speech and in the continuing debates over the role of culture in the reproduction of inequalities across generations.

In chapter two, I present the research literature on the role that culture plays in the reproduction of class positions, particularly for low-income black Americans. I highlight three different theoretical approaches. In cultural reproduction theory, the education system rewards dominant forms of cultural capital. Oppositional culture theory examines the role that people from working-class and poor groups contribute to their own class positioning. Scholars who view culture as a tool of resistance argue that the cultural capital of exploited groups is the basis for identity making that helps them resist oppression. From these theoretical positions, I extrapolate three different modes through which low-income black kids might achieve upward mobility. They might assimilate by adopting the dominant group's forms of cultural capital. They might foster a black identity that is distinctive from the dominant group and use it as a basis for political organizing. Finally, they might code switch: adopt the dominant group's cultural capital in some settings while retaining a firm grounding in black-dominated institutions and identities. I end the chapter by presenting the research questions that guide this study. These questions focus on the construction and consequences of the cultural transformation mission of Kidworks and its implementation.

In the third chapter, I deconstruct Kidworks' mission. I argue that Kidworks' mission prescribed cultural transformation as a way to access opportunities (and, thus, upward mobility). Kidworks, in other words, promoted middle-class cultural capital. This mission existed in opposition to what KW adults understood as street culture (in my analytic language) for boys and for girls.

Chapter four examines the elements of middle-class cultural capital that KW tried to transmit to kids by organizing programs to instill them and practice displaying them. There were three key elements of middle-class cultural capital, as the Kidworks administrators, staff, and curricula constructed it: middle-class presentations of self, self-determination, and rationality. I argue that KW's life-skills and prevention curricula were designed to train kids in these skills. I also lay out the ways in which KW girls and boys could display their middle-class cultural capital.

Kidworks' public relations strategies and their effects on white donors are the focus of chapter five. Within an environment where nonprofits struggle to secure funding, Kidworks was successful at

raising money among the private sector and building an envied reputation within Sherburne. This chapter examines how, including the restructuring of Kidworks' administration. I show that Kidworks also professionalized the staff, protected the organization's image, publicly acknowledged donors, and told stories of success. These strategies served as myths that left donors and volunteers feeling generous, sparking their monetary and time commitments to the organization. But Kidworks unintentionally crafted images of black kids as culturally deficient through its marketing.

Chapter six addresses race and racism within Kidworks and examines the ways in which the black staff strategically assimilated to their dualistic work environment. I argue that the black staff experienced the KW organization as white-dominated but retained autonomy that allowed them to construct identities that affirmed their blackness in relation to whites. White people who ran Kidworks created a colorblind environment where they represented race as multiculturalism and racism as inconsequential. The reality at Kidworks, however, was race driven as whites dominated decision-making positions with high status and pay. The black direct-care staff resented the disparities within Kidworks and adopted several strategies to fit in with the white administration. At the same time, the staff created worker identities in opposition to white domination. While it may appear that the black staff shared the same vision for the cultural mission of Kidworks, they themselves code switched.

In practice, however, gender was particularly influential for cultural training, even more so than either an ideological commitment to middle-class cultural capital or code switching. In chapter seven, I examine the mission in practice by showing how the direct-care staff negotiated power and control with the kids. This chapter provides a direct comparison of Girlworks to Boyworks. I compare and contrast the staff's approaches to establishing credibility, relating to authority, and disciplining girls and boys. I find that these strategies varied substantially and in gender-typical ways that promoted relatability and obedience among girls but autonomy and individual responsibility among boys. Many of these strategies, furthermore, promoted working-class cultural capital rather than middle-class, particularly for the boys.

Chapter eight shows that gender training itself was an unstated focus of cultural training at Kidworks. I explore the ways in which the staff went about encouraging girls to be good girls and boys to

become real men. GW staff and life-skills curriculum, for example, taught girls to be responsible for sexuality and to achieve through schooling, but boys were taught to be breadwinners. Being a good girl meant taking on the responsibilities for reproduction and production, while real men were defined as providers only. The staff often undercut their own cultural training, however.

In the final chapter, I return to the larger issue of the role that culture plays in the reproduction of inequalities. I analyze KW's mission and its consequences by looking at three things: the underlying meanings behind the mission, how well KW fulfilled its mission, and the opportunities within KW that middle-class cultural displays brought. I argue that an assimilationist mission itself (the organizational representation of the mission) was based in and reinforced images of black kids as culturally deficient. The more appropriate mission of code switching training, however, was sidelined by the staff's attempts to maintain power and control over the kids and to teach them to be properly gendered. What's more, displaying middle-class cultural capital only brought a few kids substantial opportunities within Kidworks, suggesting that they alone were insufficient to effect change within a race-stratified environment. Code switching, thus, remained a more appropriate and viable option for creating positive identities and chances for mobility for KW young people, but it came at the expense of reproducing gender and race inequality. I end by suggesting concrete changes for making the work of Kidworks more effective.

## **chapter two: Culture and the Reproduction of Inequality**

Research on the cultural practices of low-income blacks has flourished over the past decade. Studies have analyzed, for example, the discourses encoded in rap and hip-hop (e.g., Kubrin 2005) and kids' orientations toward school (e.g., Carter 2005; Dance 2002; Ferguson 2000). Of particular interest to scholars are the cultural practices that might contribute to or hinder the upward mobility of black youth. Some point to street culture, or the "code of the street" in Elijah Anderson's (1999) terms, as preventing young people from valuing school and work in favor of street credibility. This culture, they point out, valorizes violence, sexual domination, and respect in ways that generates self-destructive behaviors.

The role that culture plays in determining who gets ahead and who does not, however, remains hotly contested. While some scholars suggest that culture helps trap low-income black kids in poverty, other scholars point to culture as a resource for creating positive identities and, in turn, instigating social change. It is the debate over the role of culture in class reproduction that this study addresses.

Nearly all scholars agree that street culture developed in response to structural constraints. They argue that deindustrialization and racism created cycles of unemployment for blacks, residential segregation, and the mass incarceration of black men (Kasarda 1993; Massey and Denton 1993; Small and Newman 2001; Wilson 1987; Wilson 1996). In his history of racism and class in the United States, William Julius Wilson (1978) illustrated how the life chances of black Americans shifted over time, becoming increasingly class-divided. From industrial expansion through the civil rights movement, racial oppression and class conflict dominated the U.S. Jim Crow segregation and race-based hostility against black Americans in the South relegated most to the same labor force positions they held during slavery. In the North, blacks were used as strikebreakers and low-wage workers to displace white workers. The working class split along racial lines (Bonacich 1976). In the 1960s, though, civil rights and government policies like affirmative action opened up new opportunities for middle-class black Americans. Middle-class blacks gained unprecedented access to higher education, professional-class job opportunities, and higher wages (e.g., Maume 2004; Thomas 1993; Thomas 1995; Wilson 1978).

Low-income blacks, on the other hand, fared much worse during the economic changes in the 1960s and 1970s (Wilson 1987; Wilson 1996). William Julius Wilson explained that an assortment of structural factors coincided to make work disappear in inner cities in the 1960s and 1970s. Economic restructuring in northern cities shifted production from manufacturing to service and information processing. This displaced blue-collar jobs and changed the demands of others (to require more education). Remaining manufacturing plants relocated outside of central cities. At the same time, women and immigrants added thirteen million people to the labor supply in the 1960s and 24 million in the '70s (Wilson 1987). Workers who could followed the jobs: middle-class and then skilled working-class African Americans moved out of inner cities and into the suburbs. During the 1970s, for example, over 150,000 blacks left Chicago (Wilson 1987). Like a domino effect, the labor force participation of black men between the ages of sixteen to 34 dropped steadily so that fewer than half were working at all. By 1980, the black-white dissimilarity index<sup>2</sup> in central cities was around or over 80 in Boston, L.A.-Long Beach, New York, Newark, Philadelphia, and St. Louis. It was over 90 in Chicago and 88 in Cleveland (Massey and Denton 1988).

While Wilson's explanation, particularly in *When Work Disappears*, included both historic and present-day racism and discrimination as contributing factors to the creation of concentrated urban poverty among black Americans, Douglas S. Massey and Nancy A. Denton (Massey 2001; 1993) placed more emphasis on racism in their work on residential segregation. They implicated institutional racism as the culprit for both the production of ghettos and their maintenance. It was the hypersegregation of poor blacks that led to the "culture of segregation" within black ghettos, they argued. Ghettos were a twentieth century phenomena that developed in response to the northern migration of African Americans at the beginning of the century. White hostility, neighborhood improvement associations, white flight, redlining, and discriminatory lending practices excluded blacks from white neighborhoods. Anti-segregation reforms were slow to come, and when they did, they were usually unenforced (Massey and Denton 1993).

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<sup>2</sup> The percent of blacks that would have to move to create an equal racial distribution. A dissimilarity score of over 60 is high.

The result was hypersegregation<sup>3</sup> of blacks in sixteen metropolitan areas by 1980, including Buffalo, Chicago, Cleveland, Detroit, Milwaukee, Philadelphia, St. Louis, Atlanta, and Baltimore (Massey and Denton 1989). Hypersegregation of blacks in ghettos meant that they:

Have little direct experience with the culture, norms, and behaviors of the rest of American society and few social contacts with members [of] other racial groups. Ironically, within a large, diverse, and highly mobile post-industrial society such as the United States, blacks living in the heart of the ghetto are among the most isolated people on earth (Massey and Denton 1993: 77).

The result, then, was a concentration of poverty and social isolation in formerly thriving, class-integrated black neighborhoods. Community-based services disappeared as did the role models of the working and middle classes (Rankin and Quane 2000; Wilson 1987). Churches and schools lost support, and kids went unsupervised. Men, who increasingly turned to the informal economy, were no longer marriageable (Lichter, McLaughlin, Kephart, and Landry 1992; Small and Newman 2001), and women turned to welfare for support (Wilson 1987). With few positive role models and little social support, crime, joblessness, out-of-wedlock births, and women-headed households became normative (Wilson 1987; Wilson 1996).

Urban renewal projects of central cities during the 1990s and early 2000s brought some new changes to urban areas. In some cities, urban planners created intentionally mixed-class neighborhoods, for example, which drew black middle-class Americans back into central cities (Baylor 2003). Others have argued, contentiously, that urban renewal projects have displaced poor black residents (cf Freeman 2005; Freeman and Braconi 2004). Despite the flourishing economy in the 1990s and gentrification, thus, distressed residents in urban centers remained distressed (Furdell, Wolman, and Hill 2005).

Notwithstanding the successes of the civil rights movement, current economic indicators show that black Americans continue to fare worse than other race groups. Poverty, unemployment, educational attainment, earnings, and wealth indicators all show a white advantage. Black Americans experience disproportionately high rates of poverty, for instance. Nearly a quarter of black Americans live below the poverty line while only eleven percent of Asians and eight percent of whites do (Lemonik Arthur 2005).

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<sup>3</sup> Hypersegregation is operationalized as scoring high on at least four of five measures of segregation: unevenness, isolation, clustering, centralization, and concentration.

Rates of unemployment for blacks (10.4 percent) are more than double those of whites and Asians (Lemonik Arthur 2005). Whites are earning college degrees at almost two and a half times the rate of blacks (Blank 2001). Whites also continue to out earn blacks<sup>4</sup>. White women who have graduated from high school average about \$1,600 more a year in income than their black equivalent. The gap widens as education increases. White men with high school diplomas average \$4,700 more a year than black men. White men with college degrees get an almost \$11,000 a year advantage (Padavic and Reskin 2002: 141). Wealth data are grim, too. Oliver and Shapiro (1995) show that the U.S. has two nations of wealth, one white and one black. Middle-class African Americans have dramatically fewer assets than whites—only \$.15 to the whites' \$1. Most black Americans have no or very limited assets (the median is 0). They have so few assets that without an income, they are likely to live on nothing after only a few months. Additionally, blacks are less likely to own homes, and they get worse returns on their real estate investments. When they do own “assets,” they tend to be in automobile ownership, the value of which depreciates over time.

Low-income black Americans, thus, face a constrained opportunity structure where they have limited access to steady, well-paying employment. Scholars and the general public debate how culture contributes to this bleak reality. They especially dispute the role that culture plays in social reproduction: in determining who does or does not become upwardly mobile. Some cultural explanations, like Bill Cosby's in the previous chapter, put forth that the cultural practices of low-income black Americans trap them in a cycle of poverty and despair. Other scholars, however, view culture as a resource to effect social change or open up access to education or class opportunities.

In this chapter, I examine the relationship between culture and the reproduction of class. I begin by defining what cultural capital is. Then, I lay out three competing explanations for the relationship between culture and social mobility. Cultural reproduction theory posits that the education system rewards high-status cultural capital, which reproduces class positions across generations. Next, I examine oppositional culture theories in which marginalized groups are thought to contribute to their own social

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<sup>4</sup> The median annual earnings of full-time, year-round workers in 1999. Data come from the U.S. Census Bureau.

reproduction by excluding themselves from participation in education and the workforce. Finally, I explore cultural resistance theory. It suggests that cultural capital of exploited groups allows them to create affirming identities that aid in resisting their oppression. Following a discussion of these three theoretical approaches, I extrapolate three different modes for social change implied in them: (a) adopting the cultural capital of the dominant group (assimilation), (b) fostering a unique black identity via street and hip-hop cultural capital, and (c) code switching or strategic assimilation. Kidworks black workers themselves adopt the latter strategy. I end this chapter by putting forth the research questions that this study addresses.

### **What is Cultural Capital?**

Pierre Bourdieu introduced cultural capital as a concept to account for an indirect process through which families and the education system pass along class-based status and resources to the next generation. Cultural capital is the social toolkit (Swidler 1986) that a person uses to guide his/her interactions and practices. Habits, worldviews, knowledge, and styles make up this toolkit. Most importantly, people can transform cultural capital into social advantages, just as they can human capital and social capital. Cultural reproduction, oppositional culture, and cultural resistance theories suggest different ways that people use of cultural capital to their advantage.

### **Cultural Reproduction**

Pierre Bourdieu argued a new mode of class reproduction developed out of the modern economy, replacing direct inheritance (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977). In this new process, cultural capital is key to the process of reproduction in both direct and indirect ways. Cultural capital serves as a signifier of a particular status position so that others judge the actor as such (Goffman 1951). The dominant group's form of cultural capital gets recognized as most valuable by a wide-ranging group of people (Lamont and Lareau 1988). Dominant groups utilize cultural capital to mark off group membership, exclude others, and hoard resources.

Lamont and Lareau (1988: 158) point to four processes of exclusion in Bourdieu's work that specify the ways in which people utilize cultural capital to reproduce class positioning. Direct exclusion most closely resembles Weber's social closure (Weber 1978). Individuals prefer people with similar tastes and dispositions, and they exclude others who do not share them. People also eliminate themselves by excluding themselves from environments where they feel discomfort, or by lowering their aspirations to fit their perceived chances for success. Individuals get judged based on the same criteria, furthermore, even though they do not have the same cultural toolkits. Culturally disadvantaged people have to work harder to achieve the same results. Lamont and Lareau refer to this process as overselection. Finally, individuals get relegated to lower-status positions based on their cultural capital. They get less return on their social and cultural investments. Any or all of these processes can be at play.

Cultural capital, according to Bourdieu and Passeron, is passed along in families via class-specific socialization (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977). Lareau's (2002; 2003) research, for example, illustrates that middle-class families developed kids' special talents and verbal acuity by involving them in skill-building activities (see also Kohn 1977). Their discipline was based in reasoning, and they taught kids to utilize their institutional resources. Children who were nurtured through this "concerted cultivation" approach developed an "emerging sense of entitlement" in their interactions with others. They were trained in reasoning so that their cultural capital resembled that of bosses and managers. Working-class families, on the other hand, provided basic necessities to kids, particularly love, care, food, and shelter. Their discipline was directive in nature and more likely to include physical punishment. Working-class and poor children gained an "emerging sense of constraint," which taught them to be deferent to authority. Their cultural capital, thus, resembled that of workers.

Shirley Hill (Hill 2005) found that black families in particular socialized their children differently along class lines. Among families who were securely middle class, families were concerned that their kids would face racial disadvantage, and they emphasized career attainment and marriage as ways to recreate their class positions. In the newly middle class, families were less secure in their class status and held up patriarchal models of the family. They taught their children to deal with racism by being submissive and

respectful of white authority. In working-class or poor families, discipline was particularly punitive, and parents were unlikely to acknowledge racism as a barrier.

According to Bourdieu, it is in the education system that class-based cultural capital gets rewarded or sanctioned. Schools both embody and reward the dominant cultural capital that middle- and upper-class children internalize as their habitus. Students signal their cultural capital through symbols and actions, perhaps through a taste for classical literature or art museums. Teachers and other gatekeepers, who themselves might espouse the dominant form of cultural capital, interpret high culture as symbolic of effort and intellect. They deem those children worthy of attention in classrooms. They call on those students more and reward them with high grades. These students excel in school and go on to receive educational credentials. These credentials, in turn, allow them to acquire better jobs and to gain more economic capital. The next generation, thus, successfully obtains the class positioning of their parents.

In sum, according to cultural reproduction theory, parents transmit, both intentionally and unintentionally, cultural capital to their kids. The content of this cultural capital varies by social class. When students enter school, their teachers reward the skills, habits, and aspirations of the dominant group, which allows them to garner the credentials necessary to become professional class themselves. It is through their cultural capital, then, that students are able to reproduce their parents' class status. Nevertheless, the education system appears to be neutral because achievement gets explained in terms of individual ability and performance. Bourdieu and others have found substantial support for this theory, and it remains a central topic of research within the sociology of education.

### **Oppositional Culture**

Paul Willis offered an alternative explanation for the role of culture in reproduction in his oppositional culture theory. Similar to Bourdieu and others (Bowles and Gintis 1977; Meyer and Rowan 1978), Willis argued in *Learning to Labor* that schools deliver credentials that reproduce class position rather than opportunity for mobility through education. In his study, teachers established their authority not through coercion but through their moral supremacy: they had knowledge, were experienced, and

knew what they were doing. Students, then, were expected not to strive for knowledge but for “the promise of qualification” (positive assessment) from the teachers. It was student deference and politeness that teachers rewarded.

But in his research, Willis found that the working-class students themselves, the lads in this case, created a counter-school culture that was based in opposition to authority, particularly in regards to the dominant school discourses and teachers. The lads rejected their teachers’ sense of superiority and actively worked to delegitimize them. The lads also outright rejected the idea of qualifications: they saw practical knowledge as all necessary to get and keep a job. All work was meaningless to them. They valorized manual labor of the shop floor because the men they admired dominated them, but they devalued the “mental” labor of the schools. It was the devaluation of mental labor, along with the lads’ acting out, ironically, that restricted their own skill base that could have made some upward mobility possible. The lads opted out of school, which made gaining credentials impossible. Willis (1977: 103) summarized the point this way:

This sense of labor power as an essential separation of the vital self from the hope of intrinsic satisfaction in work, and as *manual* activity, does not lessen “the lads” sense of superiority, insight, and true personal learning. . . . They are also the result, however, of the subjective feeling amongst “the lads” that they have penetrated, learned, and understood through experience something that others, and in particular the “ear’oles” have not. This is, of course, the experiential hook—the precise, unintended, unexpected reversal of the conventional logic—which actually binds these kids into a future of manual work.

Willis’ contribution, then, was to suggest that the boys’ oppositional culture *itself* assured their own working-class positioning.

While Willis’ research was on white working-class boys, a related line of research and theorizing has developed in regards to low-income black Americans. While race scholars have long examined the effects of oppression on black families and culture (e.g., Du Bois 1973; Frazier 1939), research exploded in this area in the 1960s and 1970s alongside the War on Poverty. Particularly controversial was Senator Patrick Moynihan’s (1965) report entitled “The Negro Family.” Building off of the work of Elkin (1976), Frazier (1939), and other prominent social researchers, Moynihan argued that slavery and attacks on black men during the Reconstruction destroyed black families by making them matriarchal. Matriarchal

families, he argued, led to welfare dependency, failed youth, delinquency and crime, and alienation among black men. There grew a “tangle of pathology” among black Americans, he argued.

Race scholars were quick to attack Moynihan’s report. They tied his argument to the “subculture of poverty” of Oscar Lewis (1959) and criticized it as “blaming the victim” for his/her own social conditions. They conducted a series of studies that framed black families as functional rather than dysfunctional, and they argued that black women did not have the social positioning or power to dominate others (Hannerz 1969; Ladner 1971; Liebow 1967; Stack 1974; Staples 1971).

A drought of research on low-income black Americans followed the controversies of the 1960s and 1970s. By the mid 1980s, however, cultural arguments swung around again. John Ogbu’s cultural ecological theory sparked theoretical debate and a surge of studies on low-income black student achievement. Ogbu’s central thesis (Ogbu 1978; Ogbu 1983; Ogbu 1987; Ogbu 1991), which resembles Willis’s and Bourdieu’s in several ways, put forth that involuntary minorities (those conquered or enslaved) had different social positioning from voluntary minorities (those who immigrated or were refugees). Voluntary minorities assessed their opportunities and discriminatory experiences in reference to people in their place of origin, which made the education system non-threatening and social obstacles seem surmountable. As O’Connor and colleagues explained it, Ogbu argued that “voluntary minorities’ frame of reference makes it possible for them to craft folk theories of ‘making it’ that are consistent with the dominant narrative of status attainment” (O’Connor, McNamara Horvat, and Lewis 2006: 8). White Americans, on the other hand, served as the frame of reference for involuntary minorities, which seemed to lead to a keen awareness of institutionalized discrimination. They viewed their oppression as enduring and the education system as biased to undercut their ability to achieve. To buffer the psychological and other effects of their oppression, involuntary minorities were theorized to create a collective identity by way of an oppositional culture (see also Lacy 2004; see also Schwalbe, Godwin, Holden, Schrock, Thompson, and Wolkomir 2000; Schwalbe and Mason-Schrock 1996).

Ogbu’s theory posits that, much like Willis’ lads of their teachers, black kids became skeptical of white institutions, particularly schools, because of their positioning within the social structure and frame

of reference. They viewed schools as exerting a white identity and threatening their collective black identity. School success and its concurrent practices, then, became equated with “acting white,” according to Ogbu. In Fordham and Ogbu’s study (1986), for example, peers taunted high achieving students as “acting white,” “brainiacs,” and homosexuals. Black kids acted like clowns and comedians in order to avoid these stigmas and to deflect the persona of racelessness. O’Connor, McNamara Horvat, and Lewis (2006: 8) summarized Ogbu’s argument: “With little evidence that they will be appropriately rewarded for their efforts in school and the accordant notion that schooling is the province of white Americans and threatens their own cultural identity involuntary minorities have little reason to work hard in school and consequently experience poor or underachievement.” Black oppositional culture, according to cultural ecology theory, developed in response to the “fear of acting white.” Farkas, Lleras, and Maczuga (2002) confirmed Ogbu’s findings within mostly black schools with high concentrations of poverty.

Other recent studies have challenged the oppositional culture thesis or argued for more complex operationalization of black identity formation that produces more nuanced results (Datnow and Cooper 1997; McNamara Horvat and Lewis 2003; Mickelson 1990; Tyson 2006; Tyson, Darity, and Castellino 2005). Mickelson (1990), for example, called on researchers to differentiate between abstract attitudes toward education (those based in the dominant culture) and concrete attitudes (those based on the returns to education and the opportunity structure). According to this approach, black students reject school in an abstract sense but not in their concrete attitudes or behaviors. Other studies reveal that the black students in general have more pro-school concrete attitudes than whites and are more hopeful about their futures (Ainsworth-Darnell and Downey 1998; MacLeod 1995). Black peer cultures tend to be supportive of academic success in elite schools (Datnow and Cooper 1997) and mostly white communities (Tatum 2004). They are also more supportive of girls than boys (McNamara Horvat and Lewis 2003). Faircloth and Hamm (2005) found that African American students’ interpersonal connections with teachers and school activities animated student motivation.

Oppositional culture research extends beyond student attitudes and practices in the classrooms to examine the creation of a generic oppositional culture, often enacted by black men in prison (see

Collins 2004; hooks 2004 for a discussion), on the street, or around the neighborhood. Elijah Anderson's work on inner-city men in Chicago (1990) and Philadelphia (1999) illustrate a presence of an oppositional culture among some poor black men but not all. In *Code of the Street*, Elijah Anderson (1999) described two basic orientations of inner-city residents: street and decent. Decent men (and women) adopted dominant values and tried to fit into mainstream culture. They lived by a code of decency: civility, respectability, and protecting children were of the utmost importance to them (see also Duneier 1992; Hannerz 1969; Liebow 1967). Others in the inner city, however, adopted the "code of the street." These "street" or ghetto individuals were alienated from mainstream culture. They established credibility through quick wittedness, fighting ability, sexual prowess, and a tough, disaffected presentation of self. They lived by an ethos that "might makes right" and "campaigns for respect" by trying to intimidate others. Men who were humiliated, similarly, redeemed themselves through violence. Those with the fanciest cars and toughest reputations enjoyed the respect of others—and increased personal safety because of it. Street people, thus, created an oppositional culture.

Other scholars have similarly argued that low-income black men adopt a "cool pose" (Majors and Mancini Billson 1992), "tough guise" (Katz and Earp 1999), or "tough front" (Dance 2002). Inner-city men use these street presentations of self as cultural capital to intimidate others and maximize their interpersonal power (Connell 1995; Ferguson 2000; Mac an Ghail 1994; Majors and Mancini Billson 1992; Pyke 1996; Schwalbe and Mason-Schrock 1996; Wacquant 2004; Whitehead 1997).

For black children, oppositional culture seems to bring harsher consequences than simply limiting one's labor force participation to working-class jobs, although it does that. Nolan and Anyon (2004) argue that the growth of the criminal justice system meant that oppositional culture leads to incarceration for black men and, thus, removal from the workforce and democratic participation. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the presidents waged a war on drugs and crime that reallocated cold-war military spending to law enforcement and prisons (Cole 1998; Davis 1998). In practice, the war on drugs turned out to be a war on young black men. While the imprisonment risk for blacks remained steadily high between 1979 and 1999—around six to eight times higher than for whites—rates of

imprisonment of black men without a college degree tripled (Pettit and Western 2004). Currently, Americans incarcerate *60 percent* of black male high school dropouts by their mid thirties. For these men, prison records are almost two times more common than Bachelor degrees and more than two times more common than military service. Oppositional culture, thus, carried the risk of incarceration, as well.

In sum, oppositional culture scholars have argued that working-class and poor youth develop cultural capital that rejects the habits, values, orientations, and institutions of groups that exploit them. They view oppositional culture as an adaptive response to the opportunity structures in which working-class lads and poor blacks find themselves. It was the opportunity structure within inner cities and the hypersegregation of the poor that created the environment that produced street cultural capital among some poor black Americans, according to this perspective. The streets, according to William Oliver (2006), became an alternative socialization institution for black men. In *A Place on the Corner* (Anderson 1978: 270), Anderson summarized the effect this way: despite a code of decency, “‘toughness,’ ‘gettin’ big money,’ ‘getting’ some wine’ and ‘havin’ some fun’” were cultural displays that the group at Jelly’s adopted “after the ‘props’ supporting decency have for some reason been judged unviable, unavailable, and unattainable.”

Willis and Ogbu argued further that the oppositional cultures of working-class and poor kids play an agentic role in the reproduction of social class. By devaluing school and putting forth less effort, children might prevent themselves from gaining the skills—and credentials—necessary to obtain management jobs or other “good” positions (Kalleberg, Reskin, and Hudson 2000) that pay well and give benefits. Participation in the informal economy, drugs, and crime, furthermore, has made jail increasingly likely for young black men, and labor force and political engagement afterward more challenging.

## **Cultural Resistance**

Race scholars have criticized oppositional culture research as focusing on the behaviors of the wrong actors. They argue that instead of focusing on the behaviors of marginalized individuals, often kids, researchers should examine gatekeepers, such as teachers and employers who discriminate based on cultural capital. Annette Ferguson (2000) found, for example, that school teachers treated white and black boys differently. “African American boys are not accorded the masculine dispensation of being ‘naturally’ naughty. Instead the school reads their expression and display of masculine naughtiness as a sign of an inherent vicious, insubordinate nature that as a threat to order must be controlled” (86). Teachers controlled the presumed threat of the “troublemakers” by overtly disciplining black boys often and severely. They singled them out during class to humiliate them, and they removed them from their classrooms and sent them to the punishment room. Janelle Dance (2002) similarly found that there existed a collective oppositional culture and presentation of self among the kids in her study. It included music, clothing, language, and the “tough front.” Teachers associated kids who adopted this street cultural capital—regardless of their actual academic abilities—with gang members, drug dealers, and criminals. Teachers interpreted “tough front” cultural capital signals as emblematic of troublemakers, and they excluded those kids from opportunities. Dance points out that even though most students were not criminals, teachers still labeled them—even academically-oriented students—as such. Additionally, racialized teacher assessments of ability have led to disproportionate tracking of white students into advanced or gifted classes and black students into remedial classes (Fischer, Hour, Jankowski, Lucas, Swidler, and Voss 1996; Tyson 2006; Tyson, Darity, and Castellino 2005). In Royster’s (2003) research, teachers provided more support for white students and sponsored them based on racialized assessments. These studies suggest that success in school is about conformity rather than intelligence. If kids do not conform, they never develop academic abilities.

The same processes seem to happen in workplaces. Moss and Tilly (1996) illustrated that employers overtly assessed potential employees’ “soft skills” (cultural capital) on top of or in place of productivity-related skills. They discriminated against black workers because they seemed to lack proper

interpersonal styles. Other studies have found that employers judge potential employees on their cultural capital in ways that exclude black workers while using what appear to be race-neutral hiring practices (Kennelly 1999; Kirschenman and Neckerman 1999; Neckerman and Kirschenman 1991).

Theorists who look at culture as a tool of resistance, thus, reject the notion that cultural capital of dominant groups be treated as intrinsically better or preferable simply because they have power and status to exploit others (Carter 2003; Carter 2005; Dance 2002; Kitwana 2002; Lundy 2003; Tyson 2006; Tyson, Darity, and Castellino 2005). Oppositional cultures derive *from* being exploited, they point out. Tyson and colleagues (2006; 2005), for example, found that local context matters: groups of individuals develop oppositional cultural capital when high status and opportunity (i.e., tracking into gifted programs) coincide with broader categories of advantage/disadvantage (e.g., race). It is this conflation of race and achievement that sets the stage for kids to develop identities and practices that deflate teachers' and peers' power to other them.

According to cultural resistance theorists, oppositional cultural capital, including street culture, can play a positive, functional role for oppressed people, particularly in the form of group identity construction. Cultural constructions are a source of power among low-status groups who lack institutional power (Pyke 1996). "When the chances of being mislabeled, slighted, or dominated are great," Schwalbe and Mason-Schrock (1996: 138) explain, "it is crucial to be able to effectively claim the most powerful and valued identity one can." Oppositional and street cultural capitals provide the framework for creating a positive and black-affirming identity for working-class and poor black kids. For example, kids use the habits and styles that have come to characterize street cultural capital in schools (e.g., the use of Black English and slang and a hip-hop style) as signifiers of racial authenticity (Carter 2005; Lundy 2003; Tyson 2006; Tyson, Darity, and Castellino 2005). Kids use them to mark in-group membership (Clay 2003). In this way, street culture or other forms of black oppositional cultural capital are forms of resistance to the subordination inherent within white dominated institutions and white

cultural hegemony. But they do not necessarily include anti-school sentiments. They are not simply a rejection of schooling but a way to embrace a distinctive, black-centered identity.<sup>5</sup>

In addition to creating a pro-black group identity, resistance theorists point to the other positive uses of oppositional culture. Cultural capital provides coping strategies against racism through community, pride, racial identity, safe and autonomous spaces, and preparation for dealing with bias and discrimination (Feagin and Sikes 1994; Hill 2005; McNamara Horvat and Lewis 2003; St. Jean and Feagin 1998). Much of this research has focused on the role of black families in racially socializing kids. This socialization gives young people the skills and habits for dealing with racism and establishing positive identities. Black women engage in “motherwork,” for example, that fostered a racial identity among children and empowered them (Collins 2000). Black families also serve as a sounding board for family members to share their feelings and process their experiences of race deprivation and humiliation (St. Jean and Feagin 1998). The development of kinship and a collective family memory also provide bonding among family members, while passing along tools to deal with racism (St. Jean and Feagin 1998). Other researchers emphasize the roles of black music, rites of passage, and churches in passing along black solidarity and resistant forms of cultural capital (Brookins 1996; Davis 1998; Quinn 1996).

In sum, cultural resistance theorists criticize oppositional culture theories for exaggerating the role that oppositional culture plays in class reproduction. It is whites’ institutionalized control over blacks and their power to exploit blacks that is problematic from this perspective—not the cultural practices of working-class or poor people. White gatekeepers, they point out, use cultural capital assessments to exclude Others from getting access to quality services in schools, employment, and desirable housing.<sup>6</sup> It is this very exploitation and opportunity hoarding (Tilly 1998) that leads oppressed people to cultivate

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<sup>5</sup> Racial authenticity, although closely connected to class, seems to be at the core of identity work for working-class black boys. The same processes are not at play with working-class white boys, who often create identities around manual labor and in opposition to girls and gay boys. See Willis (1977) and Mac an Ghaill (1994).

<sup>6</sup> Gatekeeping, of course, is not the sole province of whites. Middle-class and upper-middle-class blacks who conform to white workplace culture are often ideologically indistinguishable from whites. Even when blacks share ideologies with whites, their contact with low-income individuals and experiences with discrimination differentiate them from white gatekeepers in substantial ways. See Lacy (2004) and Neckerman, Carter, and Lee (1999). We also know, for example, that conforming to employer expectations is less emotionally painful for middle-class whites than middle-class blacks.

oppositional cultures in the first place. When they do create oppositional cultural capital, furthermore, they do so to affirm blackness and their identities. In other words, oppositional cultural capital serves as a resource for resistance to oppression. By ignoring the positive identity and cultural resistance that oppositional culture makes possible, resistance theorists argue, oppositional culture research contributes to the marginalization of this mode of resistance.

Cultural reproduction, oppositional culture, and cultural resistance theories, thus, each suggest a different relationship between culture and the reproduction of social class. In cultural reproduction, elites pass along high-status cultural capital that then gets rewarded in the education system. This facilitates gaining educational credentials. People who have particular credentials, in turn, get rewarded with better jobs in the workforce. According to oppositional culture theory, oppressed groups develop a dysfunctional culture that rejects the cultural capital of a dominant group. By removing themselves from participation in institutions dominated by elites or oppressing groups, they cut themselves off from the chance to gain educational credentials that can be rewarded in the labor market. They also put themselves at risk for imprisonment and removal from the workforce that way. People with oppositional cultural capital, thus, contribute to their own class positioning. Cultural resistance theories, on the other hand, suggest that cultural capital of exploited groups provides positive group identities and may provide young people a chance to demonstrate their potential to teachers and employers.

### **Cultural Avenues for Social Change**

These theories imply three cultural ways for individuals from oppressed groups to create upward mobility. First, individuals can create opportunities for themselves by adopting dominant forms of cultural capital. According to this perspective, individuals can assimilate to dominant culture through cultural change, thus accessing rewards from the dominant group. Black kids, for example, could dress according to dominant cultural practices and talk in Standard English. Because gatekeepers actively delegitimize and sanction oppositional culture, individuals ought to avoid oppositional/resistance

cultural, according to this logic. By displaying the dominant form of cultural capital, black kids could signify a willingness to work hard and gain the favor of teachers, police, and employers. The ear'oles (Willis 1977), the “schoolboys” (Ferguson 2000), and cultural mainstreamers (Carter 2005), for example, adopted pro-school orientations. They were more successful in school than their peers who espoused an oppositional orientation, even though they risked alienating themselves from their peers (Carter 2005).

An underlying assumption of an approach that advocates change by way of adopting dominant forms of cultural capital is that social mobility is possible. Gatekeepers will supposedly reward people from marginalized groups who *do* display dominant cultural capital. This approach assumes that gatekeepers will positively assess kids' school and work performances, hire them, sponsor them, or provide other opportunities. Some quantitative studies have found this to be the case (e.g., DiMaggio 1982; Dumais 2005). It also assumes that jobs are aptly available for individuals to access. Jail records, family obligations, and transportation, according to this perspective, are not thought to inhibit individuals from getting jobs. In general, then, adopting dominant forms of cultural capital may create individual upward mobility by opening up access to white- or middle-class social networks and resources. The emotional or other costs of conforming remain unexamined or get disregarded as unimportant.

Cultural resistance theories, second, imply an entirely different cultural avenue for social change. They hold that people cultivate non-dominant forms of cultural capital and hip-hop media in particular to create positive identities, black solidarity, and black leadership (Dance 2002; Kitwana 2002; Morgan 1999; Stapleton 1998; Trapp 2005). There are two methods through which this could lead to social mobility. One way would be by training teachers in multiculturalism so that they would develop sensitivity or neutrality towards non-dominant forms of cultural capital. They could, then, recognize them and reward them equally. Multicultural education incorporates black history into the curricula and eliminates biases in educational testing, for example. It also celebrates leaders from a variety of racial and ethnic groups.

Another method would center pro-black forms of cultural capital. It would transform white spaces into black ones by incorporating West African principles and values into schools and rites of passage programs (see Brookins 1996; Pollard and Ajirrotutu 2000), holding up communality, and

cultivating democratic forms of decision making. This affirming cultural environment, in turn, could serve as the basis for community-based activism and, perhaps, a reinvigorated civil rights movement aimed at political change and black entrepreneurship. Through collectivity, black individuals could demand that teachers, employers, and police broaden their own cultural repertoires. They could demand that teachers reward non-dominant forms of cultural capital rather than sanction them. In short, cultural capital could be used as a basis for affirmation and community organization in order to influence the opportunity structures for black boys and girls. It is by way of changing these opportunity structures that black youth *as a group* may have chances for upward mobility.<sup>7</sup>

Finally, researchers suggest that low-income black kids make use of multiple forms of cultural capital. This would allow them to display dominant forms of cultural capital when it was beneficial while retaining a black-centered identity and the ability to fit into black-dominated spaces. Anderson (1999), borrowing from linguistics, showed the importance of black inner-city residents being able to “code switch,” or use the code of decency in some contexts and the code of the street in others. People who possessed both sets of skills and could adjust to different settings were more successful than those who could not. They enjoyed relative safety in the neighborhood, as well as relative success in the workplace. Others (Lacy 2004; Neckerman, Carter, and Lee 1999) have argued that “strategic assimilation” allows middle-class African Americans to be successful in white-dominated spaces such as workplaces and schools while retaining a firm grounding in black culture and its institutions. Code switching as a social change strategy, thus, retains the potential for political organizing through black culture while allowing individuals to become socially mobile by accessing resources controlled by white gatekeepers.

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<sup>7</sup> There is a longstanding tradition among some black leaders that advocates entrepreneurship and economic expansion within capitalism as the solution to oppression of blacks and poverty. More radical race scholars argue that upward mobility for African Americans is impossible within a capitalist economic system, even if black business owners manage to monopolize black consumer markets. See Manning Marable’s *How Capitalism Underdeveloped Black America* (1983). He argues that the development of black-owned businesses would likely create a political backlash from white small-business owners, and they would, in turn, act increasingly authoritarian toward the black working class. Capitalism, he argues, exists *to oppress* black people. Therefore, the integration of black Americans into capitalism is itself problematic. In Marable’s words (p. 256), “The road to Black liberation must also be a road to socialist revolution.”

## **Cultural Strategies at Kidworks**

As I have shown, several studies recently have examined the role of cultural capital in class reproduction among low-income black Americans. Many of these studies have focused on the variability of black student cultures in schools and the effect of these different cultural orientations on students' academic performance (see, e.g., Carter 2003; Carter 2005; Dance 2002; Ferguson 2000; Tyson 2006; Tyson, Darity, and Castellino 2005).

This study, however, approaches the issue from the other side of the coin by examining the strategies that a youth organization named Kidworks used to create opportunities for black kids through culture. Although white administrators did not call it such, the organizationally prescribed mode of change was to give kids middle-class cultural capital in order to prepare them to assimilate into white spaces. They framed this approach as an attempt to fill in the cultural gaps left by the schools and parents by teaching kids dominant forms of cultural capital and giving them an opportunity to practice using it at Kidworks and its functions. Yet it was black staff members who implemented cultural change on the ground, and it was not assimilation but rather a cultural straddling and code switching strategy—just in the way many social scientists now promote—that they themselves used. They viewed cultural code switching as a necessary skill to mediate white racism rather than to fit into white culture. Despite these differences, among both the administrators and the direct-care staff alike, “youth development” meant effecting cultural transformation of black kids away from the perceived dangers of street cultural capital and into the safety and promise of middle-class cultural capital. It was through the students' agility at making use of this cultural capital that opportunities for social mobility presumably arose.

Kidworks, subsequently, offers a unique opportunity to examine how KW gave kids cultural capital in practice as a solution to black marginalization. It offers the chance to examine the role culture played in the reproduction of social class and the consequences of a cultural transformation strategy. This research study, thus, addresses two sets of research questions. The first centers on the mission of KW as ideology. What is the cultural mission of Kidworks? Why do black staff and white administrators alike advocate cultural transformation to create mobility? What assumptions lie underneath these ideologies?

The second set examines the mission in practice: How does Kidworks go about fulfilling its mission?

What strategies do the organization and the staff use to transmit middle-class cultural capital to kids, and what challenges do they face in doing so? What are the implications of the strategies KW uses? What opportunities at KW, if any, come from kids' cultural capital displays? In this study, I examine the ways in which Kidworks went about giving kids cultural capital, the conflicts that arose from doing so, and the consequences.

### chapter three: Kidworks Character Development

*This is Mark's Story.*

*Reading only on the third grade level and struggling with simple algebra Mark tended to back talk to teachers and fight with classmates.*

*Staff at Kidworks talked with his parents and teachers and came up with a plan to get Mark on grade level so that he would not be retained. Staff stuck with Mark as he worked on his math, reading, comprehension, language arts and social studies, working with him until closing every night for most of the school year.*

*At year end, Mark graduated fifth grade with his class; in addition, he was recognized as a Star Student for his efforts not only in the classroom but for a change in his behavior.*

*Proof again that Kidworks changes, enhances--and even saves--the lives of young people.*

Mark's success story appeared in the 2005 annual report for Kidworks (KW), a pamphlet widely distributed to donors and volunteers. Three photographs of smiling youth adorned the cover of the report, while the year's highlights, thanks from an appreciative family, an inspirational letter from the board chair, and a description of the Best and Brightest Youth award winner filled the inside pages. The terms "Teamwork," "Confidence," "Success," "Belonging," "Community," and, finally, "Character" introduced each new section of the report. The report was designed to evoke a sense of pride and satisfaction and to imply a powerful promise: Kidworks—through staff dedication, mission and community collaboration—instilled in kids these most American of values. They trained kids to be the right *kinds* of people, people with the right priorities and the character to live up to them.

It was stories like Mark's that KW's literature touted as emblematic of Kidworks' success. Mark did more than embrace hard work and a new self-confidence. He was the model of self-betterment that the public values. He prioritized education and overcame the obstacles he faced. He espoused the sort of self-determination and ambition that his parents should be proud of and employers would likely reward. Mark's story grips emotion because it is symbolic of the American dream: the promise that each child has the chance to make something of him- or herself no matter how humble the beginnings. According to this ideology, upward mobility is possible for anyone as long as one has the right attitude and complete

dedication (Barnes 2002; Hochschild 1995). Mark's story, in essence, represented the American dream lived out by one boy under the care and guidance of the Kidworks organization devoted to its mission.

As much as the American dream, Mark's story represented the character development that Kidworks administrators and workers designed to transform "disadvantaged" young people into respectable citizens. In this chapter, I explore the meaning behind Kidworks' mission of "youth development." I show that the KW staffers, administrators, and volunteers constructed the mission in opposition to the "street" culture, presumably, of the kids' neighborhoods and families. Street culture, as they defined it, was a gendered phenomenon in which criminality and gangs were associated with maleness, while bad parenting was associated with femaleness. The opposing character that Kidworks tried to create was self-determination. The hope was that kids who were determined to would open up opportunities for upward mobility.

### **Youth Development: The Mission**

Kidworks was a social services nonprofit with a "people-changing" mission (Hasenfeld 1972). The stated mission of Kidworks was to assist kids to become productive community members. Staff, administration, and fundraisers were especially interested in providing their services to "disadvantaged" kids by way of "youth development." "We spend more time now," Darin explained, "trying to discipline kids and give them knowledge about respect and the character traits and integrity than we are [spending time saying,] 'Let's go play basketball, let's go on a field trip' because [the kids] are lost." These "lost" kids, as Darin described them, needed discipline in order to gain integrity. Edward also suggested that the message the staff delivered to kids was that "character counts. Education is important. Respecting one another whether it's gender, diversity, embracing diversity." Miranda, a white volunteer, explained that KW offered these kids, in her words, "a safe supportive place with good moral people who are helping to develop their character."

Staff members internalized this mission and came to define their work around it. Staff especially emphasized that they were in the business of changing kids' lives by developing their potential rather than

simply supervising them like babysitters. Darin, for example, became annoyed when some parents misunderstand the organization's purpose. "Some kids and families don't buy into it," he said. "It's more of a babysitter to them, but we are a youth development program—not an after-school program, not a community center. We're a youth development program," Darin corrected, "so our programs try to develop these kids' lives, bodies, spirits, everything." Ben, who attended Kidworks as a child and later worked there full-time, put it another way:

Some people look at the Kidworks like a babysitting service. This is not a babysitting service. This is a place to teach ya'll's young kids to be positive role models and how to interact with different people from different cultures and get along with people. And to work out differences positively, not negatively. That's what Kidworks stands for.

As Darin, Ben, and Edward alluded to, the staff became frustrated with families who approached the program as "like a babysitting service" or a simple community center. It was a frequent complaint among the staff at both Boyworks (BW) and Girlworks (GW), for example, that parents simply left their kids there all evening or came to pick them up late. Doing so, from the staff's perspective, was an abuse of them as workers. Their job was to mold and transform kids, not to entertain them until their parents felt like picking them up.

Development was the mission—one designed to define the organization and to shape its public identity. The public consumed the mission statement so that it became the public face of Kidworks and nearly synonymous with the organization. Public relations people placed it on most KW mailings to volunteers and sponsors. The mission was not only prominent on the first page of the annual report, it also appeared on the Spring into Fashion show program, thank you letters mailed to the judges of the Best of the Best Youth contest, and each of the monthly advertisements run in the local newspaper. KW representatives recited the mission statement during events for the public, too. For instance, during the fundraiser recognition breakfast, a local radio personality began the event by reading the mission statement to the group. My fieldnotes described a video shown to volunteers on the work of Kidworks:

The video starts with kids running down stairs out of a school building. Several screens of writing flash, one after another. The first one explains that the hours of 3 to 8p.m. are the most vulnerable times for kids. The next one reads there are millions of latchkey kids. The next one says that juvenile crime, substance abuse, and teenage pregnancy occur mostly between the hours of 3 and 4.

Then, the video cuts to scenes of the Kidworks, showing kids doing an assortment of activities.

According to the video, Kidworks is designed to give kids a place to go after school. The first scenes show kids playing in a gym. Another scene shows a staff member reading with kids.

The video emphasized the problems kids faced as a lack of supervision, causing them to get caught up in crime, substance abuse, and pregnancy. It framed Kidworks as the solution. KW offered not only supervision but companionship and life-skills.

A major fundraising event advertisement described Kidworks this way:

Kidworks is a place, an actual neighborhood-based building, designed solely for youth development purposes. (Quotes the mission statement.) Kidworks is open every day after school and on Saturdays when kids have free time and need positive, productive outlets. Research has shown that the most critical time in a child's life is between 3 and 8 pm— this is where Kidworks fills the void with structured, enriching, and exciting after-school programs.

This advertisement also juxtaposed the hole that kids faced without Kidworks with the enrichment that Kidworks was designed to offer through structured character development programs.

The mission of Kidworks appeared in other public domains, as well. When a deadline passed without meeting the yearly fundraising goal, a staff member called a local columnist who ran an article entitled, “Kidworks is on a Major Mission.” The article explained the work of Kidworks like this:

Other groups may talk a good game about gang prevention, but at Kidworks, it is no abstraction. They are making it happen, providing real alternatives, one disaffected kid at a time. . . . Kidworks is a great way to divert kids who might otherwise be lured into mischief—or worse. . . . Without any structured activity or supervision, a lot of kids end up just “hanging out”—making babies, getting into trouble with the law, using or selling drugs. . . . Slowly but surely, though, Kidworks is making progress.

This publicized version of Kidworks' “major mission” described the organization as a diversion from mischief and public ills, such as drug dealing and crime. KW provided “real alternatives” that changed lives “one disaffected kid at a time.” Even though the article never stated how Kidworks went about accomplishing its mission, the work was clear: to transform kids' bad behavior.

The organization's definition of mentorship, a major contribution that volunteers could make to KW, also provided insight into the mission. The mentor's job, according to a volunteer training session, was to directly develop character. The session trainer defined the mentoring relationship as “a committed

relationship between an adult and a youth focused on developing the character and the capabilities of the young person.” Mentors provided young people “new insight, attitudes, and behaviors”; “new personal skills and experiences”; development of “honesty, self-esteem, reliability, and commitment”; establishment of personal goals; conveyance of “basic societal values”; and “academic achievement.”

Other Kidworks materials directly described what the organization provided as “a safe place to learn and grow,” “ongoing relationships with caring, adult professionals,” “life-enhancing programs and character development experiences,” and “hope and opportunity.” The chair of the board explained in an annual report that it was the “highest priority” of Kidworks to “serve as many as possible of our community’s children most in need of our services. We believe that Kidworks provides a ‘home away from home’ for many children, where young people receive the guidance and support to overcome the most daunting obstacles, and where children learn to live honorably.”

### **Kidworks Character as Opposed to Street Culture**

Even though the mission was stated in different ways, what Kidworks stood for, as the staff and public faces of the organization defined it, was producing certain *types* of people, certain types of *character*, through its services. “To live honorably,” as the chair put it, meant exhibiting particular values and behaviors that supported those values. Mark, as described in the annual report, represented the character that all of the organizational members wanted kids to display. He dedicated himself to doing better and worked to do so by completing homework religiously and seeking help from staff when he needed it. It was his character transformation that Kidworks celebrated and held up as a model for success.

The honorable type of character that Kidworks tried to develop, however, could only be understood through its opposite, the dishonorable type of character that Kidworks tried to prevent or displace. As described above, one of the hallmarks of Kidworks’ mission was providing services to kids who are “disadvantaged,” “underprivileged,” or “really in need.” In fact, it was a long-term goal of the organization to expand throughout the county, especially to the burgeoning Latino neighborhoods of

working-class immigrants. Yet KW young people did not consider themselves disadvantaged, nor did Kidworks formally define what it meant to be disadvantaged, at-risk, or “especially in need of” services. Most often KW people described “disadvantage” in nebulous terms. A state senator, for example, thanked people for attending a fundraiser with the following remarks:

I would also like to thank you for participating in this important event. And thank you to the Fundraisers for inviting me. As someone who serves on the [Education Committee] in the state senate, I see how we struggle to provide enough money to educational programs. Only 60 percent of the kids in our state who enter high school graduate. Programs like Kidworks provide support to those kids who otherwise wouldn't receive it. Thank you for sharing this event and your continued support of Kidworks.

Perhaps the senator was simply referring to the low-cost of KW services, a trademark with which KW would not soon part.

There was other evidence to suggest that poverty was a source of disadvantage for which KW intended to compensate. More than half of Boyworks kids, for example, lived below the poverty line. Both Kidworks' own marketing materials and newspaper articles cited the low cost of the program as a benefit. Poverty, on the other hand, was presented as a potential pitfall for kids. The article on Kidworks' mission, for example, also read, “Providing care and activities for thousands of underprivileged kids every day, for a membership fee of under \$10 a year, isn't exactly a money-making endeavor. But Kidworks wants to do more.” Wanda explained to donors that other organizations charge more for similar services. Still,

There are people who don't have the money. They earn less than \$10,000 a year. . . . To me, it is important that people know about what we stand for, and this is why we locate our facilities in neighborhoods where you have economically disadvantaged. So, yes, we base our neighborhoods, our facilities in neighborhoods where there are people living with socially weaker backgrounds, economically weaker backgrounds (Wanda).

To illustrate further, Wanda told potential donors that “60 to 65 percent of our children are members that receive free or reduced lunches.” A 2004 KW report explained that despite recent successes, KW's work was far from done: “More than 14 million American children live in poverty. Each day in this

nation, more than 4,400 children are arrested. More than 2,500 high school students drop out. Many have nowhere to turn. All could benefit from Kidworks.”

In similar ways, blackness seemed to be associated with the disadvantage that many kids faced. Even though the connection between race and disadvantage was rarely made explicit and never stated out loud by KW workers, the implication was clear. Whenever I announced my research interest as “inequality” at Kidworks, for example, people directed me to the KW site located “across the street from a housing project.” This program had almost an entirely poor and African American clientele. People also reported with concern that Girlworks and Boyworks drew similar types of kids from local housing projects, including the oldest one in the city. Kidworks’ “premiere” program, as staffers within the organization referred to it, was BW. Boyworks’ population was almost entirely African American and more heavily poor than other KW sites. People considered BW to be one of the best program sites in the state. This label existed in part because BW had a rich history but also because it served these low-income *black* boys, whom they considered to be especially vulnerable to trouble. Kidworks’ website drew attention to race in its report of the findings of a national alumni survey. A national mailing, for example, claimed that over half of alumni reported that the program “saved my life.” According to a local handout, “Some 30 percent of alumni from ‘tough’ neighborhoods and 38 percent of African-American alumni polled strongly agree [that Kidworks saved their lives].” The website added a success story of a black man who first played basketball there as “proof that Kidworks changes lives.” He later became a collegiate star, played professionally overseas, and coached high school. It was at Boyworks, the website pointed out, that he first played ball and adults came to recognize his talent.

### *Street Culture*

Despite these few explicit allusions to poverty and race, KW people almost always described disadvantage in cultural terms that were themselves connoted with poverty and blackness. It was the culture in which low-income black young people supposedly lived, especially their families and

neighborhoods, that concerned people. In the descriptions of the mission above, staff members and promotional materials described Kidworks as filling a void left by absentee parents. Latchkey kids, for example, faced dangers when left home alone. Kidworks administrators frequently cited the statistic that most pregnancies and crime happen between 3 and 4 in the afternoon when kids were unsupervised. KW, in turn, reportedly picked up the slack of working parents.

The larger concern, however, was that kids learned and adopted street culture, as characterized by Anderson's work (1999), from their parents and rough neighborhoods. This street culture was dominated by "tough fronts" (Dance 2002), violence, and hustling.

Although few people considered the neighborhoods of most KW kids to be "inner city," the facilities that served mostly black clientele were located areas with concentrated poverty that too often characterize inner cities (Massey and Denton 1993; Wilson 1996). And the staff, the administration, volunteers, and the Sherburne community at large believed that street culture was a powerful force that was increasingly encroaching upon the city and threatening KW youth. These fears distinctively characterized low-income black kids, particularly boys, as potentially dangerous. Local media, for example, devoted several columns over the past two years to preventing gangs and crime. Local community leaders created a task force "to confront and reduce the escalating risks faced by area communities and families of losing young people, especially African American and Hispanic/Latino males, to delinquency, criminality and incarceration." The task force was concerned with the skyrocketing rates of blacks in the prison population: over 60 percent of inmates as compared to twelve percent of the population. There had also been several local news programs and even documentaries devoted to the increasing presence of violence within communities occupied by African Americans.

Within this context of heightened public concern over what people commonly perceived as black cultural problems (Collins 2004), it is perhaps not surprising that KW staffers, volunteers, and administrators found the potentials of the street to be worrisome. "It just so happens that the KW is located on Pencer Avenue in one of the high crime areas in our city. On the southwest Sherburne side. This area is a high crime area over here. Kids have different obstacles outside this door. They have drugs,

they have violence, they have gangs” (Ben). Wanda told potential donors that not only did most of the kids served by KW get free or reduced lunches but their neighborhoods were dangerous:

You can’t have a child, for instance, growing up in an environment, in a family [where] the family’s great and wonderful but the neighborhood is not good. It will have an impact on the child much stronger [sic] than the family. . . . But if the child, if the parents don’t come along with each other, it’s still the neighborhood. I just wish I would know who those researchers were. But it’s a given fact. Again those kids are in neighborhoods where, hey, there’s shootings, the police cars. I mean the police are out there. I’ve never seen so many police cars in my life ever since I’ve been driving back and forth [to work here]. I mean seriously, if ever I’ve been in a protected environment!

Kids who exhibited street styles and behavioral characteristics were a source of great concern to direct-care staff. Ben, who used to work in an alternative school setting, worried about a kid with whom he worked. He went down the street path:

I ran across a kid last year [at the school whom] I had at Kidworks. After he was out of KW, him and his brother got involved in different things. He wants to be a gang member now. He thinks he’s hard. He wants to be a little gang member. . . . I heard that he got booted out of that program over there because that program was, he wasn’t progressing. He was regressing. He got worse since he got in that program. And that program is your last opportunity for you to get it together. When you get weeded out of that program, it’s, pretty much nothing to do with you but throw you in level three group home and be caught up in juvenile detention just like that.

Turning to gangs and thinking of oneself as “hard” or tough were especially troublesome to Ben and other staff because they potentially brought about serious consequences. Ben feared that kids would get caught up in juvenile detention or run out of support-program options. Another staff member, who sat on the local gang prevention task force and began a gang prevention program at KW, had more serious concerns. Many of his peers who got caught up in the streets received long sentences in prison or were dead. He said he knew the dangers because he grew up with street violence in Philadelphia. Sherburne boys who adopted a gangster style, he argued, didn’t *realize* the dangers that come along with it. “But the little mamas’ boys [here in the city of Sherburne], they’re not strong enough to be on the streets. . . . They portray something that they don’t really want to be and don’t need to be.” They portrayed themselves, he continued, as gang members by dressing and acting like them. “Why would you pull your pants all the way down and put your earrings in your ears like you’re the thug from the street, and you’re not? So why do that? [Because] that’s glamorous. So they glamorize things that are not cute and they’re not fun. And they could get you killed.” The implication was that Sherburne boys *played* by acting like a “thug from the

street,” by wearing their pants hanging down and earrings in their ears. It was a source of fun and excitement to boys, probably because appearing tough gained them reputations as respectable and cool (Anderson 1999). Yet even looking the part—whether boys were actually involved with gangs or selling drugs—could lead to dire consequences, such as getting arrested or killed, feared the staff.

Martin, the staff member at another KW facility that had low-income African American kids, watched for behaviors that might signify gang involvement. He looked at “the colors they’re wearing a lot. Even though you know you see a lot of people [non-gang members] wearing colors. I pay attention to when they shake hands. . . . And I’ve seen see a couple of guys do something when they shake their hands. So that let me know they might be involved in gang activity.” When he noticed these suspicious behaviors from the boys, “I’ll make a comment just to let them know that I know, and I’ll leave it at that.” Then he called a police friend who dropped by to let the boys know that “I’m not going to tolerate that down here at Kidworks.” Martin tried to warn the boys of the dangers of gang activity and drugs, just like Warner did. “You can tell them, and they know what’s going to happen. You see it on TV. You read it in the paper what the end result’s going to be. You in jail or dead. But they wanted a choice and you know, you can’t do nothing. They gotta follow the rule. If that’s what they want to do, that’s what they want to do. But they can’t say no one never told them.”

### *Street Culture as Boy Culture*

It was not a coincidence that staff members referred to gangs and street culture in general terms of “hardness” and being “strong enough” to handle the consequences. In scholarly work (Anderson 1999; Ferguson 2000; Mac an Ghail 1994; MacLeod 1995; Majors and Mancini Billson 1992), in public debates, and in staff constructions, street culture was male-dominated and male-identified (Johnson 2005). Just as the media concern above focused on the potentially violent behaviors of black *boys* and *men*, many staff members and KW volunteers described boys as entrenched in a culture of risk. Darin differentiated the clientele they served at Boyworks from the kids at Girlworks in this way: “The type of kids that we serve is different [from other facilities], even Girlworks. The girls are a whole lot different

than the little boys. There's a lot of stuff you can do with little girls. You can put them all in a circle and play a game with them. So I said, 'Let me try that.' Them kids [boys] knocked everything that we had off the wall and ran out the door. You can't do that with little boys."

The implication was that boys *as a group* were aggressive and prone to making trouble. Fighting was a concern at Boyworks, and fights and disrespectful behavior constituted a major focus of the full-time staff members' interviews. Staff described incidents in great detail in which boys jumped each other or provoked other kids into physical showdowns. Darin explained a fight between Big L and another boy this way:

Well this big kid, he's just as nice and as humble. And he's not forceful to anybody. . . . Big L said these kids were talking about his mama, and L asked him, "Are you talking about my mom, man?" He went off on him hard, and L was like, "Okay, man, okay," and the other kid kept talking about it and going on and on about it. And that other kid got up in L's face or something, and L said he was joking. He just pushed him off joking and was like, "Chill, man. Chill." And he kept getting up in it, and L said, "If you come to me again I'm going to slam you." That kid didn't back off, so L moved this table out of the way, moved some chairs out of the way, pushed the foosball table out of the way. The dude ran and L picked him up just like this and dropped him right on the floor and this kid, you don't hear him talking junk to nobody.

Even though Darin and others detailed specific incidents of violence, they generalized their concerns to boys as a group. They feared that boys would get involved with the "wrong crowd," a crowd of other street boys. Ben explained his own experiences like this:

Most of my friends grew up in that environment [poor, hungry, on welfare]. And that's the only mindset that they had. . . . I went to college. Got kicked out of college because I got involved with the wrong crowd. I was trying to be like, trying to be cool. I never smoked weed or anything until I got to college, trying to be different. That was the stage in my life when I tried to be down.

But then Ben got "caught up with" a friend who was driving around with drugs in his car. They got caught, and Ben realized that he couldn't "live like this." Ben's description implied what other KW adults agreed with: street culture was a way of life, a shared experience of making and getting into trouble. It was almost always boys who shared this culture, and it was boys that workers worried would go to jail, die, or simply cut off their opportunities because of it.

The staff also used male-identified terms, such as "tough" and "strong," and male-identified descriptions of appearance, such as wearing earrings or do rags, to describe the street culture and

appearance. Rules that addressed these aspects of street culture, consequently, were a primary focus among the staff. The teen center signs, for example, listed rules in following order:

- No disrespect to staff Members
- Bring your membership Card
- No cursing or profanity
- No [fussing], fighting or picking on others
- No begging or asking for food or money
- Do not destroy or steal KW or other members' property
- Do not wear baggy pants, hats, Males cannot wear ear rings, or other head
- Gear (rags, [scarves], sweat bands). Females cannot wear hats in the building.
- All food must be eaten in the snack area . . . .

Workers frequently reinforced the rules about appearance—no baggy pants, earrings, or head gear—by making boys cover their earrings and remove their hats or skullies. Staff sometimes even pulled up boys' pants as they walked by them. BW staff drilled into boys' heads the rules about fighting and appearance so that when asked as a group to explain KW's rules, kids named these items first, along with no gum chewing and running around. Avoiding drugs and fighting were also the primary emphasis of the boys' life-skills groups, with them dominating weeks' worth of attention. The insinuation was that gangs, drugs, crime, and violence all went hand-in-hand for boys. Together these behaviors constituted street culture in which black poor boys, like the ones at BW, were supposedly entrenched and, therefore, vulnerable.

### *Street Culture as Family Dysfunction*

Drugs and gangs, on the other hand, were a much smaller concern for girls, and Danielle spent hardly any time discussing them with girls during their life-skills groups. Staffers did describe the potential for fighting among girls as troublesome but in the form of verbal arguments or teasing each other. Adults feminized girls' arguments as petty (albeit potentially harmful) female infighting rather than as something endemic in a street culture like the physical violence associated with boys. During a discussion about disagreements among girls, for example, a volunteer group facilitator translated a specific argument into a girl issue: "We are all women," she explained. "As women we need to be nice to [each other]. We're a minority group. We've come a long way. We need to lift each other up not tear each other down." The call to "lift each other up" rather than "tear each other down" through teasing was

fairly common at GW. Teasing was never discussed as a “boy issue” at BW, though, just as drugs and gangs were never addressed as a “girl issue” at GW.

Similarly, staff framed crime as a concern for girls, but not in the same generalized fashion as for boys. Rather than interpreting crime as a group-related behavior, staff individualized the crime committed by girls—as the byproduct of individual behavior by individually disturbed girls. Sharice described Dee, a girl who stole “CDs, ink pens, coats, all types of equipment” as personally troubled. Dee broke her arm and then stuffed stolen items into her cast. When Sharice met with Dee’s mom, she explained that Dee had been caught stealing, and it wouldn’t be tolerated. The mother replied, “Well, I didn’t want to tell you up front ‘cause I didn’t want you to form any assumptions about my child, but she’s done this before. She’s a klepto.” Sharice “let her come back, you know, thinking we talked to her, she would change,” but Dee continued to steal. The program director eventually dismissed Dee from the program.

Sharice accepted the mother’s interpretation that Dee had a personal problem with stealing. This translated the act of stealing into an individual’s compulsion rather than a byproduct or symptom of a larger cultural issue. As if to emphasize the personal and psychiatric nature of Dee’s theft, Sharice continued the story by explaining that after drawing suicidal pictures Dee was admitted to a mental hospital “because she needs some serious help.” Libby similarly described a girl who stole her cell phone. “I honestly think she has a disorder or something’s wrong with her,” Libby explained, “but I don’t want to classify her as that. Because it’s things she does, has no feeling about it. She didn’t, I mean she has no feelings.... ‘Pat me down if you need to,’ and she has no emotion about anything.”

KW representations of street culture did involve girls and women but within the context of failing to live up to middle-class standards of parenting and femininity. A white volunteer named Ester was inspired by her work at another mostly poor and black KW to write a paper on family transmission of bad values:

I got to see a lot of different angles dealing with the parents, and I think that made me like the kids even more because you could just tell. . . I wrote a paper in high school on why people should be involved in KW. . . . Some rich people in society just see it as, “Well, oh well. They made that decision [to do bad things and therefore deserve the consequences].” Or like they see kids as criminals once they get in their teens and start doing bad.

My whole thing is that they need to start when they are younger and realize that their parents. . . when you're five and six, you can't make your own decisions. They are having other people make decisions for them that puts them in a situation, for all they know, is to do wrong. So you know, people learning to steal or something. That's what I wrote my paper on.

According to Ester's view, rich people wrongly stereotyped teens as criminals who deserved what they got. Ester's view, however, was that it starts much earlier with the parents. Dysfunctional parents supposedly taught their kids to steal or do other bad things. Their kids, Ester thought, were tainted by these experiences. As they became teens, they continued to steal and act out because they failed to realize they were wrong or immoral behaviors. Their parents made them seem normal.

Miranda, a white volunteer in the Professionals for Progress group, shared Ester's view. She contrasted the bad luck of the "underprivileged" kids at KW (that is, poor and black) who were born into bad situations to her own, more privileged and supposedly moral upbringing:

I feel so much for kids. They deserve so much and especially underprivileged kids. They didn't ask to be born into the situation that they were. And I feel like I come from a very privileged background. My family wasn't rich, but I had two parents who had been to college and raised me knowing that I was going to go to college after high school. I think life is very easy when you have that happen. I can't imagine what it's like for kids who not only don't have someone pushing them to achieve in life but they don't even necessarily, they don't even have the basics to learn how to be a good person. I mean a lot of them do, but I think a lot of them are from single family homes and parents that are just, don't have the time to spend with them like my parents did.

Miranda had live-in babysitters when she was younger, but as she entered middle school, she and her brother were home alone more. They would fight and argue, and Miranda wondered what kids *without* loving parents like hers ended up doing during their downtime.

Wanda similarly told donors that:

The majority of [KW kids] come from single parent households and yes, it's not the child's fault. . . . And that, you know, even those things those kids have to go through, whether it's verbal abuse maybe or other kinds of changes, being in foster homes or God knows what. Yes, you understand we can give them a safe place where they can go off to school and learn a little bit. Get a relationship with a KW professional and knowing that when they go there, that being heard, they have a sense of belonging and when they come home, they probably don't have that . . . or maybe not as much. Some of them have it, of course. I'm not talking about all of them. I think the majority, from what I see, it's like that [single parents, verbal abuse, and foster homes].

Casey located parents as her greatest source of concern for the girls. “Some kids you can tell that they parents just don’t have no money.” She worried about girls who had bad parents and the wrong “attitude”:

Some people, they’re doing okay even though their situation [is bad]. And then you got some people that’s real bad. Like [their] attitude is bad, grades are real bad, not into nothing but the wrong crowd. And you can tell it’s because of the situation they’re in. Maybe if they brought, or if their parents pay more attention, it might help their situation. But some kids, you can just tell. Like, you can only pray for them ‘cause right now it looks like they ain’t doing nothing but going down hill.

“Bad” parents, as she defined them, neglected their kids by not paying attention to them and letting them get off track. These kids appeared to be doing “nothing but going down hill.” Edward thought that kids learned from their families that economic dependency and free riding were okay:

I think one of the challenges for all of us with these kids is to kind of see beyond the walls of their community. . . . And obviously you know that whole aspect of not settling for county assistance. You know what I mean? . . . . I mean they think food stamps are money. That everybody, [that] when *I* go to the store, I use food stamps. That feeling of trying to get them to see beyond that and that they’re self-reliant. That there’s no free lunch in the world. That you make your own breaks type thing. I think it’d be really easy for those kids to settle. To settle right in their community and collect their check and all that. You know it takes a little [more] to lift themselves out of that.

Edward continued to acknowledge that getting a “free lunch in the world” was appealing to everyone, including him. But it was their job at Kidworks to counteract this and to help the kids “see beyond the walls of their community.”

A common complaint among staff and volunteers was that KW *mothers* transmitted the wrong values to their children. Middle-class staff members and volunteers especially worried about boys with single mothers, who many thought needed male influences to learn to be men. Martin said that he worried about kids who were “poorly dressed, hungry. I’ve had some ask to go with me home. Not getting enough attention. Some of the boys that I run into do need a male role model in their life, and they’re not getting that.” Ester lamented the lack of male role models, and Miranda saw it as a specific issue addressed by KW. “I remember some of the boys talking about one of their KW [programs] that teaches them how to be young men [the Man-To-Man Program]. And that one really struck me because my understanding is that an awful lot of these kids do come from single parent households and that more

often is a single mother versus a single father.” The implication was that women could not teach the boys to be men, as men could. If men were not present, the boys learned the wrong values either from women or the street.

The workers described parents in general as problematic but followed up with specific stories about poor mothering. They made moral judgments about them. In the same description as above, Casey told the story of a girl who was in foster care because her “mother’s on drugs real bad.” Darin claimed that the problems of kids go “back to the parents,” too:

A lot of times it’s a generational thing. It’s a mindset through the heart of the whole family, and nobody has broken that yet. All it takes is one kid to break it. . . . It takes that one person but until then, it’s just a process that keeps going and you can hear it when the parents come in, how they speak to their kids.

I asked for an example of what he meant. Darin continued with a specific story about a drunken mother.

He generalized his complaints to other mothers:

About three weeks ago [a seven year old] had a basketball game. He already played his game and his mom came in late. She was the one who was late. Smelled like alcohol, smelled like cigarettes or whatever. Smelled like she been doing what she shouldn’t have been doing. She comes in and pretty much punches him ‘cause she’s late for his game and he’s trying to tell her, “Mama, I already played. I already played” and she ain’t hearing that. I had to go up to her and say, “Your son’s already played his game,” and she looks at me like I’m crazy. And she don’t apologize to the boy, and the boy’s crying. . . .

They want us to raise their child. They just seem like they’re not concerned about their child. They’re concerned about, “Okay, I gotta go get this man over here. I’m not concerned about my child right now.” . . . They [college-aged KW workers] see some of my kids’ parents at 9, 10, 11 o’clock at night out at the club with some dude. And we think, okay you are a single parent. Where is your child then? Why aren’t you with your child? . . . Yeah, you can go out and have your fun but not every weekend. I got staff coming in telling me, “I saw it.” That’s unacceptable to me.

The boy’s mother, who was apparently drunk and smoking and perhaps high, failed to prioritize her son. She missed his game, then blamed him and humiliated him in front of his friends. Darin characterized other mothers as bad when they seemed to prioritize dating over their kids, or who partied a lot. Darin was horrified that his staff members ran into “some of my kids’ parents at 9, 10, 11 o’clock at night out at the club with some dude.” For Darin, these mothers failed to spend enough time with their kids and to teach them what they needed to know—and he thought that KW workers were left raising them.

Libby directed her complaints about bad parenting toward mothers, as well. The mother of a girl she was close to, for example, refused to let her participate in activities because the mom thought that “[she] ain’t gonna be nothing.” Libby was so sickened by the mother that she looked at her differently because “you don’t say things like that.” Warner also saw parents as troublesome:

And then there’s some parents that could just care less. Give me my crack. Give me my marijuana. Give me my beer. Give me my cigarettes. And that’s all I want to deal with. Leave my kid here until 8:00. There’s some kids in here that left for school at 6:15a.m., and they’ll be here until 8:15, 8:30p.m. . . . They’re doing something, but they ain’t working. But they should be at home with the kids eating dinner. Sitting down with mom. Even if it’s peanut butter and jelly. Sit down with mom with peanut butter and jelly and talk about his day. And he sits here talking to us about his day. We’re his father and his mother a lot. That’s sad.

Tamara argued that kids were particularly vulnerable between the ages of three to eight. Dysfunctional parents, she argued, created dysfunctional children. “Like mother, like daughter,” she told me. “That’s what I notice. They’re just like their mothers.” By neglecting their children and not properly supervising them, mothers seemed to leave kids vulnerable to the draws of the “wrong crowd” described by Ben and Casey.

Transmitting the wrong values and being uninvolved were not the only bad actions of mothers, according to staff. Staff constructed lenient mothers as bad, too. These moms created “mamas’ boys” or simply spoiled them, according to Warner. Ben explained that the real problem of the gang member described above was his home life. “Mom’s on dialysis,” Ben insisted. “Grandparents at home. He runs all over them ‘cause he’s the baby. All that time her sheltering him, spoiling him to death, that’s what his number one problem was.” Nearly all of the staffers spoke of parents’—mothers’—failure in these absolute terms: mothers transmitted the wrong values, they neglected kids, they did not discipline enough. It was not the lack of resources that the staff found so indefensible, but the cultural *acceptance* of their state. That was why Libby, Darin, and Ester each described with disdain parents who told their kids they would not amount to anything. Darin reiterated this view when he told me that the problem with parents today was that they were comfortable being on welfare or leaving others to raise their kids: “We are left to raise the kids. They come to us for homework help. They need clothing. They don’t have any

money. They want food. They need this. They need that. They come into KW looking for it. And some parents are comfortable with that.”

Street culture, as KW’s staff members, marketing materials, and programs constructed it, then, came from the dysfunctional public street lives attributed to the “wrong crowd” of boys and the dysfunctional private home lives attributed to bad parents, especially mothers. This construction of the kids’ cultural environments was foundational to the KW’s mission. It was only by framing young people’s home lives as threatening and their mothers as incompetent that there was a void for Kidworks to fill. Kidworks could only transform kids who needed transformation. It could only “change the lives” of kids whose lives needed changing. It could only create character where character was missing. And nothing was more in need of curtailment, nothing more alarming than street culture. It seemed to be a threat to kids’ upward mobility and to public safety. Thus, it was through transformation of people with street character into people with KW—middle-class—character that youth development occurred.

### **Conclusion: The Power of Character**

The mission of youth development played an important role at Kidworks. It not only defined the purpose of the organization but also its public face. It appeared on KW advertisements, and representatives recited it at public events such as fundraisers and the Best and Brightest Youth contest. Direct-care staff members also internalized the mission as their major contribution as workers. They spoke honestly and passionately about wanting to help kids fulfill their potential. “Disadvantaged” kids, as the mission put it, needed KW’s influence.

This mission was one of character transformation away from the potential pitfalls of street culture and into the promise of middle-class cultural capital. In the words of Miranda, successful kids—those who fulfilled KW’s mission—went from “that unhealthy lower-class-struggling-to-get-by type of existence into the American dream.”

The dangers to young people, however, varied in that violence, drugs, and gangs seemed to pose the greatest risk for low-income black boys. The workers constructed these dangers as endemic within a

male-identified street culture. They thought of kids' home lives as street when their parents, particularly mothers, failed to support their kids in the ways they deemed appropriate. Dysfunctional parenting, then, characterized being street as it applied to girls and women. This construction was consistent with the widespread notion of low-income black women as Bad Black Mothers. Patricia Hill Collins (2004:131) described the moralistic construction of black women as failing to live up to middle-class and white standards of femininity this way:

Bad Black Mothers (BBM) are those who are abusive (extremely bitchy) and/or who neglect their children either in utero or afterward. Ironically, these Bad Black Mothers are stigmatized as being inappropriately feminine because they reject the gender ideology associated with the American family ideal. They are often single mothers, they live in poverty, they are often young, and they rely on the state to support their children. Moreover, they allegedly pass on their bad values to their children who in turn are more likely to become criminals and unwed teenage mothers.

Poor parenting, KW volunteers and administrators feared, not only posed risks to the community because the lack of supervision created opportunities for troublemaking but also passed on street culture, and therefore those risks, to the next generation.

The way out of street culture, the way to beat the odds and overcome the obstacles, as KW constructed it, was through middle-class cultural capital. Having ambition and looking middle class (examined more in the next chapter) were seen as the ticket out of poverty. Successful young people seemed to make concerted efforts to change their life circumstances by participating in KW events and programs. They also worked hard at school. They were perseverant and obedient.

Youth development through character transformation was a powerful message. On the one hand, character transformation represented an avenue to the American dream of a stable middle-class life, even for low-income black kids. Upward mobility through hard work was certainly the dream that direct-care workers held onto for the youth. By prioritizing school, Mark not only gained the favor of his teachers but supposedly learned the academic skills necessary to move on to the next grade and the next and eventually college. And college was essential for future economic stability in the eyes of the direct-care staff. As Warner said, "For all of those who think school doesn't matter: You have to go to the library, do our homework, do more than that. You might need even more [education in the future]. Darin

has his degree. I have my degree. But in ten years, you might need more. You might need a Master's, or a Bachelor's of science, or even a Ph.D.”

But ambition and self-determination took on preeminent importance because of the ideological context in which KW young people lived. As Hochschild (1995) and others showed (Sennett and Cobb 1972; Wellman 1993) showed, belief in meritocracy is core to Americans' sense of themselves as individuals and a collective. Americans value and construct the United States as the “land of opportunity,” an “equal playing field” where ability and effort determine the difference between success and failure (Bonilla-Silva 1997; Frankenberg 1993; Gallagher 2003; Hochschild 1995; MacLeod 1995; Wellman 1993). Within this ideological context, success and failure are moralized. Those who are successful have symbolically earned it and, therefore, deserve their success. Those who fail, similarly, have not earned it and, therefore, deserve their worse circumstances. They are deserving of their own poverty. Ambition, in other words, is moralized as a marker of worthiness.

Character development through cultural reformation at Kidworks, then, symbolically transformed kids into moral people. Staff, volunteers, and the broader culture viewed street boys and incompetent mothers as immoral or dishonorable people who fed off of others. They believed that street-oriented people depended on others to raise their kids and created trouble for neighbors and law enforcement. To be street signified that kids embraced these connotations. Ambition and middle-class presentations of self, on the other hand, were interpreted as ways to symbolically protest them. It showed that kids were, in fact, self-reliant. Opposing street culture allowed KW staff and kids to construct themselves as moral people, as different from the immorality with which they often got associated (Schwalbe et al. 2000). By taking on the dominant ideology (Hochschild 1995), they framed themselves as just like middle-class people, as mainstream, deserving, and worthwhile.

For kids typified as burdened by street culture, constructing character as a means of social change was emotionally comforting. A different life remained available to them and within their emotional grasp. They only needed to change their attitudes and try harder in order to better their circumstances.

A mission of youth development provided socioemotional comfort to black staff members, too. Workers and KW materials touted that they “change, enhance—and even save—the lives of young people” like Mark. Adults who worked with disadvantaged kids, particularly in stressful and chaotic environments like KW, found tremendous meaning in this calling. It made them feel good about themselves as workers, as accomplished despite the challenges of the daily grind and low pay. Darin, Ben, Martin, Amber, and Warner all took pride in guiding kids along the same paths they believed they themselves had taken. To do so meant their work was not in vain.

**chapter four:**  
**How to Accumulate Cultural Capital**

*No, you can't wear earrings at KW. You can't have head wear on. You need to pull your pants up. Girls you need to have clothes that come down and cover you up. That's respect for one thing, but also it's telling the other people this kid might have something about him. Let me get to know this kid (Darin, black man, full-time staff).*

The Kidworks character that KW wanted kids to develop into existed in opposition to street culture. Even though Kidworks representatives did not acknowledge it as such, the cultural capital they publicly valued and attempted to cultivate was decidedly middle class in nature. The appropriately cultured young person, as KW defined it, was one who espoused middle-class attitudes, behaviors, and styles (Lareau 2002; Swidler 1986). It was someone who fit middle-class sensibilities and who would not make life-altering bad decisions. It was someone that employers might think is hard working and, therefore, potentially employable. As Darin suggested, cultural capital told people that “this kid might have something about him” and deserved a chance. Accumulating middle-class cultural capital could lead to school and employment opportunities for kids.

This chapter examines how Kidworks went about building middle-class cultural capital among the kids at the organizational level. The analysis is broken into three parts. First, I analyze how KW programs and staff defined valuable cultural capital. I show that three middle-class styles and attitudes were necessary to display KW character: middle-class presentations of self, self-determination, and rationality. Next, I illustrate how the organization of Kidworks was designed to promote and instill this cultural capital. Rules fostered middle-class presentations of self and self-determination. KW's life-skills and prevention program curricula promoted rationality. KW events instilled a sense of self-determination and provided kids the chance to practice their presentations of self. Finally, I show that KW kids could signify their middle-class cultural capital by rejecting urban styles, getting good grades, abstaining from sex for girls, and refraining from violence and fighting for boys. Through these programs, I argue, Kidworks was structured to define appropriate middle-class cultural capital, teach it to kids, and give them a chance to rehearse using it. This cultural training was the center of KW's mission of youth development.

## **Middle-Class Cultural Capital**

Kidworks as an organization promoted three different forms of middle-class cultural capital among the kids. These skills were prominent in KW's rules and programming, as well as staff members' discourses. When kids accumulated these skills, presumably, they would have the cultural orientation and interactional styles necessary to excel in school, obtain rewarding work and succeed at a career, and become financially independent and stable—the very picture of success that administrators and staff members alike hoped for the kids. As Danielle described her vision for the girls, it would mean leading “a successful life, a blissful one. I mean, I want them to be president of their class. I want some to be secretary of their class. I want some of them to be valedictorian. I want some of them to receive all the scholarships in the book. I want them making good grades, working, just learning some responsibility. I can see and just now want that for all of them.” In order for kids to have this sort of life, KW's administrators, workers, and programming implied, they had to develop and make use of middle-class cultural capital.

### *Presentations of Self*

The first form of cultural capital that Kidworks as an organization aimed to teach kids was a middle-class presentations of self. Personal style, language, and mannerisms were central to conveying one type of character (in this case, a productive member of society) in favor of others (potentially a criminal or failed woman). For others to accept the kids as middle class, they had to appear middle-class, or at least display the potential to be.

At Kidworks, presentation of self was, in part, an act of omission: not acting street, not looking too much like a rapper or a thug, not appearing to be poor. This meant rejecting the urban street style so popular, including baggy pants for boys and tight pants for girls, headgear, and short skirts. This street style was also characterized as confrontational. Kids, for example, might directly advocate for themselves or overtly challenge authority if they had street cultural capital. They also showed off by putting others down. Nonstandard variants of English, particularly Black English and cussing, also marked the street

style. Drawing attention to oneself within street culture was acceptable and even valuable (Anderson 1999; Clay 2003; Connell 1995; Lacy 2004; Majors and Mancini Billson 1992; Pyke 1996; Wilson 1996)

In contrast, Kidworks as an organization defined the appropriate presentation of self as a middle-class one. A middle-class presentation of self came in three forms: wearing the right sorts of clothes, using the right sorts of body language, and speaking the right ways. At KW, this meant looking and acting “professional.” Conservative styles emphasized fitting in rather than standing out: shirts tucked in, pants around the waist, nothing too revealing, business dress. The interactional style relied on formal, institutionalized forms of communication (Lacy 2004; Lareau 2002; Pyke 1996). The language was a more standard form of English. Using these styles would allow kids, adults believed or perhaps hoped, to be recognized as worthwhile—as someone full of ambition and potential, as someone middle-class people would enjoy having as a coworker.

Thus, KW defined for kids the middle-class presentations of self in opposition to street culture. KW kids were to adopt particular styles, language, mannerisms, attitudes, and behaviors which together could create the appearance of being and fitting in to the middle class. The staff and volunteers took it as part of their mission to teach kids how to dress and act. “Some of the kids really don’t have the discipline, understanding and teaching at home,” Amber explained. “When they get here, that’s a part of my job, as well. To teach them basics. Sometimes they act kind of unruly. Teach them the basics. How to act. How to present themselves.”

### *Self-Determination*

Second, Kidworks promoted self-determination as an essential component of character. Self-determination is a quality particularly valued in the Western cultures because of the influences of Protestantism, the Enlightenment, and capitalism (Acker 2006; Harding 1998; Hochschild 1995; Perry 2001). The implicit, and occasionally explicit, organizational representation of self-determination was a disposition and attitude that embraced ambition, prioritizing work over pleasure, and orienting oneself toward the future. It was a desire to work and be productive, as well as a willingness to do what was

necessary to succeed, particularly sacrificing relationships with “bad” people. It was, at its core, individualism that promoted individual attainment and getting ahead. It was wanting to get ahead and having the will power to do so.

KW staffers, posters, and curriculum presented self-determination as espousing a “winning attitude” and being highly motivated. Inspirational signs and posters around KW buildings, for example, highlighted the importance of motivation: both having high aspirations and the will to achieve them. Next to a trophy case sat a poster with a professional photograph of a close up of a lit torch. It read, “Catch a Dream and Run with It.” A saying on a GW cork board framed self-determination this way: “Desire is the key to motivation, but it’s determination and commitment to an unrelenting pursuit of your goal—a commitment to excellence—that will enable you to attain the success you seek.” Another poster explained that “The Only True Defeat is Not Trying,” while posters around BW highlighted “trust,” “kindness,” “respect,” “responsibility,” and “loyalty” as important characteristics. According to another inspirational poster, “Most people never run far enough on their first wind to find out they’ve got a second. Give your dreams all you’ve got and you’ll be amazed by the energy that comes out of you.”

It was a motivated attitude that adults described as bringing success. Casey explained the qualities that made certain girls successful in relation to attitude:

Their attitude. Their winning attitude. They know that they can be the best. Like, for example, when we had those challenges [where girls competed against each other in athletic events]. They know that they’re going to win ‘cause they have that confidence in themselves. And it’s some people that just have this confidence where no matter what they do, they’re going to be good at it, and it’s true. So it’s some girls that’s like that. No matter what they do, they’re going to be good at it.

As Casey put it, it was the desire to be good at what one does and a willingness to try one’s best that brought success.

As KW adults framed it, self-determination was a mindset, a matter of “drive” and deciding that “they’re going to succeed regardless of anything,” as Sharice put it. Martin said that successful kids “have a drive. . . . They’re real focused. They’re real focused. And I think their parents are pushing them to go to school and get a good education and go out and see the world.” Darin described the mindset as deciding “I’m not going to get pregnant at 16. I’m going to go to college. I’m not going to go to jail. I’m

not going to do drugs or be in a gang.” For Edward, choosing the right path when the wrong path was tempting was a sign of valuing personal achievement over pleasure. A girl who successfully managed to do so “had to make a lot of choices down the road which would have been easy for her to do what, you know, why not? What do I have going on? What do I have to lose by making those choices?” This girl, however, “decided, ‘Yes, I am going to try to go for something bigger, and I don’t want anything to affect that.’”

Samuel, a fundraising volunteer, described the disposition and attitude of several kids who spoke at a fundraising event in the same way. The kids were previous Best and Brightest Youth contest winners, the young people that staff routinely held up as emblematic of good character. The young people described the impact that Kidworks had on them. Samuel interpreted the kids’ attitudes as a sign that they had the character needed to succeed in life: “I think they all had this self-confidence about them. To sort of say, ‘We’re part of this group. We’re part of this thing. We don’t have to succumb to anything because we have this network [at KW] behind us that’s supportive, and our peer pressure is too. Really move on and live. Not to worry about these [bad influences], whatever incident it is throughout your life, whatever it is.’”

Aspiring to go to college was a central part of self-determination—so important that staff celebrated college with kids. University students routinely volunteered at KW, and young people took field trips to a nearby college. When staff members graduated from college, professionals at Girlworks announced it to the girls who clapped and cheered at the success. Some staff members made a point of getting kids to aspire to go to college, too. Edward, for example, suggested to Lisa, an eighth grader at the time, that she ought to start to think about going on to college. Lisa came from a family with four children, and her dad was a housepainter who made less than \$20,000 a year. Edward said that he and other staff members noticed her potential early on. Then, “about eighth grade I told her, ‘Lisa, where do you want to go to school?’ She goes, ‘Well I’m going to go to high school.’ I said, ‘No, no, no, sweetie, where do you want to go to *college*? Have you thought about what you want to do? You’re about the brightest kid I think I’ve ever worked with.’” But Lisa responded, “I’m not going to college.” She had

never thought about going since no one in her family had. This framework conflicted with Edward's middle-class upbringing, he explained to me: "I don't know about you, but in my family growing up, I just always assumed I would go to college. Like after high school, you go to college." He had the same expectations for Lisa, and he told her so: "What do you mean you're not going to college? Lisa, you could do whatever you wanted to." It was essential to Edward that she change her aspirations—without doing so, she would never reach her potential.

It was clear, though, that the right attitude and self-determination was more than simply a mindset. It was also an action. Young people who were determined, as KW defined it, would not simply wait around for something to come their way but rather *planned* to be successful. They had an orientation toward the future rather than the here and now. Tamera described successful girls, those that displayed the right sort of character, as the "ones that will try extra things. They're the ones that will sit and work on a quilt for hours." Because of their dedication and patience, "those are the ones that you know are going to be successful."

Middle-class character, then, supposedly led to productive behavior, behavior that was purportedly different from the street behavior in kids' home and neighborhood environment. In fact, self-determination was most evident, according to the staff, in young people's desire to do *better* than their parents, which translated into involvement in programs at KW:

We have so many different situations over here, parents not here and that type of stuff, but you pick up in the kids that they want to have a better life because they don't want to do what Mom and Dad did or they don't want to live like Mom and Dad. And you pick up on that in the kids and you see them. And they will go to every program area, and they will come to anything you offer. And those are the kids that you know are reaching out for your help, that need just that little push. And with that little push they're going to be well on their way. But you can see it (Sharice).

According to Sharice, particular girls' ambition at GW actually motivated the staff to reach out to them and to provide them extra attention and services.

According to Libby, a girl with character used her background and struggles to motivate change in her life. This change was not only about having the right kind of attitude but also about finding her way to financial independence. Libby gave struggling girls pep talks on how to make their lives better.

Didactic speeches were her form of mentoring and one of the ways that she described as fostering character development:

And what I tell them is, “The things you go through in life should be your stepping stone. And like how you see your mom living and how you’re living, if you don’t like your situation, that’s why you need to go school. . . . But the life you’re living now, I should say, the life your mom’s living and you’re actually involved in, if you don’t want to be like that when you grow up, you gotta make that your stepping stone. You know, you’re already being told by that to do more for you. [It’s a sign that you want more.] You know, your mom ain’t doing it. Your mom might not be in a situation where she can do more. But you do more for you when you’re able to. That way if need be, you can take care of your mom. Just let the things that go on in your life that you don’t agree with or you wish could be changed or wish could be better, you let that be your strength to do [more] for yourself. And you can’t go wrong.”

If a girl did not want to be poor and destitute like her mother, Libby advised, she must aspire to be more, to do more. She must go to college.

Planning to be successful purportedly required dedicating oneself fully to getting ahead. In the kids’ case, their work was school. For this reason, Libby harped on the girls to get good grades, and she avidly tracked their grades and homework progress. She even had informal and formal conferences with their teachers to make sure the girls were being productive. It was not surprising, then, that Libby described two girls with the most potential as “Nia and Kierra. They have the two highest [grade point] averages at Girlworks. School is number one priority. . . . They do things they’re supposed to do. They’re involved in things around here and things like that.” For other girls to be successful, Libby believed, they had to do their work, participate in school activities, and be involved in Girlworks just like those two. Darin worried about some neglected siblings in his program, but remained hopeful for their future. “If they strive for excellence,” he explained, “they will get there. And once they get there, once that first one gets to college and does her thing, well, the other sisters will fall in line ‘cause she’s going to make sure of that.”

Self-determination as middle-class cultural capital was a willingness to work hard, to try one’s best. It was being self-reliant. It was valuing a life better than the ones KW young people supposedly came from. It was a willingness, as Darin put it, to “help out,” “do little things,” and “go above and beyond.” Most importantly, it was knowing how to “go out and work” for something— rather than living in the here and now and handing over control to fate or luck (Anderson 1999; Fordham and Ogbu

1986; White 1999). This form of self-determination was a primary orientation that Kidworks wanted to instill in young people.

### *Rationality*

The final aspect of middle-class cultural capital that Kidworks defined as important was rationality. Kids with middle-class character were supposed to act in rational, calculated ways. They were to set goals, analyze the steps necessary to achieve them, and then choose the course of action that would get them there.

This rationality-based approach to action contrasted with acting out of emotion or impulsiveness (see Collins 1998; Sprague 1997; see Sprague 2005). It meant controlling one's impulses and keeping emotions in check. It meant delaying gratification if rationality dictated and not losing one's cool. Rejecting anger in favor of talking things through and relying on formal channels were the preferred methods of communication.

Rational kids, for example, supposedly remained cool and did not react to people's mistreatment of them with "attitude" or violence. Danielle was concerned that girls reacted out of emotion to what they perceived as discriminatory behavior by teachers. These girls were too quick to become belligerent, according to KW standards. They copped "attitudes" with them, which justified the teacher's punishment of them: "Ya'll's attitudes give ya'll away. It's not even because you're black women. It's just ya'll have attitude problems sometimes." Girls with attitude, according to Casey, were "just always anti-social. Don't want to do nothing." Adults viewed these "bad attitudes" as one of the most offensive street traits. People with "attitude" challenged authority, particularly when they were confronted by it; stood up to their peers, perhaps even bullying them; and were generally obstinate.

While "having an attitude" applied to both boys and girls, it was a female-identified trait (Johnson 2005). Staff overwhelmingly, for example, attributed "attitude" to girls rather than to boys. These girls were essentially characterized as un-ladylike: not demure and passive but emotional, angry, assertive. Casey described bad attitudes as a female trait, even though she thought it was stereotypical:

This is truly a *Girlworks*, 'cause you could tell they had attitudes. Some of the older girls just walk around with attitudes. You could tell they had attitudes, and it's always arguing. Most of the arguing was "he say, she say." I know it's still a stereotype, but it was girly. It was a lot of girls, you know. They say girls have attitudes, especially black females have attitudes, and it's just how it is.

It was the girls who were more likely to be combative and argumentative with the staff and teachers at school, according to the staff.

Attitudes symbolized being out of control, and Danielle worried that Shameka might not be successful because she lacked restraint:

She's going to have a very big problem getting on that path to success if she doesn't learn how to control her emotion, control her attitude and the way that she reacts to different things. Just, she might have a bad day at school and take it out on everybody. And that's not something you can do and not in life, not ever. It's not something that you should do. That's something that she tends to do.

Danielle and the other staff viewed Shameka's reaction to stress as symbolic of an attitude problem in general. Instead of learning "how to control her emotion," she waned illness and threw what staff viewed as temper tantrums to get attention. To have a bad attitude, thus, was to act out of emotion rather than simply face the consequences head on. To have the "appropriate" character was to be in control and rational in one's decision-making.

Similarly, impulsive girls supposedly acted out sexually. This impulsive behavior could range from dressing provocatively to having sex with one's boyfriend to hitting on other girls if one were lesbian. A girl in control, as Amber's mother bluntly advised her as a child, "doesn't let them boys touch you." Casey proudly told girls that "I don't have sex right now. I'm celibate right now. I don't go out to clubs." Her controlled behavior represented what she wanted for the girls: "not to do all the bad stuff that they get pressured into doing." For Warner, it's the "hormones and then the sex" that suggested trouble. "Sex started really messing some of them [girls] up." It was sexual aggression on the part of bisexual and lesbians girls that bothered him:

They want to be bisexuals or they want to be lesbians. And all of a sudden, they're in middle school and bang, this just happens. So they go from ponytails and makeup to cutting their hair off, and their clothing changes completely. Then they want to hit on all the girls in the teen center. I'm like, whoa, whoa, whoa. I've been down that road a few times. I'll bring them in here. I don't care what you do. It has nothing to do with me or you. That's something you've got to deal with your parents or God or whatever you believe in. But in KW, it's neutral. And

everybody's got to be comfortable in here. If you're hitting on the girls and they're not comfortable, then that's not good. And then the boys are picking on you because you're hitting on girls, and they don't think that's right. So you're drawing problems to yourself.

To be sexually aggressive by hitting on girls, as Warner put it, meant girls were "drawing problems to yourself."

The male-identified version of acting out of emotion, on the other hand, was fighting, becoming physically violent, or partying. It was letting one's anger get the best of him. Warner described his own impulsive behavior from his youth as both out of control and stupid: "My aggression, fighting, arguing got me in trouble. Because I was fussing with the police officer. And then when I got to college, I wanted to drink and be a bad boy." But this behavior led him to get kicked out of his house, thrown in jail, and even shot and stabbed. Other out-of-control boys risked police intervention. Ester described such a time when a boy "missed his shot in basketball one day and then got really really mad and tore through the office. People were trying to get near him, he would hide a thumb tack in his hand, and when they would come, he would stab them. We had to call the police."

The alternative to copping an attitude, exerting female sexuality, and fighting was being in control of one's emotions and rational in one's behavior. As Martin warned one child, "Your attitude's gonna hurt you. You can't get mad if things don't go your way all the time. You need to learn how to, how to talk things out." To talk things out suggested one was civil. To delay sexual gratification was just plain smart, and to resist the urges to fight or become violent made sense. Rationality through impulse control, as the staff and KW life-skills programs framed it, was the final essential part of middle-class cultural capital that working-class kids supposedly lacked and needed to develop.

### **Organizational Strategies Promoting Middle-Class Cultural Capital**

Administrators and staffers did not assume that Kidworks kids had a natural inclination toward achievement or an appreciation for or desire to develop KW character. To the contrary, Kidworks as an organization structured its rules and programming so that middle-class cultural capital could be transmitted, modeled, and practiced because it was assumed that working-class kids lacked it. They were

designed to train kids in middle-class presentations of self, self-determination, and rationality. Kidworks, as Darin explained, was a place for kids to learn to break bad habits. It was the place to establish new expectations for young people that would transform them into middle-class characters. KW's organizational strategies could purportedly resocialize young people to not be street.

Kidworks implemented three organizational strategies that potentially provided young people the opportunity to develop middle-class cultural capital: formal rules, life-skills and prevention curricula, and public events. These programs would transmit cultural capital by defining the “right” way to look and behave, providing kids the tools to analyze and justify their behaviors, and giving them the opportunity to practice displaying middle-class cultural capital. In this section, I lay out and analyze each of these three strategies by illustrating how they worked and how they promoted which middle-class cultural capital, as the staff and the organization understood it.

### *Formal Rules*

Rules of behavior took on a prominent role at Kidworks. The application form to attend KW required kids and a guardian to sign a copy of the rules in order for them to be accepted. Oversized posters of Kidworks' rules hung in the front entryway to each building to make them visible to parents who were coming and going. Wednesday night parent orientations included a full disclosure and discussion of the rules and the consequences when kids did not follow them. The first days of the after-school program at Boyworks had boys traveling from program area to program area for a full review of the rules of each, and several life-skills group sessions focused exclusively on stating and restating the rules of BW and the consequences for not following them. Each game in the games room at Boyworks was accompanied by a sign that specified the proper ways to play the game and several misconceptions about the rules that would not be tolerated. Administrators formalized the rules by posting them around the building and placing them in the KW application form.

As a result, kids who attended KW, particularly boys, were well rehearsed in the rules. On the first day of the after-school program, for example, the boys could already name many of them. These rules formalized a KW code of conduct and organized how kids spent their time.

Many KW rules targeted kids' presentations of self. They, for instance, defined appropriate appearances and behaviors in order to socialize kids to dress and act in a "respectful" or "appropriate" manner. During a large-group meeting, for example, Darin led the boys in a discussion of the rules, most of which dictated the appropriate presentation of self. All the boys were sitting on the floor, and Darin asked Aaron, a veteran at BW, to stand up and identify one:

"No sag in your pants," Aaron said.

"Yes, that's right. No sagging pants here." Aaron stood there. "Aaron, give me another rule."

"No chewing gum in the gym."

Darin took it and modified it to be the right rule: "No chewing gum anywhere at Boyworks. Thank you, Aaron, you can sit down."

Darin called on another boy by name and asked him to stand. "What's another rule?"

"No playing in the bathroom."

"Good. No playing in the bathroom. You use the bathroom, flush the toilet, and wash your hands. The paper towels don't go into the toilet. Go over and read that sign (pointing to the sign on the bathroom door)."

He walked over to it and read that playing in the bathroom would result in a one-day suspension.

"What's another rule?" Hands shot up around the room. He called on another boy.

"What's your name?" The boy answered Joe. "Stand up." Joe stood up.

"No earrings at Kidworks."

"No earrings at Kidworks. Leave your earrings in your bag. If you just got your ear pierced, tell your mama that you need a Band-Aid to wear over the top. No earrings. What's another rule?"

Hands are still raised all over the room. Darin calls on another boy.

"No hats or headgear." The boy sat down.

"No hats, no headwear. No skullies or bands. Leave them at home."

Another boy: "If you at the wrong place at the wrong time, you could get suspended."

Darin: "Well, I don't know that you'd get suspended, but you should be where you're supposed to when you are supposed to. Good."

"No running," another offered.

Darin: "That's right. No running except for in the gym."

"Respect staff members."

"Good. Be respectful to staff and to each other. Respect Kidworks property."

"Keep your hands to yourself."

"No running around," another said.

Darin: "That's a good one. No running around except for in the gym."

"No curse words."

Darin: "Good, there's no profanity. That's disrespectful."

"No picking on other members."

"Yes, there's no picking on other members. What else? (Looking at the

rules behind him and the staff around him).”

“No running.”

Darin: “Yep, we’ve heard that one three times now. That’s important. You don’t need to be outside without staff. No stealing. What else? If you ain’t looking, you ain’t listening. Look at people when they talk to you. That’s respectful.”

“Don’t put other people’s things in your pocket.”

Darin: “Yeah, that would be stealing. Don’t do that. . . . No begging for food or money. If somebody wants you to have something, they will offer it to you. They’ll ask if you want it. That’s good. That’s all the rules.”

These rules forbade kids from wearing sagging pants that hung well below a child’s waist, earrings for boys, and head gear (hats, do rags). They dictated that cussing was inappropriate and a violation of KW’s standards for behavior. Kids were told to look at people when they talked to them.

Other rules dictated kids’ presentations of self. During her presentation of the rules, Louise ordered kids not to roll their eyes or suck their teeth. She demanded they look her in the eye when she was talking to them. She also trained the kids to address her formally with “yes, ma’am.” Martin warned boys not to wear certain colors if he thought they were gang-affiliated. Edward reported that he told boys to remove their hats with a simple glare. Darin routinely required boys to cover up their earrings with bandages, and he occasionally pulled up a boy’s pants—and even a staff member’s once—so that they were not sagging. The most frequently enforced appearance policies required kids to remove their hats and do rags, cover-up their earrings (for boys), and stop sucking their teeth.<sup>8</sup>

The application form addressed other rules and required kids to sign below a list of rules to indicate their understanding and acceptance of them. These rules stated that there was to be “no smoking and no profanity” as well as “no wearing hats.” The application form further highlighted the “appropriate dress practice” of KW. The policy explained that while KW adhered to Sherburne’s public school system’s standards of dress, staff retained the right to “exercise appropriate discretion in implementing this practice. Appearance of clothing that is disruptive, provocative, revealing, profane or offensive is prohibited. Staff will ask members to change his or her dress to reflect the dress Code and the mission of the organization.” Kids who repeated a violation of the dress code, the policy warned, were subject to suspension from participating in KW’s programs.

The application form directly forbade “fussing, fighting, or picking on other members” and “tearing up or taking KW property or other members property.” It also warned kids about “begging or asking for food or money from other members.”

In addition to middle-class presentations of self, Kidworks’ rules also tried to instill self-determination. The rules prioritized school and both encouraged and forced kids, particularly girls, to do well.<sup>9</sup> KW rules, for example, required that all kids, regardless of age or amount of homework, spend time in the homework room each day. At Girlworks, girls were supposed to go straight to the homework room upon arrival and not participate in any other programs until their homework was complete. Staff members continuously harped on girls to get to the homework room, and when girls rebutted that they had no homework, the staff instructed them to read a book quietly instead. At Boyworks, the homework room was much smaller and could not accommodate all of those with homework at once. The boys, thus, were on a rotating schedule that required each age group to spend around 30 minutes doing homework. (I show in a later chapter that this rule was poorly enforced.)

Kidworks’ rules required kids to submit their report cards so that staff could keep track of their grades. The KW application requested that parents sign a waiver to give staff “permission to talk with my child’s teachers about his/her work and to keep records of my child’s report cards in an effort to meet his/her educational needs.” The staff used the report cards to track progress of individual kids and to determine if they needed a tutor. Some staff members also communicated with teachers when problems arose with particular kids. Libby, for example, attended several conferences with teachers about a girl whose behavior was growing increasingly worrisome to her.

Education Plus, a locally sponsored program, furthermore, encouraged and rewarded kids for doing their homework. Young people received points each day that they did school work or read. The

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<sup>8</sup> Adults and other kids viewed sucking one’s teeth, in particular, to be a sign of disrespect. I was, however, surprised at how infrequently it and other street-typed behaviors actually happened at Boyworks and Girlworks.

<sup>9</sup> While school and schoolwork were officially priorities for both girls and boys, I show in later chapters that this was not the case in practice. Individual achievement, particularly through performing well in school, was a higher priority at Girlworks than at Boyworks.

top point recipients were supposed to be rewarded with pizza parties and field trips at the end of the month. Each location had a staff member in charge of bookkeeping for this program in particular.

The rules, then, rejected a street presentation of self and promoted a middle-class one. They also tried to create self-determination by making kids prioritize school work and orienting themselves toward individual achievement.

### *Life-skills & Prevention Programs*

Both Boyworks and Girlworks had an extensive set of life-skills and resistance programs that served to socialize kids to develop self-determination and rationality. Each of these programs, including their structure and content, was created by Kidworks National. They were designed and field tested by Kidworks National (with input from Kidworks programs throughout the country) and disseminated to local Kidworks organizations as ready-to-use curricula. These programs had standardized lesson plans to be covered in gender- and age-segregated groups of kids. Staff and volunteers who facilitated the programs, furthermore, generally went through a standardized training implemented by Kidworks National. Grants required the implementation of certain prevention programs. In the case of a Philip Morris grant, for example, Girlworks and Boyworks each had to put a quarter of their young people through a prevention program to deter smoking, alcohol use, and sexuality.

Kidworks routinely programmed around four distinct curricula, each of which had its own program manual. Man-To-Man was a fourteen week life-skills curriculum for boys “to talk explicitly about and model responsible manhood and to introduce [boys] to good examples of dependable men.” The introduction to the curriculum in the manual described it as filling the void for boys from “homes or communities in which [‘caring male role models’] are not present or conspicuous.” It covered topics such as value-guided decision making, personal codes of conduct, wellness, instigating relationships with girls, fatherhood, substance abuse, careers, leadership, and self-esteem.

There was no equivalent program to introduce girls into womanhood, but the Girl Might program, with separate curricula for eight to twelve year olds and thirteen and up, was “to help girls

develop healthy attitudes and lifestyles.” The program’s goals included teaching girls to “understand and appreciate” the changes of puberty, develop healthy eating and exercise habits, learn how to access healthcare in their community, develop relationships with women mentors, create cooperative communication skills, and avoid abusive relationships.

Saying No To The Streets was a program for girls and boys ages eleven to thirteen. Its development was funded by the foundation of a major insurance company. “The program,” the curriculum explained, “enables participants to counteract the negative lure of gangs, develop effective conflict resolution and leadership skills, become ‘positive peer helpers,’ or role models, for other adolescents, and recognize the virtues of diversity.”

The final curriculum, Mighty Kids, had separate lesson plans for six to nine year olds, ten to twelve year olds, thirteen to fifteen, and parents. This program was focused on developing “knowledge, skills, self-esteem, and peer support” to avoid drug and tobacco use and postpone sexual activity. The covered topics ranged from loving oneself, the influence of advertising on decision making, and the effects of drugs and alcohol on the body (six to nine year olds) to refusing peer pressure, recognizing gateway drugs, and sexual myths (other age groups).

Throughout the life-skills and prevention curricula, manuals presented decision-making as a rationalistic and instrumental process to produce positive individual outcomes (or at least, not harmful ones). The curricula trained kids to reflect on their decision-making and to establish skills to make rational decisions and to reject harmful behaviors under the pressure of peers. Dissecting the decision-making process, establishing personal values, and analyzing the role of outside influences (the media and peers), in fact, were central skills taught in the Mighty Kids, Girl Might, and Man-To-Man curricula. These skills promoted the importance of and established a minimal skill base for acting instrumentally rather than impulsively. As the Saying No To The Street lesson entitled “impulse control and its consequences” put it, “Good or poor impulse control affects the choices people make and the consequences that result.” The goal of these programs was to promote and train kids to create positive, rational consequences for themselves as individuals.

Mighty Kids laid out steps to develop a rational basis for action. These steps slowed down kids' behaviors and required them to think through each possible course of action, its consequences, and the potential responses of parents. Mighty Kids, for example, encouraged kids to reflect on the following sequence of questions when faced with a precarious situation:

1. What is the decision I have to make?
2. What are my choices or options?
3. What are the possible good and bad consequences of each option?
4. How would my family and friends feel about this choice?
5. Based on all the information I have, what is the best decision for me?"

These steps seemed to not only teach young people to reflect upon the situation they were in and their choices but also to establish criteria for prioritizing one decision over others.

The most important step in evaluating one's options, as the program manuals both directly and indirectly suggested, was to estimate the potential consequences of different courses of action. Young people were then to compare likely outcomes to those desired by "good or moral or legal" authorities (e.g., parents, police, teachers) rather than "bad" ones (those that abuse their power, such as Adolf Hitler, Richard Nixon, and segregationists). Another frame of reference, according to Man-To-Man, was one's own "personal code of conduct": "hard work," "generosity" and "dependability," as opposed to the societal or group codes also discussed. Those outcomes that produced results consistent with one's moral code of conduct and were viewed as legitimate in the eyes of good authority and deemed the right courses of action. The facilitator's manual provided an example of how rationalistic decision-making would purportedly produce the right results:

Give the example of responding to a friend's offer to try drugs: If a person has thought through the positive and negative aspects of drugs, he is more likely to respond intelligently and in his own best interest to an offer to try drugs, rather than giving way to peer pressure or embarrassment.

Acting rationally rather than impulsively meant that young people had to learn to recognize when others were trying to influence them. Mighty Kids for teens trained kids to recognize a variety of persuasion tactics that peers might use to influence their behavior. Peers might guilt them, the manual pointed out, flatter them, appeal to authority, promise a reward, or punish them. The first step when being pressured by peers, then, was to recognize that despite what they were feeling and others were

telling them (as one lesson plan in Mighty Kids was titled) “everyone is *not* doing it.” Then young people were to analyze tactics of persuasion by figuring out who was trying to influence them, what they got out of it, what they would gain by going along with it, and the reliability of the information presented to them. With all of this information, young people were encouraged to surmise what was in their “*own best interest*” and to act accordingly. Mighty Kids for ten to twelve year olds explained how this analysis process might create “good” decision making in practice:

People may also try to influence [kids] to use tobacco, alcohol, or other drugs by saying “everyone is doing it.” That’s just not true: everyone is *not* doing it. Anyway, doing something to fit in isn’t a good enough reason to risk all the bad consequences. Tell members, “You don’t want to do things that will hurt you or are not in your best interest just to please someone else.”

A similar process was suggested for analyzing the influence of the media on consumption and perceptions of beauty.

Training young people in rational decision making also included establishing skills to *resist* the negative influences they faced. It was not enough for young people to be informed of the consequences of their actions or the techniques peers used to try to pressure them; young people had to be able to effectively *reject* bad behaviors or the influence of others. The prevention programs, consequently, attempted to directly tie values to decision making and then to action. As the Girl Might guidelines for dating explained, “Girls need to remember that *how* they say ‘no’ [to sexual advances] will influence how their ‘no’ message is received.” When it comes to rejecting sexual advances, this meant communicating “no” in “an assertive yet non-aggressive way.”

Mighty Kids provided young people ten different strategies for refusing negative influences. These “ways to refuse,” for example, suggested simply saying and repeating, “No, thanks” or giving a reason, such as “No, it’s not right.” Young people could also ignore the person pressuring them or walk away from the situation. They could try reversing the pressure (“If you were my friend, you wouldn’t ask”), proposing an alternative behavior (“I’ll bring the soda!”), or changing the subject. Of course, it was effective, the manual pointed out, to avoid the situation in the first place or surround oneself with other kids who refuse to engage in the behavior. Refusals were most effective, the next lesson taught, by being said assertively, with a firm tone of voice while standing confidently.

Once young people learned the rational ways to make decisions and reject bad influences, nearly all of the lesson plans provided kids a way to act out what they learned through scenarios and role playing. The lesson on decision making, for example, walked kids through analyzing six different scenarios (pressure to steal, be at home without adult supervision, and skip out on studying). The refusal strategies were to be practiced first as a large group and then in pairs. Life-skills lessons, then, not only defined rationality as the appropriate basis for action but also provided young people an opportunity to practice it, step-by-step.

### *Public Events*

A final organizational strategy to transmit and practice middle-class cultural capital was inviting young people to be ambassadors for the organization at public events. These events—the Kidworks Gala, the Music for Change fundraiser, the campaign kickoff, the end of the campaign celebration, the annual fundraiser featuring prominent athletes, teen summits, the holiday party, and annual meetings—provided young people the opportunity to practice their middle-class presentations of self. Kids were expected to and practiced dressing and speaking professionally. They also could develop their self-determination by participating in them.

Each of these events was either a fundraising event or preparation for fundraising, and administrators requested that kids attend them as representatives of the organization. The volunteer coordinator or program directors decided which kids went, invited them to attend, and then prepared them for the events. It was Miranda's idea, for example, that kids attend the Kidworks Gala so that potential donors could "see the kids and know these are some of the kids that we are helping by being here and having a good time, bidding up the auction to support." Everyone within the organization viewed the invitation as a special honor and a chance for kids to experience new things. The Gala fundraiser, for example, was held at Saks Fifth Avenue. There were live bands, food from fancy restaurants, and auction items. Boys who attended were dressed in tuxedos, and girls dressed in the theme of the night. It was considered an honor to be invited to attend.

Staff prepared kids by having them write and rehearse speeches on the role that KW played in their lives. The day before eleven-year-old Aaron was to speak at a board meeting, he walked around with a copy of his speech in his pocket as he tried to memorize it. He ran up to me and announced, “I’m giving a speech tomorrow.” The following exchange occurred:

Carissa: “You are? On what?”  
Aaron: “The wrestling program. I wrestle on Thursday nights.”  
Carissa: “Who are you giving the speech to?”  
Aaron: “The big meeting in the morning.”  
Carissa: “Oh my. Is that for the board?”  
Aaron: “It’s the [fundraising] kick-off.”  
Carissa: “Are you all set to go?”  
Aaron: “Yeah.” He showed me his folded up piece of paper with a short paragraph of a speech on it. The speech was typed out for him double-spaced.  
Carissa: “Do you want to try it on me?”  
Aaron: “Okay.”  
Carissa: “Do you read it?”  
Aaron: “I’ve got it memorized.”  
Carissa: “How about we sit down over there and you can practice it on me?”  
Aaron: “Okay.” We sat down on the ground and leaned against the wall. He began: “My name is Aaron (last name). I’ve been a member of KW for a year and a half. I’m part of the new wrestling program on Thursday nights. I like this program. It teaches me self-respect and confidence. Thank you for your interest in KW.” He said this without looking at the paper. He had it memorized.

Aaron’s speech was typical of the sort delivered by younger kids. It highlighted his moral character, for example, by showing that KW “teaches me self-respect and confidence.” Aaron and others who participated got to practice looking sharp and speaking publicly. Another boy’s speech at the Kidworks Gala did the same thing. Dressed in a tuxedo, he stood in front of the room before a live auction of diamond jewelry describing his participation in KW’s programs and thanking participants for “believing in kids—your support makes a difference.”

Similar presentations of self were developed at town hall events, too. There, kids gave speeches about life as a young person in Sherburne and testified to the importance of getting an education and working hard. They also fielded impromptu questions from the audience. At one event, for example, the facilitator asked kids: “What’s the biggest challenge you face?” “What does the American dream mean to you?” “Is it ever okay to use violence?” “Is college necessary to meet your career goals?” Kids practiced giving the “right” answers, as well as delivering them in an appealing way. The facilitator asked a girl

about the key to success, for example, to which she responded, “Getting a good education. Putting my mind to it. Getting guidance.” Another explained that violence “has never solved one problem. It only exacerbates things.” The facilitator followed up by asking him the best way to solve a conflict. He answered, “Take myself away from it.” The question-answer sessions provided kids a chance to assert their middle-class aspirations and problem-solving skills. They got to show the potential donors that they were self-determined.

Participation in the Best and Brightest Youth scholarship contest<sup>10</sup> was the most extensive opportunity KW offered for practicing middle-class presentations of self and displaying self-determination. Each KW program invited two teenagers to participate with the chance to win scholarship money. The application process was extensive and included writing two essays: one on what KW meant to them and “why a post-high school education is important.” The application also required transcripts from school and letters of recommendation, and young people wrote reflective statements highlighting their moral character, community involvement, role in their families, school activities, and life goals.

The application requirements steered young people to examine and then express their self-determination, particularly their high aspirations and their commitment to working hard. One boy wrote in his life goals reflection, for example, “Throughout my life I have always set goals to aspire to. . . . All of these goals have been leading up to my life long goal which is to become a good person that people can respect. Kidworks has helped me reach all of my goals by teaching me morals and helping me make good decisions that have helped me stay out of trouble.” Another boy wrote in an essay that “post high school education is very important to me because it starts me off on a career path. It also leads us to who we want to become and who we are destined to be.” A girl contestant expressed the importance of education this way:

At this stage in the game graduating high school and getting accepted to college means everything to me. A lot of things can be taken away from you in life but no person, or thing can take your education away. I was always told nothing in life is free but your dreams and when you wake up they are gone, unless you make them reality. In order to get the things out of life that I want I need to have a stable income, and it won't come from working at [a fast food restaurant].

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<sup>10</sup> This contest was held annually. Kidworks invited four volunteers per site, corporate sponsors, community supporters, and donors to judge the yearly contest. I served as a judge in 2006 as a representative of GW.

The contest had two rounds of competition in which the teens stood before the judges and delivered opening statements on what KW meant to them. The first round was designed to determine a winner for each KW location so that both Girlworks contestants, for example, competed against each other. In the second round of competition, the winners of the first round faced each other. They gave an opening statement and fielded questions from 23 judges seated in a horseshoe in front of them. The winner of that round won a scholarship and entered more scholarship competitions.

Kidworks provided the judges with criteria to judge the young person and were instructed to rank each on a five-point scale for each characteristic. Young people, then, needed to demonstrate effectively that they showed leadership in each area in order to convince the judges of their suitability for the scholarship. These criteria required kids to display self-determination and middle-class presentations of self. The topic areas were “home and family,” “spirituality,” “community,” “school,” “service to KW,” “life goals,” “obstacles overcome,” “essays,” “poise,” and “public speaking.” After young people gave their opening statements in the contest, the judges hurled questions in order to ascertain how to rank each young person. Among other things, the judges asked these typical questions: “What are your life goals?” “Because in life situations arise, do you have a contingency plan?” “What are your moral values?” “If you had any advice to offer on how to get back on the path after kids deviate from it, what would it be?” “How would you like to be remembered?” The kids who responded in ways that showed that they valued individual achievement and were competent public speakers, in turn, were highly ranked.

In this first round of competition, the judges in my room debated who most deserved to move on. One contestant had high and realistic ambitions (becoming a nurse). She had better public speaking skills and appeared at ease in front of us. Her grades had fluctuated, but she never had failed a class and got mostly Bs. Her application was typed and edited, and she had three letters of recommendation attesting to her good character. Her life goals essay also described her greatest struggle in life thus far:

My number one aspiration in life is to become an anesthetic nurse. I would like to become an anesthetic [nurse] to help ease the pains of people. Nursing is a passion of mine, because I love to help people. To help me accomplish my goal, I have started taking classes at [a technical college] and also biology classes in high school. I recently had to take a class over to receive a

better grade. I could have given up on the program, but I persevered because I am going to accomplish my goal.

The five judges were each impressed with her ambition and the concrete steps she had taken to attain her goals.

The other contestant, while also a good public speaker, had grades that declined with each year of school. She had two letters of recommendation, but they were less glowing. Her essays and reflection pieces were not completely edited. They were filled with grammatical errors but still compelling. Her goals were ambitious but seemed much less realistic to the judges. She seemed less certain of her ability to attain her goals and did not seem to take concrete steps to accomplish them. Her education plan essay read:

I am the only person in my house that is going to pursue a post-high school education. I am also the only female in my family that will attain a college degree. I want to get a college degree because I know that it will make my family proud. My mother will know that all her hard work and tears were not in vain. If I get a college degree I can become a businesswoman, one of my lifelong dreams. It will also satisfy me to know that I accomplished something great despite my background and what I've been through in life.

While the previous contestant described her plan to achieve her goals, this contestant used “if” to describe getting a college degree. But her life story was compelling: she came from a single parent family, struggled growing up, had a brother in jail. She clearly needed the scholarship more than the other contestant in order to make her dream a reality.

Ultimately, the judges awarded the first girl the winner. She more competently displayed self-determination. She was “someone who will meet her goals,” as one judge put it, while the other one was “setting herself up for failure.” They also believed the first girl had a more realistic shot of winning the overall title and future competitions. She had successfully demonstrated her high aspirations and ability to meet them.

In the second and final round of competition, the judges voted unanimously to award the scholarship to a white girl with a compelling life story, high grades, and excellent public speaking skills. Her application packet was the most clean, and she stood with poise in front of the group. She had the most professional presentation of self: dressed in a suit rather than a skirt and blouse like other girl

contestants. She also most successfully displayed her self-determination.<sup>11</sup> Her essay on the importance of post-secondary education read:

It is important to continue on with your education beyond high school because it helps to make you a more productive, knowledgeable citizen. It will help you to better understand the many complex things that go on in today's society.

While a high school education is good enough to get by on, it does not afford you the opportunities that post education does in your career, knowledge base, understanding of complex community, country and world issues. Post high school education also exposes you to different ways of thinking, learning and experiencing what life has to offer you.

I am looking forward to the opportunity to go to college as I have many dreams for my future, which depends on my level of education. I would not be able to become a lawyer or judge if I only had my high school education. It takes many years of law school and studying to become a great lawyer.

The judges were convinced that she both deserved to win a scholarship and that she had a shot at winning more.

The Best and Brightest Youth contest winner then served as ambassador for Kidworks. She was expected to attend public events and to give public speeches in which she practiced and demonstrated the qualities she exhibited at the contest on a broader scale. She came to symbolize a kid with character, even as other kids developed and practiced their presentations of self by taking part in public events as guest speakers and performers.

Through kids' participation at public events, then, KW created opportunities and obligations for kids to practice their middle-class cultural capital. They learned to look professional, sound professional, and to display their self-determination publicly.

### **Signifying Middle-Class Cultural Capital**

If Kidworks' programmatic strategies were successful, kids would embrace middle-class presentations of self, self-determination, and rationality. Kids could learn from these rules and programs, furthermore, how to signify that they espoused and embraced them. Kids who could showed that they were moral and worthy rather than undeserving (Gans 1994). Kids could do so in four different ways:

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<sup>11</sup> Interestingly, this contestant decried abortion. She told the group that as a judge she wanted to outlaw abortion.

rejecting street styles and vernacular, getting good grades, abstaining from sex for girls, and refraining from fighting and gangs for boys.

### *No Street Styles or Language*

The first step to signifying a middle-class presentation of self was to disregard urban street styles such as baggy clothes and Black English. Carmen, a wealthy white board member who mentored several black teens, taught her mentees to “dress very nicely” by way of rejecting hip-hop styles:

We were at lunch one day and I asked them, we talked about how...because this was about three or four years ago and that was when the kids were like dressing like all of the rappers who were these thugs with the baggy pants and idolizing that lifestyle.

And we had this conversation. I said something to the effect of, “How do you all feel about that people are judging you by the way you are dressed? And do you not realize that that’s just the way of the world?” And we had a real frank discussion about it. They didn’t like being portrayed as because they’re black they’re going to get into crime and they’re going to do drugs and they’re gangsters and all of that. Even though they like that music.

So we talked about the do rags on the head, that there comes a point in time where you do have to realize when people are going to judge you on how you look, and how you talk, and how you present yourself. And it has nothing to do with race, but unfortunately because you’re black you’re going to get more scrutiny than I would get. And so we talk about those kinds of things.

And when I take them places, they dress very nicely. And when I see them out and about, most of them still dress very nicely. So we do have frank discussions like that. We talk about these girls that get pregnant and fighting at their school. And their schools not being safe, and their neighborhoods not being safe. Yeah, we talk about it, but that’s their real world, and I can’t deny it. I can’t change it, but I can’t deny it.

Although she took pride in her mentees dressing nicely, it was less important what they looked like than what they *did not*. Carmen, for example, never specified what looking nice meant. The style they should *not* adopt, according to Carmen and others at KW, was the urban, hip-hop style of low-riding baggy pants, head gear, and jewelry.

Darin thought displaying character meant rejecting a street appearance, as well: wearing big clothes, earrings, and pants hanging down elicited connotations of violence. He wanted boys to wear a “tasteful” style that conveyed “respect.”

For Ben, Sharice, Louise, and others, the street style extended to language through the heavy use of slang, double negatives, and cuss words. Sharice refused to hire staff members who used slang during their interviews because it signified a lack of respect to her. She also believed they would set a bad

example for the kids. Sharice expected the girls at Girlworks to not say things like “sucks” or “shut up,” in addition to not cursing. “Staff don’t use cuss words,” Sharice said. She continued as if she were talking directly to the girls: “Ya’ll are not going to use cuss words, that type of stuff. That’s what I mean about being positive. And the way you walk.”

Louise warned girls that their “foul mouths” made them appear ignorant and unattractive. She described one girl whom she thought had successfully transformed with the help of KW programs. Her language, in particular, changed:

Mostly in her language. She had one of the most foul mouths. She would just curse and she had a very nasty mouth. But, through this and dealing with the program and stuff, she’s learned that it is not appealing. That it’s not appealing to guys. It shows ignorance, you know? It’s very distasteful and it, it just draws negative attention.

Ben said he wanted kids to deflect some of this negativity by learning from his example. When I asked him to clarify what he wanted them to learn exactly, he explained it this way, “Like being positive. Like, for example, your appearance. You can’t walk into BW and have your pants hanging down. Using certain languages and just pretty much just acting out of the ordinary.” Warner, who had an extensive background working in gang prevention, thought that KW boys too often tried to look street through their personal styles but did not realize fully the repercussions of doing so:

They’re not strong enough to be on the streets. And that’s good. I mean, I’m glad parents don’t allow that to happen. But they portray something that they don’t really want to be and don’t need to be. If your mom loves you enough to put you in a program and your mom loves you enough to educate you and you have all the nice things, then that’s what you should portray yourself as: a nice young man and a nice young woman. Why would you pull your pants all the way down and put your earrings in your ears like you are the thug from the street and you’re not? So why do that? That’s glamorous. So they glamorize things that are not cute and they’re not fun. And they could get you killed.

Being a “nice young man,” according to Warner, meant pulling up the pants and taking out the earrings. The gang awareness life-skills curriculum similarly encouraged small group leaders to “stress the danger of engaging in ‘wannabe’ behavior (e.g., dressing or acting the part of a gang member, drawing graffiti, throwing hand signs) when you are not part of a gang.”

For girls, the emphasis was less on looking like a thug through a street style than looking street as a “hoochie mama.” Danielle, who taught the life-skills groups at Girlworks, thought that fashion was the

most important thing for girls to learn. The best girls, according to Danielle, fixed their hair, coordinated their clothes, and dressed in respectful ways. I asked her to recount the topics she covered in the life-skills groups:

Danielle: My biggest one is fashion. Maybe...

Carissa: You surprised me with that one!

Danielle: Fashion! Some of these girls come in here and look like they just woke up in the morning and came right on out of the bed. Like they didn't want to fix their hair, they didn't want to fix their...I don't know. I just really look at them like, "Do ya'll really go to school like that? Or do you really not coordinate? At least coordinate. Coordinate your outfit a little bit." I keep saying I gotta bring in some malls, some kind of group in here to talk to them about how to present themselves because although they might not, just like our parents always said: "Your first impression is your last impression." And it is. . .

You don't have to step out the house and look crazy. And I think some girls... like one girl came in here with a comb in her hair. And I asked her, "Did you walk around school like that all day with the comb in your hair?" "My teacher told me to take it out." I said, "Did you take it out?" "No 'cause it's my comb." "You should have taken it out. She was trying to help you (laughing at the outdated style)."

Carissa: Do you see there as being like real consequences to being sloppy?

Danielle: No. I mean I want these girls to develop and learn how to present themselves. Even if it's just at school or just coming here. I want them to learn the different ways to present yourselves. That it's okay if you feel like throwing on some pants and a T-shirt. It's okay if you don't feel like dressing all up with heels. No, I don't expect you to do that everyday. But I do expect you to put yourself together in a respectful manner. Like you don't need to walk out your house not doing your hair. It's just no need or no reason to do that. We try to tell kids, "Be yourselves. Be yourselves and do you." But also be real about the matter. You know that there's a teacher at every school that's looking at your child like, "What in the world is wrong with her?" I don't want my girls here at KW to walk in anybody's classroom looking like they done hit Hurricane Katrina or something like that and not look like some thing. . . it's a way of presenting yourself.

To not have their hair done and to appear sloppy, Danielle feared, would conjure up images of poor blacks during Hurricane Katrina. Having style and presenting oneself well was one way that girls could create the sorts of images they wanted, according to Danielle.

Danielle explained further that just as boys got stereotyped as thugs when they adopted an urban style, girls were stereotyped when they wore short shirts and tight jeans:

Well it's the same with girls: The short shirts. The tight, tight, tight jeans. Like, my teachers stereotype [someone with this style] as a hoochie mama. I think they might not come out and say it, but from just when I was going to high school, if we had some girls that dressed just real trashy-like, you were gonna get certain attitudes from the teachers. You were going to get some kind of attitude from them. Or some kind of feedback from them to let you know, "I don't really care for you and the way you dress in my classroom."

Carissa: So how do you want them to dress?

Danielle: I don't want them to dress like hoochie mamas. And I don't want them to dress like those little rap stars in the video either.

Rather than specifying what Danielle wanted girls *to* look like, she emphasized what she did *not* want them to look like: the “hoochie mamas” and “rap stars” whose images were the prominent representation of black women to white suburbanites with little contact with urban blacks. Girls could do so, apparently, by wearing longer shirts, less tight jeans, even heels and panty hose. A volunteer’s mentor, for example, taught her how to dress during public presentations: “Sweetheart, you’ve got to have pantyhose,” she told her. “I don’t care how hot it is. You can’t wear short skirts here. You’ve got young people, and they’re impressionable. Gotta model the behavior so they’ll model back.”

As Carmen described, the street style had particular significations: it supposedly made kids look like they wanted to be criminals, druggies, and gangsters. Their glamorization of hip hop, then, left adults with the impression that kids themselves could control these connotations. Kids who dressed in hip-hop styles apparently signified their willingness to be associated with crime. To reject this style signified the opposite: they were unwilling to be put into a box and to self-destruct.

### *Getting Good Grades*

Kids could signify their self-determination by prioritizing school and doing well in it. In fact, it was Lisa’s hard work and dedication that convinced Edward that she *ought* to go to college. “Well, you know,” he explained what was special about her, “that is more work ethic than it is intelligence. But it made us realize. We started looking, and we could see through her work and looking at her work, she’s a very smart kid.” Lisa and other kids demonstrated their potential and smarts by faithfully doing their homework, often at KW, and taking advantage of Kidworks programs. The latter was important because many KW staff believed their programs, particularly their life-skills and leadership programs, provided kids with the decision-making and resistance skills they needed to be successful later in life.

Athletes signified having the right priorities by doing well in school. Darin worried that kids placed too much emphasis on sports and not enough on education. He explained that he thought about “the way they act, their mannerisms, the things they talk about, their goals. A lot of them don’t have goals. ‘What if you break your leg?’ ‘I don’t know.’ They will be lost. Like I said, growing up as a kid, we

ran around as kids. It wasn't just about basketball. It wasn't just about sports. It was education, going to college." To prioritize sports at the expense of education, as they believed boys too often did, was to have the wrong attitude and to present themselves as not serious about gaining employment later in life. But to do well in school *while* playing sports meant the young person had the right priorities.

For this reason, KW athletes had to maintain a certain GPA in order to participate at KW:

There are a few [kids with potential] that come to my head. Some of them are very hard workers. They know, for example, you have to have a certain GPA. Well, I don't know if the director's doing it this year, but you have to have a certain GPA to play a sport. I know that they do it at Boyworks. These kids are going to work hard at school, even if it may be a little ploy to get them to work hard at school. But the fact is that they are going to appreciate that later on in life. There is a girl at GW who wanted to be a junior staff. And Sharice said, "You can't be a junior staff unless your grades are all right." That next semester, she changed from all Ds to As and Bs. Now *that's* motivation, and then she had no excuse not to do well. Now she's still here and she has no excuse not to do well (Tamera).

Scholarship winners similarly signified their priorities by maintaining their GPAs and being involved at Kidworks.

Attending college was the ultimate sign that kids had worked hard and the ultimate wish for the kids. Libby hoped that in ten years, girls would be in college "trying to do something." Casey hoped some girls would go to college on athletic or academic scholarships. No matter the method, aspiring to, preparing to, and then going to college showed that kids should be taken seriously as hard workers.

### *Sexual Abstinence*

The most important way for girls to signify their rationality and impulse control was to abstain from sexual activity. Street girls were characterized as impulsive sexually, which they demonstrated through having sex or getting pregnant. These girls ran the risk of being called "sluts," "hos," and "chicken heads." More "lady like" girls, on the other hand, apparently controlled their sexuality in public by delaying sexual activity, using their discretion when picking a partner, and hiding their sexual desire from others. Girl Might, for example, emphasized the risks to girls for "not waiting to have sex until they are physically, emotionally, and financially capable of birthing and caring for an infant." It was girls' responsibility, according to the manual instructions, to care for their sexual health and to stay healthy. "It

is important for the group [of girls] to know that *not* making a decision as to how they will be sexually responsible is making a decision to *not* have control over their lives.” To not have control, as the lessons progressively showed, meant risking pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV, and dropping out of school. “It can take only one sexual encounter,” the manual instructed facilitators to tell girls, “to become pregnant.”

It was not just dressing like a hoochie mama, then, that staff found problematic. Some girls’ sexuality, from KW adults’ perspectives, appeared out of control because they gave off signals that they were sexually available and willing to engage in sex. Louise warned one girl, for example, that sitting with her legs too far apart gave guys a “free invitation.” It supposedly suggested that she was sexually available to anyone who wanted her:

One of the other girls, she was sort of lady like, but she was doing things that were not appropriate. Like I’d walk in and she’d be sitting on the couch, and she’d have her legs open like this (spreads open her legs to demonstrate). And I’m going, “Do you know how that looks? And what’s that saying when a guy comes in here and he sees your legs open?” And she’s like, “Oh my gosh! I hadn’t thought about that!” And so, that’s not the way we sit. We don’t sit inviting, just sending out a free invitation: hey come and get it. You don’t want to do that.

Once the girl had thought about the messages she supposedly signaled with her legs sitting apart, at Louise’s suggestion, she joined with the other girls in sitting in ways that drew less attention to her sexuality. But the girls could demonstrate that they were truly “ladies” rather than “chicken heads” by crossing their legs and hiding their sexuality.

The only thing that KW girls really had control over were their bodies and their reputations. To give off the appearance of being sexually active—whether true or not, whether protected or not—purportedly signaled to others the sort of person a girl was. She seemed to lack self-respect and self-control. She was not the sort of person who wanted to or could make something of herself.

Even having sex, particularly if others found out about it, suggested that girls were being too impulsive or handing over too much control to boys. KW’s Girl Might life-skills program, according to the manual, emphasized controlling girls’ sexuality in order to avoid potential consequences, namely pregnancy and disease. Girls could demonstrate their self-control and humility by postponing sex until marriage:

What are the main messages [of the curriculum]? Young people should postpone sexual involvement. The best way for youth to avoid the risks of pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases is by postponement of premature sexual involvement. Participants are provided a clear, consistent message that sexual involvement at their age is not appropriate. Contraceptive information is not taught.

Not being street, not being out of control or a “chicken head,” meant adopting an instrumental and rational approach to decision making. When it came to sexuality, the way to prevent losing one’s pride and reputation, as Danielle explained, was to “cover it and protect it at any cost.” To do so, girls had to control their own sexual desires. They also had to refuse boys’ advances and to read through their charm and sweet talk. They were to consider the symbolic consequences to themselves of having sex. Then, they would decide that abstinence was the best policy, showing everyone that they were in control of their sexuality and bodies.

### *Rejecting Violence*

Fighting and resorting to violence were interpreted by KW adults as direct expressions of acting impulsively. As Ben warned one young person, “You can’t work right with a chip on your shoulder. You can’t be violent.” The Man-To-Man curriculum explained that “many of us do not know how to enter into conflict creatively in such a way that we can understand and resolve it successfully. Ours is a culture more geared toward ‘one winner and one loser’ rather than a society of ‘all winners.’” Managing conflict through aggression was interpreted as a “negative way” to do so. What’s more, “yelling at another person, threatening to beat them up, acting nasty or fighting doesn’t solve the conflict; it only shows who is bigger or can talk louder. Usually the conflict is made worse, not solved.” The Saying No To The Streets curriculum directly tried to improve impulse control, which it defined as “taking an action without really thinking it through.” The examples provided included screaming at someone, getting in their face, and grabbing someone’s personal belongings.

Kidworks boys, then, could signify to outsiders that they were not ruggedly individualistic, as the Man-To-Man manual put it, but instead rational, in control, and willing to cooperate with others by resolving conflict in other ways. They could, after all, “try to work it out,” as Ben suggested. They could

do so by, according to the manual, by first staying calm, taking a deep breath and cooling off. Then, they could handle the conflict through “*problem-solving discussion*,” according to the Man-To-Man manual. “Here, both persons talk honestly about what is the best way to solve a problem so that they both win. They are willing to cooperate and to compromise.” Persuasion was another way to illustrate one’s rationality if someone has a “good reason” and has “thought a problem through carefully.” Working things out meant, thus, using the systematic rational approach to decision-making described in the KW curricula and not resorting to violence or fighting. Doing so allowed the boys to signify that they were not uncooperative and therefore non-threatening.

### **Conclusion: Accumulating Cultural Capital**

In this chapter, I have shown how Kidworks was organized to implement its mission of producing protective citizens of upstanding character. Kidworks’ rules, life-skills programs, and events were designed to train kids to value and display middle-class cultural capital that could potentially open up opportunities for them and help them gain credibility among teachers and potential employers.

There were three steps to this socialization process. First, KW adults, particularly administrators at the local and national level, *defined* what was appropriate behavior and appearance. Their definitions centered on three types of cultural capital understood as characteristic of middle-class individuals in opposition to street ones. A middle-class presentation of self, first, meant rejecting street styles in favor of professional and preppy appearances and interaction styles. Self-determination, the second aspect of middle-class cultural capital, consisted of having the “right” attitude and disposition: being ambitious and prioritizing one’s life to accomplish his/her individual goals. The final asset was rationality. Rationality was defined in opposition to emotionality and impulsiveness. It meant maintaining self-control, being analytic, and acting instrumentally. Through its programs and rules, Kidworks defined for kids in black and white terms that sex, wearing earrings or a hat, walking with a swagger, “improper grammar,” devaluing school, and being lazy were bad things.<sup>12</sup> On the other hand, being in control and rational,

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prioritizing school, and tucking in one's shirt were appropriate behaviors. "Good" kids simply internalized this information—rather than debating it, analyzing it, or dealing with the consequences—and said "no" to any temptations that came their way.

Second, KW programs and rules could have the effect of *teaching* kids how to go about employing middle-class cultural capital. The life-skills curricula, for example, outlined step-by-step how to make rational decisions that could produce a desired outcome. The refusal strategies, similarly, were specific techniques for combating peer pressure. Kids could learn how to structure speeches and deliver them effectively by participating in public events. Rejecting urban clothing styles, sex, and violence were, the programs taught, key ways to signify one's rationality and self-determination.

Finally, Kidworks provided kids the chance to *practice* employing middle-class cultural capital and, therefore, to appreciate its value through trial and error. The life-skills curricula specified role playing exercises in which kids could practice decision making, keeping a cool head, and saying no. Similarly, public events provided kids the chance, preferably with adult guidance, to fill out an extensive application form, to write speeches and essays, to practice delivering them, and to field questions from an audience.

Through its organization of programs, rules, and public events, then, Kidworks aimed to transmit to kids middle-class cultural capital. Kids who properly adopted it could signify their worthiness as a person and, KW adults hoped, inspire people to trust rather than fear them.

**chapter five:**  
**Kidworks' Public Relations**

*It would be great if people who are on the board stop in and read to kids twice a week or whatever. But really to me more importantly is a board who is educated. Who cares. Who is either financially well off and they can contribute on their own or they have an incredible sphere of influence that they can call on during campaign times. Who are dedicated to helping steer the ship into expansion or improving facilities or whatever and has the resources and connection to help make those goals a reality. That's, that's a board's job to me (June, white woman, fundraising volunteer).*

One of the biggest challenges for any nonprofit is finding enough financial support to run its programs and pay its workers. At the turn of the millennium, nonprofits were facing a particularly “challenging resource environment” (Froelich 1999). The volatility of private funding and changes in government regulations and rules were forcing nonprofits to expand fee-based services and to diversify their resource base. Nonprofits were looking for new sources of funds and new strategies to ensure their viability in a resource-competitive environment.

Kidworks' response to the changing environment was to restructure its administration, formalize its fundraising, and target the private sector (individuals and corporations). The executive director hired a professional resource developer. The capital campaign goal grew by \$250,000 each year. Kidworks hosted new fundraisers and invested time and energy in marketing. June's description of an ideal board, as a group of caring people with the financial means and social networks to create a solid financial base, became an accurate portrayal of Kidworks and its priorities. The board was there to raise funds and “steer the ship.” The organization had instrumental goals of expansion and improvement. The integrity of the organization, as evident in a positively crafted public image, and the prestige of the board were critically important from an organizational standpoint.

In this chapter, I analyze Kidworks' public relations strategies that successfully boosted its revenues and fostered an enviable reputation, all within an increasingly competitive environment for nonprofits. I begin by describing the changing nature of nonprofits and the challenges to secure funding that nonprofits faced during the time of this study. I then present the organizational changes that Kidworks made that facilitated its expansion of public relations and growing fundraising efforts. Next, I analyze the public relations strategies that Kidworks used to build up the organization's public image, including professionalizing the staff, protecting the organization's image during times of crisis,

recognizing donors and volunteers, and providing stories of success. These strategies fostered public investment in Kidworks by serving as myths that made volunteers and donors feel generous while framing Kidworks as a worthy cause. The drive to increase KW support and expand its services, however, came at the cost of the kids and direct-care staff who became marketing tools, used to cultivate KW's reputation to white donors.

### **Changing Nature of Nonprofits**

According to resource dependency theory (Pfeffer and Salanick 1978: 2), “the key to organizational survival is the ability to acquire and maintain resources.” The resources upon which nonprofits depend, however, changed in the late 1990s and in to the new millennium. The traditional funding base of nonprofits was disappearing in favor of commercialization (Froelich 1999). Traditionally, nonprofits relied on individual and corporate donations and foundation grants as primary sources of funding. Individual donations, however, tend to be unpredictable and fluctuating (Gronbjerg 1993), and the share of revenue from private donations decreased from 30 percent in 1980 to just 19 percent in 1996 (Froelich 1999). For nonprofits outside of the health care segment, government-based revenue also shrank during this time, even though many nonprofits relied primarily on government funding. Most of these funds were disseminated through government grants and contracts, which came with an assortment of bureaucratic rules and regulations. Service fees and directly selling goods and products, on the other hand, increased in popularity, making clients and customers the largest source of funding among nonprofits (Froelich 1999).

The environment in the early 2000s, then, was increasingly competitive. Particularly after September eleventh, many nonprofits (and for-profit organizations) were competing to gain public attention and financial investment (Gronbjerg 2001). It was an era of No Child Left Behind,<sup>13</sup> which

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<sup>13</sup> The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 amended the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. This legislation sought to increase student achievement through, in part, increased accountability on the part of schools and districts to state governments, and state governments to the federal government. It required that each state develop accountability programs based on annual testing of students in reading and mathematics. School districts and schools that failed to make yearly progress faced restructuring or even economic sanctioning. New teacher

increasingly tied educational resources to student performance and outcomes, and a similar revolution seemed underway in the human services nonprofit sector (Gronbjerg 2001). Responsibility was shifting from the federal government to states and local communities. Funding was increasingly tied to performance, government rules, and bureaucratic regulations<sup>14</sup> (Froelich 1999; Gronbjerg 2001; Irvin 2005; Smith 2003), despite the challenges in assessing effectiveness in human services (Hasenfeld 1972; Irvin 2005). The result was that nonprofits began to take on capitalist business models of interaction and culture while becoming increasingly commercial (Clohesy 2003; Dees and Battle Anderson 2003; Froelich 1999; Gronbjerg 2001). Gronbjerg (2001: 293) explained the change like this:

Overlaying these trends is the growth in reliance on performance and outcome contracts (e.g., workforce development, welfare reform) by government agencies. Designed to improve efficiency and effectiveness, these developments have necessarily shifted attention away from the quality of inputs and volume of effort and therefore constitute a major cultural shift for nonprofits. It is forcing nonprofits to downplay their traditional pride in quality of services (the argument for why they should be preferred service providers) good faith efforts (the explanation for what they were paid) in favor of market-like behavior.

Under this model, donors become clients, fundraisers become marketers, and interactions exist to maximize profits (Clohesy 2003; Gronbjerg 1993). Despite romanticized images of nonprofits as small-scale, volunteer-run, and commitment-driven (Carson 2002)—essentially, as uncommercialized and free

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qualification requirements also required that teachers be “highly qualified”: for example, to have gotten a C- or higher in courses in their core area and trained in content-area pedagogy.

<sup>14</sup> Regulations vary depending on the funding source, contract, government agency, and state. According to Irvin (2005), 39 states require nonprofits that solicit donations to file annual registration forms. Some states also require copies of the IRS Form 990, copies of contracts with fundraisers, and auditing information. Most states require professional solicitors to report on solicitation activities.

Smith (2003) demonstrates the shift from government-sponsored grants and subsidies (where private agencies monitored themselves) to formal contracts between nonprofits and government agencies. These contracts come with a variety of restrictions in relation to billing and performance measures, and welfare-to-work programs face especially tight restrictions. Within these programs, moneys are earmarked for abstinence-only sex education, for example. States are encouraged to reduce out-of-wedlock births through financial bonuses and to restrict women from receiving money if they had a child while receiving TANF support. The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 also set time limits on receiving TANF funds (five years) and required women to identify dependents’ fathers who were then required to subsidize the TANF funds. See Sharon Hays’ (2003) *Flat Broke With Children*. President Bush’s Faith-Based and Community-Based Initiative was similarly predicated upon shifting responsibilities carried out by government to nonprofit organizations. Legislation and public calls to strip advocacy-oriented nonprofits of their tax-exempt status have also restricted nonprofits.

Increasing regulation over the nonprofit sector has occurred simultaneously as corporate consolidation, particularly in the 1990s, and globalization. As larger portions of the economy are being forced into a capitalist mode, the lines between nonprofits and for-profit organizations are blurring. Nonprofits come to look more like for-profits with contracts and formal regulations, while privatization is making health and human services increasing for-profit enterprises. See Dees and Battle Anderson (2003).

from capitalist logic (Hochschild 2003)—they were decreasingly that way. On top of those changes, nonprofit scandals left the public weary of fundraising practices (Froelich 1999; Gronbjerg 2001).

### **Reorganizing Kidworks**

Within Sherburne in the mid 2000s, there had been a United Way scandal that strained public trust and made nonprofits cautious about depending too heavily on United Way funds. At the same time, the need for after-school programming was growing rapidly. A steady growth in Latino immigrants was overwhelming the local school system. Public concern over gangs brought attention to teens' after-school programs as a solution, and the public disapproval of “latchkey” kids had well taken hold. Kidworks was more in demand than ever. KW wanted to expand its services to more kids within its existing facilities, as well as to new ones.

Kidworks met the dynamic fundraising needs by restructuring the organization to expand marketing efforts and to cultivate the local private (and some grant) bases of revenue. This restructuring doubled the size of the administration, brought in a power-house marketing and resource development expert, and added an additional layer of management to KW. The executive director, the white businessman who ran Kidworks before and after the restructuring, tapped another long-term white man employee for the associate director position. The associate director became the personnel supervisor to the growing staff. The executive director hired a savvy resource developer, a white woman, and promoted another woman into government relations. The organization more aggressively sought out grant moneys, as well, including growth grants which tied funds to an increase in young people signing up to use KW services. KW held new annual fundraising events. The resource developer started Professionals for Progress,<sup>15</sup> a group of young professionals who hosted social events on behalf of Kidworks for other professionals in the area. By 2005, Kidworks was promoting Professionals as Progress more heavily,

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<sup>15</sup> Their primary purpose was to promote KW and raise funds for it while engaging in fun social events. Their events ranged from soccer games to meet and greets at local restaurants and bars to a more formal gala complete with a jewelry auction. The group represented a variety of professions, including marketing, finance, real estate, and business consultation.

eventually transforming it into a primary mode of volunteering among white 30-somethings.

New responsibilities brought pay raises as well that rewarded administrators for their work and made their pay highly competitive. In 2004, the executive director enjoyed a salary of over \$100,000 and another \$5,000 in benefits. The associate director made \$72,000 (an \$18,000 raise over the previous year) and almost \$4,000 in benefits. The new resource developer had a salary of \$80,000 and \$4,000 in benefits that same year. She was promoted into a national position because of her successful work in Sherburne. When the new resource developer started, with some experience but an unrelated master's degree, she made over \$50,000 a year, although she would not reveal the exact figure.

Fundraising campaign targets grew rapidly with plans for a twelve million dollar campaign in the works. This aggressive fundraising put more onus on the board of directors who tapped their business associates and friends to donate money and serve on the board. The resource developer also created a community-based arm of the annual campaign. By 2006, 42 of the 43 members of the board of director were white business people, only eight of whom were women. The community-based arm had a similar makeup.

The result of KW's efforts was an enviable fundraising powerhouse and a reputation within the community to go along with it (see Figure 1). Revenues and expenses more than doubled between 2004 and 2006 to nearly \$4.5 million<sup>16</sup>. Local support, however, constituted the bulwark of the organizational funding.

### **Building Kidworks' Reputation**

Public relations were increasingly important, and Kidworks' reputation became an asset. Several highly effective Kidworks' strategies carefully craft and protected its public image. These strategies were designed to enhance Kidworks' reputation in the community as one of the top and most important youth develop organizations and charities.

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<sup>16</sup> KW's revenue and expenses data comes from 990 tax forms. Tax forms also include salary information for anyone paid over \$50,000 a year.

They also provided volunteers public recognition and ceremonial thanks.

The new high pay of administrators, for example, opened up more elite social circles. It allowed administrators to wear business attire, to drive leather-seated foreign cars if they desired, and to fit into the white business networks they were targeting. High pay also marked administrators as high status and reflected back on the organization itself. Because professionals should be paid like professionals, in the words of one administrator, high pay suggested that KW itself was a professional, successful enterprise.

The high status of the executive director added credibility to KW, too. The executive director was well admired by the public both locally and nationally for his work with KW. He had been with the organization for decades, and Kidworks' reputation was closely aligned with his. When the staff bragged that their programming was better than other youth service programs, it was because of the work of the director. When there was a successful fundraising campaign, it was attributed to him, his friends, and their reputations. Even at regional or national conferences, staff reported, people complimented them about the director after learning they worked for him. The executive director had a reputation as business savvy and a self-sacrificing community leader. He was trusted, and his work or tactics were largely unquestioned by the public.

The prestigious makeup of the board and public supporters also lent credibility to KW. For instance, KW had the support of an assortment of local businesses. Karly described KW as so well respected in the community that the volunteer coordinator could get anything from companies that she wanted. State representatives and local council members attended KW events. Each year, famous athletes and coaches headlined fundraisers. Well-established financial corporations, banks, and real estate companies lent their support and names to KW events, which brought credibility to the organization and its cause. The prestige of the board seemed to reflect back on itself as well: the more prestigious and wealthy the business people, the more revenue they could generate and the more people like them wanted to join the board. "Since I have gotten to know it, I have come to understand how supported Kidworks is in the community," June explained. "I mean the board of directors is like a who's who of Sherburne. A lot of people hold it very, very, very dear. And that's special." KW was special *because* elite

businesses and corporations of Sherburne supported it, and this support built up KW's reputation as an important place to network.

### *Professionalizing Staff*

Kidworks reinforced this image of Kidworks by framing the staff as trained and educated professionals. Administrators, staff members, and literature alike referred to full-time direct-care workers as “professionals,” which suggested the positions were of high status. It implied a high level of competence. Professional positions required a college degree, with parks and recreation, sociology, education, or physical education taking preference. They also included the most extensive training at KW. After a year of employment, professionals traveled to youth development conferences where they learned better ways to manage their programs. They also visited other youth facilities to see how others provide services. Some professionals underwent training to run specific life-skills programs, and others provided training (first aid, for example) for other staff. KW literature laid out the desired effect of professionalizing full-time positions. Its description of full-time workers read, “men and women who use their education, training and energies to help young people. They enjoy being with kids, they understand them and get satisfaction from seeing them become responsible citizens and leaders.” Professionals by definition were supposed to be competent, caring, and effective at youth development.

Being professionals, furthermore, meant acting in ways that enhanced KW's image. KW staff members, after all, represented KW and its mission. For this reason, KW administrators created a code of conduct for its staff. This code of conduct required that professional staff wear their KW polo shirts, slacks, and closed-toe shoes.<sup>17</sup> Direct-care workers were not allowed to wear hats or head gear either on KW grounds or on field trips. Staff were also not to curse. During public events, the staff wore suits. When in public but off of work, they were expected to be well behaved and to abstain from drinking. Tamera explained the code this way: “[You have to] act like a professional, dress like a professional at all

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<sup>17</sup> The administrative staff, on the other hand, dressed in suits, skirts, slacks, blouses, and heels. The various dress codes (suits and skirts for the administration, polo shirts and khakis for the full-time staff, T-shirts and jeans for the part-time staff) also served as status markers. It was apparent who had what status within the organization.

times.... You represent the KW no matter where you are as you should. Like we had that event this weekend. Regardless if we are off work, not wearing a KW T-shirt, and are out and paid our money to go, you can't drink because you're still an ambassador for Kidworks at all times."

This code applied to volunteers, as well. Instructions in the volunteer packet explained: "Kidworks has established a strict code of behavior for its volunteers that must be followed at all times." This code specified "comfortable clothes that are discreet and in good taste. This includes shorts and blue jeans with appropriate tops. Tops and bottoms that expose the midriff should not be worn on site," the brochure continued. "Sandals are acceptable, but 'flip-flops' should be avoided." It also instructed volunteers to avoid the use of "foul or offensive" language. By following the code of conduct themselves, staff and volunteers, as a volunteer training on mentorship put it, could "offer new insight, attitudes, and behaviors to the mentee." It was the mentor's job to teach young people these new ways of acting through modeling of appropriate, "professional" styles and behaviors.

Along with the code of conduct came other expectations to act "professional." Being a professional required, as Edward explained, a certain approach to one's job. When the administration hired full-time staff, these were particular, albeit vague and impressionistic, qualities they looked for, according to Edward:

Once they come in and you start the process of interviewing somebody, you are looking at them, you're looking pretty close at temperament. What is their temperament? And you have to try to pick up and have them give you examples that will kind of gauge their aptitude to be able to do the job. 'Cause you don't want to invest that time when they don't have the aptitude. Coaching them is what we call it. You're coaching them if they don't have the aptitude. Even though it might be small scale, have you led a program? Have you created a special event and carried it out, and what challenges did you have? What was the hardest part about it?

And then the temperament is. . . . There's a lot of stress. Just that stress of dealing with those kids . . . Delivering programs. Delivering kids. We're a nonprofit organization. We have to deliver what we say we have to deliver. And so you have to have that temperament. You're going to have mad moments. . . . Those are the things that we're looking for.

Having the right "temperament" and "aptitude" seemed to mean that the worker could juggle the stresses of the job and still run the programs they were charged to. It implied a high level of self-control and focus.

What administrators expected was for everyone to prioritize KW and the organizations' image over everything else. As Tamera put it, professionalism was about "protecting Kidworks, protecting kids, and protecting yourself. So kids come first, KW comes second, you come last."

To put the kids first, from the organizational perspective, meant coming to work prepared and ready to serve as a role model. Richard emphasized that staff must come in well rested, for example, and staff training taught them the "professional" way to approach their work. Ben reported that he paid attention to his appearance and behavior in order to role model for kids. The staff training, in fact, taught him this approach and the best ways to look and act:

We used to go through the employee training, and they used to give you an employee handbook. They used to tell you what you're expected to do and how that when you put on the staff shirt, you are a role model to these kids. So everything that you do, kids are looking at you. They're looking at you. Looking at what you're doing. And people can learn by learned behavior when they look at a people they see what they're doing, and they want to be like these people. Role models. That's what we are when we put on this staff shirt. That we're role models. We gotta uphold the rules, and we can't be biased. We gotta be straight forward. Can't have certain standards for certain people. We gotta be straight across the board.

Carissa: What is it that you role model for them specifically? Can you give me some examples?

Ben: Like being positive. Like, for example, your appearance. You can't walk into BW and have your pants hanging down. Using certain languages and just pretty much just acting out of the ordinary. You have to up hold the law just like you're a police officer. You work with children, and children learn by learned behavior. What they see. They see somebody doing something positive and they be like, "Hey, I want to be like such-'n'-such 'cause he's doing such-'n'-such positive."

Carissa: What about, so is it mostly about appearance? Or is there particular ways of acting or behaving that you...

Ben: Yeah, all of that. Behaviors, the way you dress, your look. Because you can, if you look a person's face and you look in their eyes, you can tell something about that person. You gotta come in KW with a positive attitude. If you're having a bad day at home, you gotta leave that outside that door. Because once you come in here, you gotta go to work. 'Cause you got one hundred fifty, one hundred sixty kids a day. Then you gotta run the basketball program. You can't let your guard down a minute. You can't act like you're tired. That's why you gotta, that's why [an administrator] always said, "You gotta come in and work well rested," because you can't come in the KW asleep, you're tired after you hung out all night. You gotta come in with a positive attitude.

To be a "positive" influence on the kids, Ben learned through trainings and internalized for himself, staff also had to pull up their pants, prioritize work, and put aside their own feelings and desires to be emotionally available to the kids.

Sharice held up the same "professional" standards when hiring staff members:

I would say the way you talk in general you have to carry yourself like a young lady. You can't, if you're talking to a child, you can't be like, "Yo, what's up?" or that type of stuff. Or not using the proper grammar, that type of stuff. "Dog, bite me." You know that type of stuff. If you want them to model what you do, you have to teach them. . . . If you say certain things, they're going to say certain things. Like let's say if I'm playing a pool game with one of the kids, and I say the word... what is the word I hate that they always use? Um... "that sucks." If I say "that sucks," how many of them are going to walk around and say "that sucks?" And before long that's going to turn into something else. So you know, we don't use that word here at Girlworks. "Shut up," we don't use that word at GW. My staff don't tell kids to shut up and I'm not going to walk around telling kids to shut up. Staff don't use cuss words, ya'll are not going to use cuss words, that type of stuff.

That's what I mean about being positive, and the way you walk. . . . If you're having a bad day, the kids haven't done anything to you, so you can't come into KW with your head held down acting like you know the weight of the world is on your shoulders. Like I tell them everyday, "We all go through personal stuff, but they [kids] have not done anything to us. So when you come through those doors, whatever problems you have brought with you to work, you need to leave them beside those doors."

Being a professional, as Sharice trained the part-time staff, was about being a "lady": using inoffensive language and mannerisms. Those best at their job—and required according to both the administration and Sharice's standards—acted professionally. They prioritized their work. They controlled themselves, and concentrated on being available to the kids.

Professionalization of the staff, consequently, projected an air of competence to the public. It reassured the public that Kidworks staff would serve as "appropriate" role models for the kids.

### *Protecting Organizational Image*

Kidworks administrators went further to protect KW's reputation, particularly during times of crisis that could stir media attention or tarnish its public image. During these times, and any others in which the media might contact Boyworks or Girlworks staffers, KW policy dictated that only (white) administrators speak to the media. Full-time direct-care workers were supposed to contact a chain of command in order, starting with the executive director, then trying the associate director, then trying the resource developer. Under no circumstances were the direct-care staff to talk with the media. The point was to "protect the brand," as Tasha put it. Tasha described the crisis plan like this: "Usually it's the executive director. . . it goes in a hierarchy. The ED talks to media, the associate director talks to media, it's the resource developer that talks to media, and that was it. If those three aren't there, you keep your

mouth shut. You don't say a thing." Only people who were "great on camera" were supposed to speak. "Some people don't need to have their faces on TV. Some people just, back to the whole idea of brand more than anything." Warner was good on camera, but Williams was supposedly not. "He's a scary dude," Tasha explained. "He doesn't need to be on camera talking. He can barely get out a sentence. Have you heard him talk? He's a scary dude."

There were a few crisis moments during the time period of my observations. A kid slammed his thumb in a door one time. A boy punched out a window and the police were called. Another boy was attacked in the bathroom. A girl collapsed outside of the GW building, and an ambulance took her to the hospital. During interviews, staff and kids recalled a more dramatic event when a boy was hit by a car in front of the BW building. All of these events, however, flew under the public's radar. Even though police or ambulances were involved, the media never were, and there really was no threat to KW's credibility. The staff contacted the executive director to inform him of the incidents, but nothing was said publicly. When several former BW participants shot and killed two women in a parking lot, the reaction was silence so as to not draw attention to the fact that he was a former member. When I asked Warner if the staff talked about it with the kids, he responded, "No. No, we didn't. We could have, but we chose to stay away from it. Because it can get misconstrued that this was something that we taught them, or that's a product of Kidworks. And right now, we've got a positive." Warner explained that "when I first started [working here], they called this the breeding ground of thugs." He did not want to resurrect that reputation and so remained quiet about the kids' violent behavior.

There were only two events in which KW's image was threatened, and the staff activated their crisis management strategies to "protect the brand." During a boys' basketball game at Boyworks one night, an adult man stabbed another man. The police came, as did camera crews. I saw Kidworks on the evening news that night, and three newspaper articles on the incident followed. Richard served as the organization's spokesperson. He was interviewed by local television stations, as well as a local newspaper. He also sent out an email to volunteers to provide reassurance and to make sure they felt safe. Through all of his public comments, Richard repeated over and over that Kidworks young people did not commit

the crime but rather outsiders. The newspaper article, which described the details of the incident, for example, said, “The men had no direct connection with the Sherburne Kidworks, and no one playing in the game was involved in the fight, said Richard Carter.” The program director at the time, whom Tasha described above as a “scary dude” provided an account of the happenings to the newspaper.

The brevity of the news coverage, however, only provided Richard enough chance to provide a one-line sound bite. In a developed letter to volunteers, Richard brilliantly framed the incident as evidence to the *need for* Kidworks rather than a reflection *of* Kidworks:

No aggressive actions were taken or threats made toward the teen basketball players, parents, or staff. According to a police officer on the scene, [the program director] and the staff of Boyworks did a great job of handling the situation. Warner administered first aid to the victim until emergency personnel arrived on the scene.

We alerted the board Chair last night of the situation. It is important to emphasize that this was not a Kidworks incident...it could have happened at the grocery store, mall, or apartment parking lot. There is no indication as yet that the assailants were from our neighborhood.

It is ironic that these are the very kids...older teens...that very few organizations make an effort to serve because it is believed that the teens are too hard to control; yet they were in no way involved in this incident.

They were doing what we want them to be doing...being engaged in constructive activities in their teen center. While this was a very unpleasant experience for our kids, parents, and staff, it reinforces that the Boyworks is where it needs to be, serving who it needs to serve. Unfortunately the outside world ascended on our facility last night.

Richard, thus, transformed an incident that could have damaged KW's reputation into one that promoted Kidworks and its services.

The other potentially devastating incident that occurred was a staff member was arrested by local police for engaging in illegal activities. The arresting officer knew a Kidworks staff member and informed him of the arrest. He informed the administration, who later forced the staff member to retire under the guise that it was simply time for change at KW.

These incidents, though rare, illustrate the importance of protecting KW's image and some of the ways that KW administrators went about doing so. Their aptitude at keeping KW out of the media and framing the discussion when they were, however, spared KW from public scrutiny. This was one of the things that attracted the new resource developer to KW. The lack of scandals, she explained, lent the organization credibility.

### *Recognizing Donors and Volunteers*

Donor recognition was another successful public relations strategy. As Kidworks' "principles of effective fundraising" suggested, "donor recognition and stewardship are important parts of the fundraising process." KW administrators, thus, rewarded those who contributed to KW with public recognition for their generosity, as well as provided individualized attention.

KW had around 200 volunteers whom the volunteer coordinator was charged with keeping involved in KW's programs and events. She took her job seriously and viewed it as important to the functioning of KW. The volunteer coordinator worked to make the volunteers feel welcomed and connected to KW. She learned their names and used them when she saw them. She showered volunteers with praise and thanks at "volunteer celebrations" honoring them. These events, held several times a year, were catered by well-known restaurants. The volunteer coordinator also sent thank you notes to volunteers who donated their time, and she sent notes personally signed by the executive director to donors. She remembered people's birthdays and sent them cards to honor them. These acts, though small, were designed to show the volunteer that he/she was individually needed and appreciated and to leave them feeling connected to KW.

The executive director created this same sentiment among the board and assured their comfort with the organization. He requested that emails to the board pass through him, even those originating with the resource developer. Doing so allowed him to correct any improper language or political messages. He instructed staff, for example, to use the term "we" rather than "I" in their messages to the board. This created a sense of cohesion and group identity around Kidworks. He also sheltered them from political messages that they might find offensive. He instructed a staff member, for example, to remove a quote by Hillary Clinton from an email because many of the board members were republicans who might be annoyed by it.

Kidworks celebrated its fundraising volunteers in very public ways that provided them public recognition for their generosity. Big-time fundraisers and corporate donors were invited to celebrate the end of the campaign year at a breakfast in their honor. All full-time staff members were required to

attend this event. Direct-care staff wore suits and directed traffic. Administrators, in their usual business attire, greeted people at a check-in table and casually mingled before the ceremony. At this event, donors and fundraisers were rewarded with a commemorative clock, gift certificates, and public—and publicized (on KW’s website and annual report)—praise. Corporate donors brought in giant checks showing their gift amount. The master of ceremonies (a local radio disc jockey) called up each corporation in succession, highlighting their gift amount and providing time for clapping and a photograph: an agriculture corporation with a \$10,000 check; a bank with a \$7,500 check; another bank with a \$10,000; \$10,000 from a third bank; a hospital system giving \$3,500; communications company with a \$5,000 check; another company giving \$15,000; followed by a bank giving \$2,500; a final bank with a \$6,000; and an insurance company giving \$10,000. The representatives, then, stayed at the front of the room, growing into a snake of oversized checks so that everyone could see their company’s contribution. Staff posted photographs from this event on the website to provide more publicity to the companies.

This event also crowned the “King of the Campaign,” the fundraiser who single handedly raised the most money (\$33,500). When the King was announced, he made a grand entrance from the back of the room to themed music wearing a crown and cape and holding a torch. The room broke out in applause. The King passed along the recognition by demanding, “Ladies of my office, stand up. Let’s give them a round of applause.” Three young women stood to accept the clapping. Then, he turned to congratulate the new petite blond KW resource developer, “You are not only beautiful but did a wonderful job on the campaign.”

Kidworks was also very accommodating to its volunteers, which provided them the opportunity to volunteer in comfortable and familiar ways. The volunteer coordinator was flexible, never pushing people to commit time or hounding them if they missed volunteering sessions. When I was gone from KW for several months, for example, she sent me a personalized note saying that “we miss you.” The volunteer coordinator left it up to the volunteers as to when and how they volunteered so that they could do so in comfortable ways. The resource developer, similarly, provided resources to fundraisers but did not surveil their sales pitches or the other strategies they used to fundraise. This left volunteers to

volunteer while making use of their existing talents. The Professionals for Progress who organized and ran the KW Gala event, for example, used their well-established skills and connections to efficiently promote the fundraiser:

I think that all of our marketing materials were very professional. It was interesting. The group that we did have this year was perfect in terms of everyone's talents and how they could contribute. 'Cause we had the graphic designer who helped with the marketing. We had someone who was in PR who could shoot the press releases out to media and knew who to contact there. So we just, we did have some good people to get done exactly what we needed.

Despite the chaos two hours before the Gala began, then, Miranda took great pride in that the event “appeared very well put together, very organized.” In providing volunteers the space to organize and run events and programs the way they wanted, KW left volunteers feeling competent and comfortable in their work rather than incompetent or uncomfortable.

Through these events, along with the typical thank you letters and pronouncement of donors in the annual report, Kidworks celebrated the generosity of fundraisers, volunteers, and donors. They left volunteers feeling successful, important, and part of a KW family.

### *Stories of Success*

Being a legitimate youth development organization also meant confidently projecting that KW was fulfilling its mission. Kidworks made attempts to provide feedback to donors in the form of pictures or very loosely measured outcomes. A recent addition to the volunteer coordinator's job description was “accountability officer.” She filled donors' requests by summarizing where their money went. She joked about always toting around her camera, which she used to document kids' engagement in activities or sponsored events. Following soccer season, for example, she took team photos to give to the meat company that paid for their jerseys. She had the kids flip their jerseys around to better highlight the company name, which was scrawled across the back. KW collected report cards of kids in order to track their academic progress. Staff members also collected data on the number of kids who participated in life skill programs. Kids took unmatched pre- and post-tests during some groups. These results were given to the administration who reported them to granting agencies. The organization was also in the midst of a

nonrepresentative voluntary alumni survey that would track the progress of former KW attendees and the effects of KW on their lives.

Most donor feedback, however, came in the form of stories about young people, highlighting their talents and successes. At the campaign celebration, the KW “chairman,” actually a chairwoman, presented each of the five white people who ran the capital campaign a special gift: framed art pieces, each of which was designed and painted by a KW young person. The Best and Brightest Youth winner made an appearance, as did a school paper she wrote on the positive effects of KW on kids’ lives.

Richard, a white administrator, also listed off the effects of KW on a number of kids, whom he called by name during a speech:

I want you to know what you’ve done. I want to tell you about seven-year-old Trevor who will be able to go to camp this year. Eleven-year-old Vanessa will be able to take art lessons. Nine-year-old Michael who is terribly overweight will be able to get physical activity. Nine-year-old Brittany was shy when she came to us. Now, she’s outgoing. A sixteen-year-old boy found a safe place to get away from gang colors.

But KW is more than a safe place of character building. When kids come back years later, they always tell us that they forget the programming but they remember the people. A few weeks ago, I was down at the grocery store. I ran into a 46-year-old man there. He came up to me and asked me, “Are you Mr. Carter from KW?” He came to KW. He said, “I still have a picture of when you [joined the staff] here.” That’s what you’re doing.

What Richard was doing was personalizing their donations. The kids, be they real or caricatured, came alive through his words, suggesting that donors’ money would affect individual kids in the same ways as these kids had been affected. At the same times, Richard was attributing the success to the donors’ actions by claiming “that’s what you’re doing.”

The resource developer routinely told kids’ stories during her formal presentations to potential donors, albeit in shortened form:

I usually like to say, tell a success story, something like that. Or put a dollar amount to the children. Like I said earlier, \$200 can send a kid to camp. \$500 is the yearly contribution. . . . In terms of bringing the child in or talking about the children, I talk about the programs and how our children benefit from the programs. Because basically it’s the programs that I sell.

She explained the technique and its effects this way:

And I think that’s one thing that [the executive director] and I always try to give to the board, as well so that they know, okay, in one year the life of child, for one fiscal year, for instance, what we have done. So give them actually an opportunity. . . . Okay, there is really a story behind it. I

mean, we don't make those stories up. I mean we could go to KW and every child would give me a story and one way or the other KW is involved in it.

Kidworks provided other forms of feedback that superficially spoke to the effectiveness of its programs, too. KW promotional materials and public events put kids' stories front and center. The annual report, described in chapter three, for example, highlighted Mark's story of struggle and redemption in school.

KW videos did the same thing. One created by the North Kidworks' young people showed kids responding to the question of "what do you learn from coming here." Kids said, "How to be nice to people. There are lots of activities," "They helped me out with my homework when I was struggling," and "It gives me respect. Discipline." Another video, shown frequently to potential volunteers, showed kids doing homework and smiling.

Public events, furthermore, created an image that the kids had struggled and KW had brought them newfound opportunities. Teens, especially those with compelling life stories, were invited to provide personal testimonials at these events. Their life stories followed a typical triumphant narrative: I grew up facing adversity, Kidworks gave me the support I needed, and now I am on the right path. A scholarship contestant, for example, told the judges (a group of mostly professional men), "When I was seven, I was adopted. I think my biggest obstacle in life was trying to put my past behind me. I witnessed a lot of alcohol and drugs, physical abuse. And I feel like I never want to be that way." In her application, she explained that Kidworks had given her a "place where I can learn and develop leadership skills. . . . Kidworks has had a huge impact on my life. I have always looked at it as a source of reassurance that no matter the circumstances, I could still make something of myself."

Many testimonials highlighted character transformation. In order to set up the transformation, then, they depicted tragedies that kids faced, including personal stories of abuse, addiction, or struggles at home. The applications for the Best and Brightest Youth contest, for example, routinely elicited stories about troubled home lives, drugs, and abuse. One girl told this story in an essay:

I lived in a single parent home all my life. When I was four, my father divorced my mother, leaving her to take care of two children. My brother and I had to take care of each other many nights and weekends because my mom was working two or three jobs to make ends meet. My

mother brought us to Kidworks hoping this would help her keep us safe and out of danger and trouble. I started coming to KW when I was just six years old. I remember my mother having trouble paying the rent and one day we had to leave and go live with my grandmother. Since my grandmother was old and didn't have many structured activities to do and her neighborhood was full of gang activity and drug dealers I was glad to have KW to go to after school and on weekends. . . . Watching my mom working hard to get us our own place and listening to her cry at night hurt. I also lost my brother who was my only male role model at the time to crime and the street life. My brother ended up in jail and this hurt my mother and me very much.

The teens signed release waivers so that the KW could use these compelling life stories in their marketing.

Kids' testimonials were so common that some kids' stories became well known and talked about among fundraisers and their friends. Nearly everyone associated with KW seemed to know Carl's life story. Samuel, a white volunteer and fundraiser, heard Carl's story at a youth summit, which took place at a board meeting. Warner facilitated the event. Samuel described the board meeting, which I did not attend, like this:

It was a board meeting and the teen summit. And so they did this teen summit that was absolutely phenomenal. . . . Some of the folks when they went to some event with KW nationally, they did a teen summit. And they took this concept and brought it back to Sherburne, which was they had three teens from sites sit there. They had a moderator ask them questions like, "What are your challenges? What does KW mean to you?" blah, blah, blah. And it was really fascinating to hear the impact. It made an impression on me. I think it made one on all the board members, so it was sort of getting that, because I'm sure a lot of them don't get to interact with the kids enough, and that was kind of to hear what the experiences were, and what the impact made.

He heard the compelling story of another girl who testified there, too:

She had said it had really made a difference in her life. She said yesterday her brother had gotten picked up for possession. And she said, while he was part of KW, he really wasn't as active as she was and didn't really participate in everything like she did. She felt like if it wasn't for KW, she'd be down that same road and instead she's thinking about college and just kind of a whole other aspect.

These testimonials were powerful because they highlighted the vulnerability and neediness of the Carl and the girl—and they left donors feeling like they could contribute directly to bettering their lives. KW could make the difference, as this girl's story projected. In turn, donors and potential donors could *see* the results of their work, as Karly wanted, and *feel* them, as Miranda wanted.

KW staff invited kids to participate in public events as hosts, too, which allowed outsiders to see, if only for a moment, well-behaved KW kids with middle-class character. Hosts greeted adults at the door

and escorted them to the appropriate room of the event. When potential board members came to KW, kids played tour guide. At other events, they did much more. At the Gala, kids opened the doors for whites as they entered Saks Fifth Avenue. They ushered them inside onto a red carpet and checked their overcoats, as the staff had trained them to do. Whites then enjoyed an evening of private shopping, wine, and upscale auctioning, as the kids played by the door. At a volunteer appreciation at a restaurant, staff paired kids with servers. They spent the first part of the night taking dinner orders and serving drinks.

Staff also invited kids to provide entertainment to board members, donors, and volunteers, which allowed them to see their money in action. For months, staff rehearsed Christmas carols with kids, which they performed for the board at the winter meeting. When the food was late at a volunteer orientation, Tamera called in the cheerleaders to shake our hands and talk to us as she bought time. Much to the delight of the volunteers, the girls also performed cheers and chants that declared KW to be the best. At the Gala, staff dressed boys in tuxedos because the event coordinator thought it would be cute. She was right. Throughout the evening, adults approached them to gush at their sweetness. When Gary first came out of the dressing room, for example, three groups of whites approached him saying, “You’re so handsome! Look at you. What a cutie!” For much of the night, eight-year-old Gary danced for and with his admirers. Staff members took photos of the kids in order to preserve the moment and post them on the website.

Testimonies of transformation, as well as involving kids as servers and entertainment, allowed professionals and businesspeople to see directly who they were helping. They provided a snapshot glimpse into the world of the kids, while highlighting their talents and successes. KW events and marketing materials, thus, put young people and their stories front and center in order to demonstrate anecdotally that people’s money would be well spent to support kids like the one in front of them.

### **Effects on Volunteers and Donors**

It was the public’s positive impression of KW, along with the opportunity to network through the organization that generated public support. Most people who came to KW had little knowledge about

KW or its mission outside of mere name recognition created by widely distributed television ads. In fact, none of the volunteers or donors I interviewed sought out Kidworks because of its mission. Rather, they happened upon the organization or had important connections to others volunteering there. Miranda had a business associate on the board who recommended that she join Professionals for Progress (PP), the mostly white fundraising group of young professionals. June had a friend on the board, but it was an invitation from another friend to PP social events that piqued her interest. Karly's parents were involved in starting up one of the sites. Board members nominated new potential members, generally from their social or business networks, and then invited them to serve. Edward applied for three jobs out of college and simply took the one with the highest pay. Ester ended up at a KW event because she wanted to boost her resume by increasing her hours volunteering.

KW, thus, offered a mixture of socialization with philanthropy, and volunteers and donors found those roles appealing and satisfying enough at first. June described Professionals for Progress as a "social club for a cause." She decided to join because she was "looking for a social outlet with people my age." In fact, PP's connection to Kidworks was wholly irrelevant to her. "Really I didn't join because of KW," June explained. "I joined because of my friend and because of the opportunity to put a means together that raised money for something." It was fundraising *itself* within a social atmosphere that was appealing, not KW. Her passion for Kidworks as an organization came later. At a volunteer appreciation event, Marissa described the appeal of PP this way:

It's an organization for young professionals who don't necessarily have the time or the desire to volunteer. I enjoy volunteering and I started off doing that, but not everyone does. This is a way for them to get involved in the community. It's a great organization. I mean 83 cents out of every dollar goes directly to the kids.

As Marissa became busier, her desires changed and she wanted to be involved more in the fundraising and social side of KW. Her interpretation of PP was reiterated by other Professionals, particularly those with the highest status positions (i.e., in real estate and finance): they were too busy, worked too late, or otherwise were uninterested in volunteering directly.<sup>18</sup> They viewed PP primarily as a social organization

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<sup>18</sup> A few Professionals did volunteer directly but most did not. Even fewer board members did.

where they could also do good work. “Through raising awareness,” Miranda explained the purpose of the group, “young professionals would have the opportunity to volunteer at KW, or give financially, or support KW in whatever way they saw fit from there.”

Other Professionals also reported joining primarily *through* and *for* social and professional networking contacts. Karly’s mother recommended she join for contacts: “She said it was a great professional networking group for one thing, and that they do a lot for KW. If I was going to get involved that would probably be the best avenue for me.” Miranda was “looking for something in terms of getting involved with the community” when a business associate, who was also a member of the board, recommended she look into KW’s burgeoning professionals group. “So that’s kind of how it happened,” she explained. “I kind of fell into it, and I knew it was a great cause, and I thought, “That is perfect.””

Wanda reported that what interested a lot of the board members and community fundraisers, with whom she worked closely, was the competition to raise more than others:

For lots of people it’s just competitive. So this competition among different teams or even individuals, I mean to that point even where I want to see some email or where I sent, well, to public side team captain and said well, we received a check from XYZ who was solicited by Y, and they said, “What?! How can Y dare to solicit my XYZ?”

And so, then it does not get ugly, but it really gets competitive. And it’s good because you want this kind of competition, and I’m telling you that guy did a hell of a job in raising funds with this kind of attitude, but sometimes it can be a little bit too much and then you question it. Team A beat team C. Team A raises \$40,700, team B raises only \$1,200, team C raised \$15,000. And then you know all of them. Money that comes in is being accredited to their account or their team. And then the team is the subcategory of the names of the individuals that contain that team. How to say it. . . they try to get as much as they can accredited to them. And to this point even where I just say, alright, I’m backing off. You take care over this corporation. If you need me, I’ll come with you. Corporations where I know the potential is much higher, or where it doesn’t work, it would be a damage for us.

For these high status community members, KW offered a fun environment where they could enjoy competing with others through their networking and fundraising prowess. It was not the mission, in other words, that drew whites to Kidworks.

## *Emotions*

Even though it was often social connections or an interest in expanding one's social network that brought professionals or businesspeople to KW, it took something more for them to come to see a nonprofit as their "charity of choice," as June thought of Kidworks. After all, businesspeople reported volunteering at a host of other places such as art museums, women's programs, and homeless shelters. Professionals at KW, like businesspeople in general (Hochschild 1997; Jacobs and Gerson 2004), also considered themselves extremely busy and pressed for time.

What business people needed was to feel like they were making a difference in a way that they could and should. They needed Kidworks to fill their emotional need to feel important and generous.

Through the public relations strategies described above, KW left the volunteers and donors feeling needed and thinking of themselves (and each other) as important, caring, and generous people. If the kids' history "breaks your heart," as June put it, then being part of the solution could swell it up.

Volunteers and sponsors gained tremendous emotional fulfillment from both extensive and limited involvement with KW. They considered their work and that of KW in general as reversing the kids' misfortune. A board member who was sponsoring several kids to go to college explained the effect she could have this way:

If I gave them mentoring, the extra things that I could put in front of them over the years of middle school and high school, when they went to college I could make a difference in their lives. Probably, I would say half of them would not go to college if I was not involved.

The sponsor saw her work as crucial for the kids whom she thought had few opportunities for college outside of her. But giving scholarships and personally mentoring *her* scholars was emotionally fulfilling to her because she knew that she "could make a difference in their lives."

Ester started volunteering and later worked at another KW facility. She was hooked after helping a child from an unstable home overcome his fear of water:

His grandma raised him . . . whenever his mom didn't want him. He never had a male figure in his life because her boyfriend was always in and out, broken up and stuff. And we would take them swimming in the summer. It would be me and [a staff member], and she wouldn't get in the water since she didn't like it. Well, I had all my clothes on one day, but [the autistic boy] was really terrified of the water, so he would just put his feet in. But you could tell he really wanted to get in. So I got in with all my clothes on, and he wrapped his legs and arms around me. His smile

and how happy he was melted my heart that day. And from then on I decided to stay and work with them.

Ester was able to bring happiness and fun to a boy who apparently otherwise lacked it. The experience “melted my heart,” she explained, and this sense of accomplishment motivated her to stay on at KW despite her father’s objections.

June felt this same sense of importance and effectiveness from her work with KW. She was part of Professionals for Progress and judged the Best and Brightest Youth contest. When I asked her to describe what was meaningful about her judging experience, she responded:

The kids, the “thank yous,” the hugs, the “I love you.” How much they need attention, how it tugs on your heart strings that they might not get the attention at home, how much KW is a source for them to get the attention and the guidance and the affirmation—to me is tops.

I asked Samuel if he had an emotional reaction to hearing the story of the involved girl and her brother above. He did:

Oh yeah. I mean you can’t help it. I mean, right off the bat the girl said that, you know? And I’ve been telling everybody that. It’s just such a real life example. You can read everything you want. You can study the stats and all the other stuff, but when you hear a kid say, “Look, we were in the same family. I got involved and my brother didn’t. He went one way. And I’m hoping he’ll come back.” You can’t have a better testimony.

For Samuel, the success of the girl involved with KW compared with the failure of her uninvolved brother seemed to prove KW’s effectiveness. He couldn’t “help” but feel moved by it, just as the board member, Ester, and June felt moved by the stories of others and the recognition they received from their involvement in Kidworks.

### *Pocketbooks*

The help KW kids needed was not just anybody’s help—it was the help of generous, self-sacrificing people like June, Ester, the board member, and other business people KW turned to for support. Public relations strategies were *designed* to demonstrate a problem, to personalize the problem in order to invoke an emotional reaction, and to frame public commitment and investment as part of the solution. Doing so could motivate potential donors to open their pocketbooks. This is just the effect that hearing kids’ stories as a Best and Brightest Youth contest judge had on June. Participating proved to her

That KW worked. That some of these people rose from some unlikely circumstances to really blossom. And that it's, especially a couple of the girls that I heard from, they so needed a place like this. I think that some of them were primed and ready, and this was such a blessing. It was just exactly the type of place they needed. And then I think there were some other people who never knew they needed a place like that so much. And I think in retrospect, they can see how it's helped them. It was impressive, I thought. . .

It reaffirms your commitment to doing what you can financially and with your time. And raising awareness. And [my husband and I] laughed about the applications 'cause we both read them all, and we said, "I don't know what I would of written about myself at that age," you know? I would like to think that I was well rounded and pleasant and inspirational and all that stuff, but the reality is those kids are just amazing. And my husband said something along the lines of, "I don't know what I would write [about myself in a personal essay] now that would top some of those stories." Really! I mean they were just so impressive.

As June's account shows, the kids' struggles and success stories, as highlighted in personal essays and testimonials, were "impressive" to her and her partner. This impression motivated them to donate money to Kidworks.

Hearing kids' stories had the same effect on Miranda, and she hoped it would have the same effect on young professional adults who attended KW events like the Gala. For this reason, she requested that kids participate in the event:

If I were just going [to the Gala] to have a good time and buy some auction items, and I see the kids at the door and I hear the little boy talk about what KW means to him, all of a sudden I'm thinking I need to buy more. I need to. Yeah, it's fun, and I want these things [auction items] anyways. But I'm going to be a little freer about my pocketbook 'cause I really see exactly where this is going. It was primarily a fundraising event, but it was also an awareness event anytime we do something for KW. So for people to really understand what KW is doing in the community I think is a big part of any event for KW or the PP.

Testimonials and highlighting kids' stories, then, impressed potential donors and motivated them to give money.

## **Conclusions**

Nonprofits face an increasingly competitive resource environment in which they compete directly with for-profit organizations and regulations tied to public funds. In response to this environment and plans for expansion to provide services to more and more Sherburne kids, Kidworks increasingly invested its energy and resources in public relations and marketing. The organization targeted private donations: individual donors (mostly white), white business networks, and white-owned

companies. Private donations, unlike government funds, came without contracts and formal regulations or restrictions.

Meyer and Rowan (1977; 1978) argued in their analyses of new institutionalism and the education system that there need not be a realistic understanding of what is happening within an organization or close accountability to outcomes for an organization to be perceived as reputable and legitimate in its work or as an investment. The opposite is actually true. A realistic understanding of the reality on the ground often impedes an organization's reputation by exposing people to negative information that potentially damages or shatters perceptions about effectiveness. An organization need only enact *myths* to create an *impression* that they are doing important work using institutionalized and well-accepted methods. Myths and rituals that maintain this impression are good enough to ensure legitimacy—as long as they are paired with professions of confidence and trust.

Kidworks' public relations efforts were designed to have just this effect on Sherburne's donating public. Public relations strategies served as myths which ensured that Kidworks appeared to be a legitimate nonprofit worthy of public investment through donations and volunteer hours. These strategies included professionalizing the staff, protecting the organization's image during times of crisis, recognizing donors and volunteers, and providing stories of success. Together, KW's public relations techniques had the desired effect. They demonstrated that the youth *needed* donors' and volunteers' contributions in order to be successful as adults. They convinced potential donors that *their* contributions would make a difference. They allowed business people to contribute using their preexisting talents and in ways that were *comforting* rather than discomfoting. Finally, they assured the public that KW produced *mainstream* citizens whom donors could feel good about supporting. Through its public relations efforts, Kidworks was framed as an organization worthy of volunteer and donor investment. Businesspeople who donated time or money, in turn, left KW not only with tax breaks but feeling fulfilled and accomplished, like they had made a real difference in the lives of kids who needed them in order to succeed.

KW's organizational myths turned out to be successful fundraising strategies. They allowed KW to boost its revenue and expand its vision to new program sites, even during a time of increasing competitiveness and accountability among nonprofits.

These marketing strategies, however, came at a cost. They created an environment that used black staff and kids in order to bolster the image of the organization. Kids' stories of heartache and struggle became commodities to manufacture a sense of vulnerability. Kids were framed as innocent victims—of poor parenting and black culture—whose potential for success was attached to specific dollar amounts. Putting these stories on display evoked a sense of compassion and guilt designed to generate pity among whites. This pity, in turn, was relieved through financial contributions that donors believed would solve the problems the kids faced. Relieving anxiety through a financial contribution was emotionally gratifying and easy. And donors did not have to get their hands dirty. They only had to encounter the kids after their problems appeared to be solved—and from a safe distance and on comfortable terms.

KW's public relations strategies, furthermore, were assimilationist. It was only by meeting white expectations and fitting into white culture that staff and kids received validation. In fact, the codes of conduct and public events *required* staff and kids to display middle-class presentations of self and self-determination, lest they risked losing the competition or being rebuked as “unprofessional” or incompetent. It was this white-washed version of KW that administrators and board members presented to the public. The public relations narratives reinforced the image that it was black families and black culture that disadvantaged the kids. White people's culpability and responsibility, thus, disappeared. The problems that the kids and staff faced, of course, were much bigger than could be solved with a couple of thousand dollars, as I demonstrate through the eyes of the black staff in the next chapter.

## chapter six: Strategic Assimilation

*I deal with a lot of non-minorities on a daily basis that I wouldn't ever deal with in my regular life. But it's for the betterment of kids who look like me. And I really look at it that way. If I have to smile in somebody's face that I know may not really like me and would never hang in the same circles as I do or speak to me in the street, if I have to smile at you until you hand me that check, I'm going to smile. 'Cause I'm going to know that it's probably going to go in some kind of fund that's going to help them in the long run. And more than anything, it's about creating opportunities for these kids (Tasha, black woman, full-time staff).*

A century ago, W.E.B. Du Bois (2004) argued in *The Souls of Black Folk* that African Americans develop a “double consciousness,” an internal and psychological bifurcation of the self. This split arises from living in and trying to fit into two different worlds: spaces dominated by and identified with white Americans and those particular to African Americans:

It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness,—an American, a Negro; two warring souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.

The result is a dualistic experience of oneself as simultaneously an insider and outsider (Collins 1998; Collins 2000; Smith 1987; Sprague 1997).

For middle-class black Americans, this double consciousness is even more complex as they shift between class-heterogeneous environments to race-heterogeneous ones. They often live and worship in black-dominated spaces but work in and patronize businesses in white-dominated spaces (Collins 1997; Denton and Massey 1988; Feagin and Sikes 1994; Lacy 2004; Massey and Fischer 1990; Neckerman, Carter, and Lee 1999). This bifurcated life creates an assortment of unique problems for middle-class black Americans: they experience more discrimination and prejudice, often feel lonely and isolated, and face the demands to fit in to both a white middle-class culture and working-class black one. When it comes to socializing children, middle-class black Americans are left with a bind: to teach their children to see and deal with racism and risk overwhelming them, or to downplay the extent of racism and risk leaving children unprepared (Feagin and Sikes 1994).

On one level, Kidworks was thought of and experienced by the black direct-care staff and volunteers as a white-dominated work space. As I showed in the previous chapter, KW's administration,

the board, and fundraising volunteers (Professionals for Progress) were overwhelmingly white and male. They served as the public face of Kidworks and crafted its public image. They also created KW's formal policies, including a code of conduct for the staff, and they supervised direct-care workers so that they had the authority to hire and fire. White administrators set the pay for full-time direct-care workers and enforced staff expectations. I illustrate below that the staff experienced the control asserted over them as racialized and resented it.

At the same time, Kidworks as an organization was dominated by colorblindness and multiculturalism that hid race (Bobo, Kluegel, and Smith 1997; Bonilla-Silva 2001; Carr 1997; Collins 2000; Frankenberg 1993; Gallagher 2003; Wellman 1993). Colorblind ideologies and discourses suggest not only that a society *should* be colorblind—that race should play no part in determining a person's life chances—but that the U.S. now *is* colorblind. That is, racism has ended, and meritocracy determines life chances. At Kidworks, discourse on race was surprisingly lacking, particularly among whites. When it did occur, race was presented as multiculturalism or cultural diversity. In other words, race was reduced to cultural differences, implying that it is cultural superiority or inferiority that allows one group or another to get ahead or fall behind. Research by Bonilla-Silva (2001), Wellman (1993), Perry (2001; 2002), and Frankenberg (1993) illustrate that colorblindness camouflages racism. It transforms whiteness and white-typed attributes into the norm. At Kidworks, it prevented direct acknowledgement of white domination.

At the same time, Boyworks and Girlworks were experienced and constructed as black-identified spaces on the ground. They were located in a mostly black neighborhood. The kids they served were overwhelmingly black, as were the workers. Direct-care staff, furthermore, had autonomy over what happened within the BW and GW facilities. They retained authority over other direct-care workers and their programs. The program directors managed their individual facility. They could, for example, hire and fire part-time staff. They also began to run their own budget, which was formerly controlled by the administration. Program directors generally passed along autonomy to the PE and education directors, too, who implemented their programs with autonomy. The staff's flexibility ensured that they could create a black cultural environment (Hall 1993). Staff honored black heroes, played call-and-response

games with the girls, did soul train, and listened to gospel and hip-hop music for fun. The workers, thus, were able to create black-identified spaces at GW and BW, even within a white-controlled organization.

In this chapter, I analyze the construction of race relations within Kidworks, paying particular attention to the precarious dualistic position of the black direct-care staff and volunteers and the ways in which they strategically assimilated in this position. I begin by analyzing the dominant race ideology within Kidworks: colorblindness. I show that whites within Kidworks consciously constructed an ideologically colorblind environment by presenting race as multiculturalism. They reduced race to cultural difference, camouflaging racism within the organization itself. They also framed racism as unimportant.

Next, I turn to the black direct-care staff's experience of race within Kidworks and their interpretations of these experiences. Despite the ideological colorblindness, reality at Kidworks was race driven, and the black direct-care workers viewed the organization as unfairly racially stratified. The staff resented the unequal opportunities and status differences within KW, as well as the impersonal and controlling management style of the administration. Within this context, the staff knew they could make "no excuses."

In the third section, I analyze three ways that the staff strategically assimilated to working in an ideological colorblind setting despite the race-driven reality. I show that they deflected attention away from whites and whiteness, particularly when interacting with whites. The staff also constructed worker identities around love and care for the kids—an identity that existed in opposition to white-identified compensation through big money and status. Finally, they constructed themselves as a family and tried to create a family-type environment for the kids. Through these strategies, the staff managed to reformulate Girlworks and Boyworks into comfortable, black-identified spaces. I conclude by arguing that the staff wanted the kids to adopt similar sorts of strategies and appropriated the mission of Kidworks to reflect it. They transformed the cultural transformation mission from race-neutral to one intended to buffer the effects of white racism. The mission for the black staff, thus, was one of code switching rather than assimilation.

## **Colorblindness**

Race and racism remained hidden at the highest levels of Kidworks. Although the organization served mostly black kids and had three program sites serving almost all black kids, racism was rarely discussed openly. When whites did discuss racism, they framed it as an unfortunate reality that was part of the “real world.” Most often, race was discussed as “cultural” differences. As a result, racism remained veiled behind the public presentation of multiculturalism and “diversity” inside the buildings themselves, in the media, and through KW programming. White administrators created this colorblind environment and shared it as their own ideological perspective on race.

Kidworks made a concerted effort to provide a broad racial representation of its clientele. Kidworks National, for example, created a series of posters to convey a message of racial inclusivity. Each one had a young person of a different race acting out one of five program areas. The five posters symbolically represented the full range of young people served by Kidworks programs: blacks, whites, East Asians, West Asians, and American Indians. These posters lined the walls at Girlworks, as did laminated construction paper signs marking everyday objects with their Spanish translations. The covers of the life-skills and prevention curricula manuals showed diversity with at least one kid who appeared white, one who appeared black and one who appeared to be Asian or Latino. The pictures left the impression that KW served a wide range of people and was culturally inclusive and sensitive.

Kidworks administrators in Sherburne constructed and projected this same message of openness and inclusivity to the donating public. Any pictures in the media represented Kidworks as multicultural rather than as black-dominated. Advertisements for volunteers ran monthly in a local newspaper. They showed a circle of kids on their backs: half of whom were black, half who were not black. Videos shown to volunteers flashed back and forth between white kids and black kids, white staff and black staff. On the website, the front page photograph for Girlworks showed a smiling staff member surrounded by girls, including three of a handful of non-black girls who regularly attended. The cover of the annual report showed three white girls, one white boy, and two black girls (both of whom are shown upside-

down). The following page had six kids lined in a row, each with a differently colored complexion. The other pictures in the report displayed a similar rainbow of kids.

Administrators consciously represented Kidworks in this way as a form of organizational dramaturgy. They requested, for example, that staff bring a “diverse” representation of kids to public events. The events were intended to display the full range of kids that Kidworks served as a whole rather than a proportional representation. This provided a diversified picture of Kidworks by race, age, and gender. Tamera described the reasoning like this:

Tamera: You need a black kid. Like you need a representation of each part of your KW. So we have Hispanic kids at KW, so you make sure you have a Hispanic kid. You have a white kid, you have a black kid. You have a... anything you can do. You need to make it a good diverse looking group at least.

Carissa: What is the hope that that will do?

Tamera: To show the reflection of the KW. It doesn't show the actual [representation of KW's young people]—we're not 25 percent each way—but it shows a reflection of KW, supposedly. So people understand that we're not just reaching out to the African American community. That we do have a huge Hispanic population.

Even though Kidworks primarily *did* serve black youth and their families, to represent itself as doing so apparently conveyed a closed image of Kidworks as important *only* to African Americans. Having a black kid, a white kid, and a Latino kid suggested that Kidworks was an equal opportunity program, an organization that served—and was important to—an assortment of race and ethnic groups.

A newspaper article about the inclusion of white Latino kids at KW's mostly African American program facilities made this message clear, too. An article entitled “Promoting Unity” ran in a local newspaper. The accompanying picture showed a Latino boy and a black boy playing pool together. It read, in part:

Kidworks in West Sherburne is trying to bridge the divides between Hispanics and African-Americans by knocking down language barriers and using activities to promote togetherness. Kidworks leaders hope their efforts to reduce tension between the two groups will serve as a model for the greater community. . . .

When Hispanic youngsters started showing up at the predominantly black Boyworks and Girlworks, tension between the two groups was evident in the name calling and other forms of behavior.

“The black kids called them ‘tacos’ and ‘bean pickers,’” a staff member said.

For their part, some Hispanic parents bought into stereotypes about African-Americans as violent and feared for their kids' safety, another staff member said.

For three years, officials at the Sherburne Kidworks have been working through the prejudices to foster unity and cultural appreciation between the youngsters and their parents.

The article continued by describing the influx of Latino immigrants to the area, KW's outreach efforts to increase their participation in programs (an uphill battle, according to the article, because Latino parents "don't trust our kids to any organization"), and the black kids' changing attitudes. A black teenager who attended KW was quoted as saying that she thought the changes were positive: "[Latinos] can teach us a lot," she said. "I want to learn about different cultures. I have a Spanish class, and being here has helped me." The article portrayed KW as increasingly inclusive and cohesive to the point of racial harmony, although the reality at Boyworks in particular was much different. I often heard the Latino kids at Boyworks called names, and I saw them left out of games. But by displaying diversity, Kidworks was claiming that everyone got along there, and race and ethnicity were largely irrelevant. Race was supposed to be invisible because brown and black and white faces could all be present and could all get along with each other.

### *Race as Cultural Difference*

The institutional message about race at Kidworks was more than one of inclusion. The message was one of colorblindness and post-racism in which equal opportunity and racial harmony are interpreted as current realities (Bobo, Kluegel, and Smith 1997; Bonilla-Silva 2001; Carr 1997; Collins 2000; Gallagher 2003). Portraying all races and ethnicities allowed people to pretend to be blind to race altogether—or more accurately, to see race as little more than superficial difference. Gallagher (2003) argued that colorblindness was part of a larger commodification of diversity and black culture. The "new color-blind ideology does not, however, ignore race," he explained. "It acknowledges race while disregarding racial hierarchy by taking racially coded styles and products and reducing these symbols to commodities or experiences that whites and racial minorities can purchase and share." Race, then, is reduced to differences in culture rather than hierarchy or inequality. Doing so allows whites to consume products that represent other cultures while disregarding the consequences for non-whites.

Insofar as race itself was directly represented at Kidworks, it was represented this way. Curricula materials and staff represented race in cultural terms as differences in preferences. They aimed to teach

kids to recognize cultural differences as such and to value them all. For example, the introduction to the “valuing difference” chapter in the Mighty Kids curriculum explained the purpose of the two-month lesson plan as “based on the understanding that acceptance of cultural diversity requires one to recognize and respect his or her own cultural identity as well as those of others. Thus, creating an environment where differences can be acknowledged, discussed, and validated is paramount.” In the Man-To-Man curriculum, facilitators explained the benefits of diversity:

- The more you learn about other people, cultures and societies, the less you will fear them.
- Tolerant people themselves are more self-confident and comfortable in all kinds of situations.
- Learning about other people’s differences can make life more interesting.

The Mighty Kids sessions focused on diversity, communication skills, introspection about how participants feel about themselves, the influence of the media on “how they view and accept, or do not accept, others,” individual identity, and group identity. The lessons together fostered reflection upon and acceptance of an assortment of people’s differences. The Man-To-Man curriculum took a slightly more critical perspective by asking boys to explain the harms of stereotypes such as Mexicans are illegal immigrants, Italians are the mafia, and African American males are dangerous.

Within the first lesson of Mighty Kids, though, race became another innocuous characteristic of difference. Young people were instructed to identify themselves as having “been there, done that,” just like breaking a bone, meeting a famous person, or marching in a parade. In the next step, young people were to give examples of what diversity looks like to them before categorizing each as either “things I can change” or “things I can’t change.” By highlighting all of the differences, young people were supposed to see the value in their similarities and differences.

Race as cultural difference was the lesson in a brand new program designed to “celebrate diversity” that had not yet been implemented at Kidworks during my observations. The annual report featured this new curriculum in order to celebrate its message. The byline explained that the new program would “help young people cultivate individuality, build cultural identity, and appreciate diversity.” The program had boys do research on a country, for example, to learn about its “values and traditions.” The

boys were then supposed to dress in traditional garb and eat traditional food. The accompanying picture showed a white boy and a black boy shaking hands in front of a homemade sign that read “Diversity.” Being inclusive at Kidworks, consequently, implied being blind to race and ethnicity with the exception of supposedly innocuous differences in cultural practices. The teen’s perspective in the newspaper article above suggested “unity” because she could enjoy learning about Latino culture, particularly Spanish. The boy quoted in the annual report favored Chinese culture because “they’re big on education like I am.”

White administrators, workers, and volunteers at Kidworks also advocated this cultural approach to race. An exchange with Edward, a white administrator, during an interview illustrated his perspective. I asked him if his work with black kids prompted addressing any issues in particular. I was referring to how kids deal with racism, but Edward answered in terms of cultural differences he observed:

I have noticed, you know, certain behaviors. Something as simple as . . . and this might sound strange to you, what would be a good example? Uh. . . (Long pause) All of this is anonymous. I kind of feel weird saying. . . I’ve noticed black boys. Okay, noticed my black males, my young black males, are a lot more physical than my young white males. They’re not, I wouldn’t call it aggressive. I don’t classify. . . They’re just physical. They’re going to hit you in the back of the head and run and want you to chase them. I’ve noticed that. And they’re a lot louder. Just in general tone in speech. Sometimes I look at them, “My god, I’m standing right here! You’re screaming at me.” I’ve noticed that.

And another thing I’ve noticed is there’s not as much diversity within their own race as there is with the white kids. And what I mean by that is cultural diversity. In other words, if you weren’t around KW today, a lot of all the kids, black kids, dress exactly alike. And then you look at the white kids, and there’s a lot of diversity in how they’re dressed. And some of them are dressed like the black kids, if you understand what I mean.

So I’ve noticed things, but I don’t try to deal with them any differently because of those differences. In other words, I see those things, and I understand them. But we have our expectations of the kids we work with, and I try to lift them all to those expectations. Now, how I might do it with one kid as opposed to another kid is not based on, it’s usually not based on cultural differences.

The other way cultural difference would come into play would be how I would deliver that expectation. How I would kind of bring them along. I’m going to make them try to rise to that expectation. How I give it to them, I might do a little differently because it is a girl or it’s a guy or it’s a teen guy or an eight-year-old girl or a teen boy as opposed to a nine-year-old boy. But I’m going to hold them all to the same standard and try to push them towards the same expectation.

According to Edward, there were clear cultural differences between white and black kids. White kids themselves were quite diverse, while black kids were more homogeneous. He also thought that black boys were “physical” and talked loudly for no apparent reason. These cultural distinctions were noteworthy to Edward, but they marked differences and not inequality to him.

When Jonie, a young white woman, started working part-time at Girlworks, she was shocked to walk into a room full of black kids. Her hometown after-school programs had only white kids, and she had no idea that Girlworks was located in a mostly black neighborhood or served mostly black kids. She said that she adjusted pretty quickly. She noticed “myself doing, saying things differently or acting a little bit differently just because of the way they act. And I don’t really think of it, it’s kind of just a subconscious [thing]. That’s how everyone around me is acting so it’s kind of how I act.” In this account, Jonie was explaining that she drew upon her newly learned cultural capital to adjust her self-presentation at Kidworks. She changed her speech patterns, for example: “I’ll say ‘ya’ll’ or talk like, ‘What ya’ll gotta be doin’ that for?’” In an essay she wrote for a college class on her experiences at Kidworks, Jonie described what she interpreted as her cultural conformity like this:

I also noticed some conformity on my part. The building is located in southwest Sherburne, and many of the children there come from low income, African American, single parent families. When I talk to these kids and their parents and notice I speak differently than if I was speaking with a family in the neighborhood I grew up in. Without really thinking about it, I use different words and a different tone than I usually would. Instead of saying “You guys need to take turns,” like I naturally would, I might say “Y’all gotta take turns.” After I hear myself say something like that I think to myself, “What am I saying?”

Jonie interpreted her changed speech patterns as a matter of adjusting to the cultural norms of the black kids she was around. She wrote that she usually talked in a way that was more proper or grammatically correct than many of the players and their parents: “They use more slang (sista, girl), double negatives (“I ain’t got no...”), and contractions [sic] (gotta, hafta, gonna). I tried to fit in and be more like them by talking in the same way. I did not want them to think that I thought I was better than them because I spoke in a more sophisticated manner.” It was these cultural differences that Jonie found interesting and highlighted as the racialized aspect of her experience at Kidworks. Jonie, thus, reduced race to innocuous differences in speech patterns that she could learn and use over time with no consequence.

Race as whites constructed it through their personal ideologies and programs, thus, was little more than cultural differences. To see diversity, then, was a positive thing because it meant people could enjoy each other’s cultural differences through consumption of them. A volunteer training on diversity led by a Latino staff member promoted this message of multiculturalism. He defined the goal of the

presentation as “to begin or continue the process of building increased awareness, understanding, and appreciation of all the actual diversity that has come to characterize our culture but, especially our Kidworks.” Later, he explained that diversity was “all about accepting, respecting and embracing differences of others.”

### *Racism as Unimportant*

Within this colorblind framework, whites at KW constructed racism as overt discriminatory actions carried out by prejudiced individuals. As Edward implied above, noting cultural differences did not seem to make someone racist. Rather, racism meant treating people differently because of their race in ways that whites deemed harmful. People were supposed to enjoy each other’s cultural differences but treat everyone as if they were the same by, in Edward’s words, “push[ing] them towards the same expectation.”

This perspective superficially acknowledged racial inequality but not as something widespread or out of the control of the kids. White administrators and volunteers, for example, recognized that black kids faced unique barriers and that some white people continued to discriminate, but they saw that as an annoying part of living in the “real world.” They thought racism was a small something to deal with rather than draw attention to or complain about. A fundraising volunteer named June, by her account, grew up “ignorantly blissful” and oblivious to racism. It was not until she encountered a “lot of diversity” during high school (i.e., black students) that she became aware of any tensions around race. She attributed the problems she saw to poverty. She implied that Kidworks combated the poverty and racism, though, because as she explained, “Kidworks sort of piles all types of people from all types of different challenging backgrounds into one pot.”

Racism was not an impediment in the eyes of the chair of the board either. She explained that she wanted kids to “know that the world is larger than what they experience every day, and they don’t have to let their family circumstances hold them back.” She mentored kids by informing them that “in

the business world, people are going to judge you on how you present yourself, it's just the way it is." The kids, thus, were supposed to adjust their behavior and clothing to match the employer's tastes.

During his interview, Edward said that employers discriminated against kids who walked into a job interview with a do rag, earrings, and "hat cocked to the side." "They are going to make a conclusion about you without talking to you." It was up to the kids to prevent people from drawing those conclusions, according to Edward. He told black kids that it was not right for people to treat them that way but that is the "real way the world works." When several kids protested to him "that ain't right. I ain't playing that game," Edward downplayed racism. He tried to convince kids that it was people in power who got to make the rules, and kids' protests were overblown. He told them:

"That's a decision you have to make. Understand when you choose not to 'play that game,' you've isolated yourself even more. For you to really be able to rub that guy's nose in it, you're going to have to be on this side of him [on the hiring side]. And I hope you do. I hope you start your own company. You hire whoever you want to hire and go specifically on their abilities, but I'm telling you that's the way, unfortunately, the world works." So I had those conversations with them. I've seen kids never catch on to that. And you [Carissa] have probably dealt with kids that are constantly saying, "They're keeping me down. They're keeping me down. They're keeping me out." They don't take any. . . and some of them might be, yes, keeping you out. But have you [kids] met them anywhere towards the middle?

During this exchange, even though Edward acknowledged racism existed to some degree, he viewed it as the kids' responsibility to meet employers "anywhere towards the middle" to prevent it. Racism, as the whites at Kidworks thought of it, then, was more of an annoyance than anything else. It was not something to complain about or, as Edward implied, an excuse for not achieving. Rather, kids were supposed to fit employers' expectations, regardless of the cost.

In sum, Kidworks defined race and racism through these public representations, programs, and interpretations. Race consisted of cultural differences cloaked in discourses of multiculturalism, diversity, and tolerance for difference. Difference was good from this perspective as it added choices and made life more exciting. Through this definition, diversity became a mode of self-expression and, therefore, something to tolerate in others as an individual characteristic. It was also something to enjoy through consumption. This framework allowed whites to construct race and racism as largely unimportant. Next, I turn to the role that race played at Kidworks and the staff's interpretation of it.

## Race-Driven Reality

The reality at Kidworks as direct-care staff interpreted it, however, differed substantially from that depicted through multiculturalism and colorblindness. Reality at Kidworks was race-driven because the organization was run by whites. At Kidworks, it was not just administrators (and some full-time workers) who controlled hiring, firing, and pay, but *white* administrators who did so. They also controlled the staff's psychological wellbeing by praising or humiliating them. Thus, there was a significant pay gap between white and black employees, despite the professionalization of direct-care workers. The executive director earned between two and three and a half times more money a year than the full-time direct-care staff. The program director of Boyworks made good money and the most money of the black staff: \$47,000. He received this pay because KW matched his salary after he left for another job. The program director of Girlworks, however, was paid several thousand dollars less.<sup>19</sup> A black director of another program, who had a master's degree, made just over \$31,000 a year. Casey, who was employed full-time at GW, made about \$28,000 a year. Most of the other black staff were part-time workers. Their wages topped out around \$8 an hour<sup>20</sup>. With the exceptions of the BW and GW program directors, then, the pay was pretty dismal. There was only one black person in administration, and she just recently became full-time and benefited. She had a college degree and made \$28,500 until a pay raise of fifteen percent in 2006.

There proved to be a shorter promotion ladder for black staff because there were so few opportunities for promotion, and whites typically got promoted into administration. The former program director of BW, a black man, had worked at KW for around thirty years but was never promoted into administration, even though a white woman employee under him was. By age 30, then, the program directors at GW and BW already had as much authority as they likely would, regardless of their tenure at KW. Other full-time workers (PE directors, education directors) had no chance for mobility unless a

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<sup>19</sup> The program directors of GW and BW had worked there for the same number of years and had the same amount of education. Boyworks also enjoyed a larger budget: around \$150,000 a year as compared to only \$100,000 a year for GW, even though GW had higher attendance rates.

<sup>20</sup> Compare this to the \$10 an hour wage for part-time workers at North Kidworks, which had full-time white staff who served a higher proportion of white kids.

program director left the organization. Whites who were employed full-time within Kidworks, however, expected to be promoted as soon as a position opened up because administrators made them promises that they would.

Kidworks was typical of other organizations in that administrators made more money than workers. Several factors, however, inhibited the direct-care workers from critiquing the pay and opportunity structure within Kidworks in terms of class inequality or capitalism. Workplace positions in capitalist economies by definition vary in pay, promotion opportunity, and autonomy with administrators and middle managers having better rewards than workers (Wright 1997). The same pattern exists in nonprofits, too, where high CEO compensation has come under increasing scrutiny over the past few years by the U.S. Senate and the IRS. The current average compensation package for a CEO of a nonprofit in human services is \$114,922<sup>21</sup>. The pervasion of differences by position make them seem normal, if not natural and inevitable, while the evaluation of those positioned better as superior legitimates these differences (Della Fave 1980).

At Kidworks, the direct-care workers did not question whether some positions deserved better rewards. Part-time direct-care workers, for example, did not complain that full-time workers were paid more because they assumed that the staff's degrees, experience, and extensive involvement in the organization warranted more. The administration and board encouraged this perspective by telling the staff that professionals deserved to be paid like professionals. White volunteers, similarly, did not find it problematic if administrators made more money than direct-care workers because, they presumed, administrators had special business skills and experience that direct-care workers did not. The nonprofit status of KW and the fact that the organization specialized in childcare, a typically low-paying field, also prevented direct-care workers from thinking of themselves as exploited as workers. When direct-care workers first came to work at Kidworks, consequently, they expected low pay because nonprofit and childcare positions, they believed, rarely paid well. The one area in which direct-care workers showed

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<sup>21</sup> This figure includes salary, cash bonuses, and unusually large expense accounts but not contributions to benefit plans or deferred compensation. Data come from Charity Navigator's 2006 CEO Compensation Study of nonprofit tax returns.

class consciousness was in the form of resentment over the expectation that they prioritize their work over everything else (including their families) and that they work long and odd hours. Workers expressed frustration over these two things, both of which they seemed to attribute to administrators and their expectations.

It was the correlation of the opportunity structure with race that more significantly shaped direct-care workers' interpretations of their exploitation. Research shows that the stratification of power, authority, and access to resources along race lines means that they get *experienced* as racialized by people of color (Tyson, Darity, and Castellino 2005). Black staff at Kidworks, in fact, experienced the differences in pay and promotion at KW as racialized and their exploitation as race-based. The full-time workers aligned themselves with the part-time workers, even though they had education levels and benefits more like administrators.<sup>22</sup> It was the full-time black staff members who especially resented the racial and gender hierarchy at Kidworks<sup>23</sup> because they used administrators as their frame of reference. Low relative pay and a lack of opportunity for upward mobility, for example, were common complaints among black employees, and it became a frequent point of conversation between the full-time staff and me. Darin complained that “they do just enough to keep you here.” Staff did not know the ED’s specific income, yet they clearly knew that he made significantly more than they did because they complained about his “six figure salary.” One told me that he “made lots of green money.”

Several staff members directly attributed their lack of promotion to racism and sexism among their supervisors. Louise referred to an administrator as “racist” and “sexist.” Tamera explained that “I think [that he] believes that there are certain jobs that are meant for women and others that aren’t.” That meant that any program sites with boys should be headed by men so that they could have men as role models. The education director at Boyworks applied to be the program director at the all-black facility across the street from a housing project. She believed that she was never considered for the job because she was a woman:

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<sup>22</sup> Full-time direct-care workers were also salaried like administrators, rather than waged like part-time workers.

It was conveyed to me [by someone else who applied] that no female would ever be a director of any of those Kidworks except the GW because it is female. You can apply and we [the administration] will listen to it. And we'll go through the whole spiel with you. But right out of the gate, we are never going to consider you for the position because you're a female.

Several other black employees also believed that Girlworks would be the only site with a woman program director—because boys supposedly needed men in charge and GW was the only site that served only girls. Even though administrators promised the program director of Boyworks a promotion to administration when he retired, the black staff believed that a white male full-time worker at North Kidworks would get the position instead. They gossiped that Richard, an administrator, was really upset—to the point of yelling—when he resigned to take another position because it wrecked the vision for Kidworks leadership in the future.

#### *Exclusion from Decision Making*

Staff members and volunteers, black and white alike, universally appreciated the work that the board and the administration did for the organization. They viewed the board members as generous with their money, and most believed that they had a genuine interest in helping the organization and kids. When board members knew of GW or BW needs, they often responded immediately. For example, board members who were touring Boyworks during a “quality check” assessment noticed a lack of storage space in the teen room. They bought bookshelves. Some board members and fundraising volunteers devoted copious amounts of time and energy to fundraising. At Christmas time, they bought kids bikes. One board member was sponsoring the college education of five kids. The board as a group helped reestablish a family who fled Hurricane Katrina by furnishing their apartment and giving them clothes.

Even so, some staff and black volunteers noticed the racial makeup of the board and found it problematic. It meant that whites alone were making decisions for black kids' lives. This was the

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<sup>23</sup> Not all of the workers were aware of other people's pay. Those staffers, all part-time workers, had little contact with the administration. They considered their low pay as typical of wages at a nonprofit or in caregiving professions. These were typically young workers who showed less class-consciousness than their coworkers.

complaint of Yolanda, a black middle-aged volunteer. She had raised the issue with staff in the past and thought, “It’s probably time for me to raise [the issue] again. The board should more closely represent the people they serve. . . Surely we could have some Hispanic board members, some black board members.” Louise boldly labeled the makeup of the board as “discriminatory. ‘Cause there are a lot of competent money-making black people that I feel that qualify for the board. And I think that was a choice. I don’t think you just happen to pick an entire board of all white people.” To pick a board of all white people, however, implied that black adults were somehow not qualified to serve on it.

Even though he appreciated their financial generosity, Darin felt like the board and the administration devalued the direct-care workers’ contributions to the organization. The board raised money for the organization, he explained, but it was the good work of the staff that allowed them to do so. “*We’re* the reason why they can make the decisions,” he appealed. “We are the reason why they can go out and claim all this money. Our staff, here at Kidworks—we’re just as important as anybody.” Even though they made some major policy decisions for the organization and served as its public face, many board members, Darin had witnessed, did not know the most basic information about it. Staff members filled in the holes when they attended board meetings, including “demographics, what programs do you run,” according to Darin. He added, “They don’t know that.” The lack of knowledge about the organization by its most public figures left staff and their work feeling invisible.

And it seemed that white board members and fundraising volunteers did not really *want* to get to know them or the kids, from the staff’s perspective. Darin explained it like this:

Their job is to make policy and make money. That’s what they do and that’s the only time they interact with us on an informal level. They don’t come in and see the kids and volunteer. Not since I’ve been here. They don’t come in volunteering and help a kid play a game of pool. I’ve never seen them do that. And when they do come it’s always a shock to the kids.

The “shock” was that they dressed in ways that highlighted their importance and higher class status by wearing suits and ties. As I had learned from my own experiments with dress during my time at KW, preteens and teenagers reacted poorly to professionally dressed whites. Suits or other business attire reinforced the kids’ perceptions that whites were rich and had little in common with them. It also seemed to conjure up the feelings of resentment that some kids felt towards their white teachers, who were the

prominent white people in their lives. On top of that, whites' professional dress prevented them from playing with the kids.

From time to time, the staff tried to stave off their and the kids' discomfort with professionally dressed whites: "We try to tell them, when you come in and see our kids, don't come in here with your suits and ties on." But they did. In fact, on the rare occasions that I saw board members at KW (usually on a tour of the buildings), they were always dressed in professional attire. When board members *did* come to Kidworks, then, they did it in such a way that marked them as superior to the kids and staff whom they were supposed to be serving. The kids responded with skepticism, particularly the teenagers, according to Darin: "Y'all never come up here. Why are you trying to talk to us now? That's the type of attitude they have, and it's the truth."

#### *Impersonal and Directive Management*

More problematic, and a source of growing resentment, were the ways in which the whites within Kidworks, especially the administration and the board, *treated* black staff members. They were offended by the corporate management style of administrators especially. Sharice and Tasha referred to Kidworks as the "good ol' boys" and an "ol' boys club." Black staff felt as if they were invisible to the administration except when they needed them to do the grunt work or to project an appealing image of KW. They felt like "peons," in Sharice's words.

Nearly from the beginning of my observations I noticed this disconnect, a separation in both space and communication, between the black direct-care staff and the white administration. Even though the administration was located inside the same building as Girlworks, I rarely saw administrators and direct-care workers interact. It was routine, in fact, for administrators to come into the GW program area to use the restroom but not greet any of the staff or girls. On several occasions, an administrator greeted me with a smile or a hello but no one else. The staff noticed this, too, which left them feeling invisible. The GW program director especially felt insulted by it because she had regular contact with the administration. She felt like she deserved better treatment:

I don't know if [an administrator] has a problem with women in authority, but he can walk through this building all day and not speak to us at all. The program director from Boyworks and I can be standing right there, [I'm] talking to him. And [the administrator will] walk right up, "Hey, [BW director], hey how ya doing?" You know that type of stuff, and I'm like, just keep right on going. Like, okay, I've been here all day [and I should keep on going.] That type of stuff.

This disconnect extended to other aspects of work life, as well. When I walked into the administration offices one day, I noticed a sign on the copy machine that read "This copy machine is for administration use only!" At the time, the GW copy machine was broken. Another time, a group of us were setting up for a special event, and Sheryl, an administration assistant, was sweeping the floor. This menial labor was apparently beneath her position because another administrator found it to be ridiculous: "The assistant is sweeping the floor!" she laughed. The direct-care staffers enjoyed their autonomy from the administration, made a point out of avoiding them, and even feared asking for things, particularly the women. One female employee told me, "I don't like going back there talking to [an administrator] period. I hate going back there. He might say yes, but I just don't like approaching him to ask him for anything."

At the same time, the administration expected the workers to uphold a "professional"—and not too street—appearance when in public as dictated by the executive director. These expectations were communicated through staff packets and training. When staff broke expectations or simply did not follow the code of conduct, staff reported, Richard especially reprimanded them, humiliated them, or made them feel guilty. Richard, for example, personally reprimanded Ben for driving the bus with a hat on<sup>24</sup>. After another staff member resigned, he yelled—in a staff meeting in front of all the other staff—"I hope you go to hell!" Tamera witnessed him reprimand his assistant because the building keys were missing. Staff felt humiliated by these experiences.

The staff not so affectionately referred to Richard's style of management as "old school." By this, they meant that there was a top-down and impersonal form of decision making and communication. At the end of the day, administrators were in charge and had the authority to make whatever decisions they deemed appropriate. What they wanted was not to be challenged, and those who broke their expectations could anticipate negative recourse, often in the form of public chastisement.

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<sup>24</sup> Ben was bald, and apparently wore the cap for warmth.

A favorite form of communication for the administration seemed to be email, and this especially irked the Girlworks staff. Administrators passed along orders to direct-care staff, often around cleaning, via email. When there was too much garbage on the lawn, an administrator would send an email instructing them to clean it up. If the gym was too messy, the message came via email. When the administration wanted the garbage to be taken outside and around the building rather than through the administration offices, they said so via email. The administration gave these orders over email, even when they were in the same building or even on the other side of a cubicle.

These emails were particularly hurtful and insulting to staff, who felt like they deserved face-to-face communication. On a day when some potential board members stopped by, the cleanliness of the gymnasium at GW was not up to Richard's standards. He sent the physical education director, while carbon copying her program director, an email that read:

There are many people who have given of their resources to ensure that these children have a facility in which they can take pride; Kidworks will not tolerate its present condition. As a Kidworks professional you have the responsibility to ensure the safety and cleanliness of your program areas. You have until I come to work at 7:30a.m. Friday morning to make the Girlworks gym the cleanest, most orderly, and safest facility in southwest Sherburne.

The PE director was so upset about the email that she brought me into the gym to help her figure out what she needed to change—she could not tell. She was offended that Richard sent this to her supervisor and her in an email rather than walking across the building and talking to her directly. In a reply email, she told Richard as much and requested to meet with him in person. When he did meet with her, he told her the request for a face-to-face discussion was a “part-time complaint.” Being a professional apparently meant taking his criticism in whatever form he gave it.

Libby was equally baffled and offended when the same thing happened to her. An administrator sent her supervisor an email instructing to “tell her [Libby] to clean up the homework [room] as fast as possible. It looks very nasty.” Libby explained, “He was just telling me two minutes ago, and he'll go send [my supervisor] an email about that. Like it's just like they don't want to address certain things face to face, and I don't understand why. For the life of me I can't understand why. I don't understand.”

Sharice also expressed frustration and dismay over email communication:

We had a sleepover Friday night. The kitchen and floor and stuff was clean, but of course they still had cereal and boxes sitting on the counter and a couple of dishes to wash up. Instead of an administrator coming directly to me saying, “Sharice, you know the kitchen’s a little bit on the messy side. You need to make sure you take care of this today.” He sent an email to my supervisor, which in turn my supervisor calls me. They do stuff like that all the time. I’m right here in the building.

These incidents were common enough that the professional staff retold them to others so that when an administrator reprimanded someone they collectively disregard it as a problem with *his* behavior rather than *theirs*. An administrator told the PE director that she was lucky that another administrator did not talk to her in person because it would have been much worse. She should “not take it personally” and “just let it go and not make a big deal out of it because it happens to everyone.” When another full-time worker became upset at being rebuked, her supervisor consoled her, “That’s just the way he is. That’s just... you have to take stuff with a grain of salt. You have to let it roll off. You’ve got to not show your emotions on your face and that type of stuff.” Still, the staff felt disrespected and exhausted by it. One explained the effect like this, “They wear people out. They do. You just can’t do that.” She was so worn out by the demands of the administration with little pay and opportunity for promotion that she was looking for a new job.

What staff took away from the impersonal and directive management style of administrators was that he was the ultimate “savvy businessman” who prioritized the organization over everything else. He was unconcerned with making people feel good and wholly concerned with staff professionalism. As one told the staff, “You either have the wrong kids or the wrong staff. And definitely we don’t have the wrong kids.” “[Richard’s] a real strong guy,” Ben explained, “and he may be one of the hardest administrators in the organization in the nation because he expects nothing less than one hundred percent from the staff. Nothing. No excuses. No excuses for anybody. No excuses.” Edward, an administrator, agreed that there were no excuses for not creating excellence at Kidworks. He wanted the staff to not “limit themselves” or “make excuses” for failing to create opportunities for the kids because of limited resources. “In youth work,” Edward told me, “you program at the convenience of the kids not at the staff. If an opportunity presents itself for our kids tonight at eight o’clock, we need to take advantage of that. Like Tuesday, I started at 7:00 a.m. I got home at 10:00 p.m.” When Edward took over

the administration position, it was the workers' attitudes and excuse making that he sought to change. But as an administrator quipped, "You can't make chicken salad out of chicken shit." Tasha explained that Richard understood that the staff felt connected to Kidworks as part of the black community. "I'm telling you," she said. "He's a smart man. . . . And he understands that many of us do stay for that reason. Yeah, he does take advantage of that." When the workers were around the administrators, then, they learned to not complain because they would interpret it as making excuses. Perhaps that is why the staff called one administrator "Daddy."

Despite the colorblindness within Kidworks, thus, reality was actually race driven. Whites experienced significant pay, tenure, and status advantages. White administrators took an impersonal and directive interactional style with the black staff below them. As a result, the black staff at Kidworks experienced their workplace as a white-dominated space. The staff who worked the longest at KW and had the most contact with whites developed hostility about what they experienced as unfair and humiliating treatment.

### **Strategic Assimilation by the Black Staff**

Within this race-stratified but ideologically colorblind and no-excuse environment, direct-care staff were left to carry out the work with kids. Directly addressing race, particularly within the organization's mission, seemed quite unlikely. The colorblindness at Kidworks made acknowledging race a liability, particularly for the black staff when they were interacting with whites who had direct power over them. To charge that the world was white-dominated, to claim that white racism existed, or even to draw attention to racial identities, potentially threatened the white authority upon which black kids and staff were dependent at Kidworks and outside of it. The staff had learned from experience that white people in authority had the power to humiliate or fire them. They could also delegitimize their claims, disregard them as "playing the race card," and physically or verbally attack them (Bonilla-Silva 2001; Wellman 1993).

Previous research shows that middle-class blacks generally strategically assimilate (Lacy 2004) to their dualistic experiences, in this case of a perceived racial reality and the colorblind public representation of race at KW, by creating a minority culture of mobility (Neckerman, Carter, and Lee 1999). They become proficient at code switching themselves: learning and using the interactional styles and ideologies that advantage them in white middle-class and black working-class settings (Anderson 1999; Neckerman, Carter, and Lee 1999). Within mostly white middle-class spaces, research shows that middle-class blacks adapt by, for instance, signifying their class status through dress, speech, and ideology (Collins 1997; Feagin, Vera, and Imani 1996; Lacy 2004; Neckerman, Carter, and Lee 1999; Schwalbe and Mason-Schrock 1996). Doing so allows them to fit in and even gain the favor of whites who might be able to sponsor them or provide other resources (Schwalbe et al. 2000).

In this final section, I examine three ways in which the staff strategically assimilated to their racialized experience within Kidworks. I begin by showing that the staff deflected attention from whites and whiteness. At Kidworks, direct-care staff gained favor among whites, particularly the administration and white volunteers like myself, by appearing race-neutral and hiding their charges of racism. Doing so allowed them to fit into the colorblind environment that would likely delegitimize them for openly discussing race and racism and to retain the favor of the whites around them. Second, the staff constructed a worker identity in opposition to whiteness. They defined their work around loving the kids and being there for them rather than what they defined as inauthentic motivations: to pursue status and money. Finally, the staff tried to create family at Kidworks. They thought of each other as a family and tried to make a family-type environment for the kids.

#### *Deflecting Attention from Whites and Whiteness*

First, black staff and volunteers deflected attention from race, particularly when interacting with whites who had authority over them or with whom they wanted to establish credibility. The staff used coded language that would appear to whites to be race neutral. At other times they deflected attention away from the hegemony of whiteness. Coded language could potentially stymie white hostility and

establish black credibility through its restraint and dissociation with racism. Thus, the staff cloaked their own concerns over racism within what appeared to outsiders as race-neutral talk by minimizing white racism and airing their own complaints of racism to each other.

When talking with whites, the staff deflected attention from whiteness. They did this in subtle ways that were meant to ease the discomfort white people might feel in their presence and to reassure them that they did not lump all white people into a single (racist) group. For instance, black adults made a point of including white people during black-identified activities. Several staff and girls approached me to invite me to dance down the soul train line at a sleepover. When I did not participate, Tamera, who had organized the event, made me a dance judge in order to include me. A similar effort to make non-blacks feel comfortable happened at a Girl Might group. In a health session on hygiene, a college-aged black volunteer gave a lesson on doing hair to ten black girls, one Latina, several black adults, and me:

I'm going to cover everybody. As an African American woman, I want to keep the oils in my hair. I'm going to wash my hair every 2 weeks or so. Keep oil in it. People from other races want to take the oil out of their hair. They need to wash every day or two. Take the oil out. African Americans want to keep the oil in, and other people want to take the oil out.

To “cover everybody” at the beginning of the presentation provided a superficial way to include, at least temporary, the two non-black people in the room with only minimally drawing attention to their whiteness. The volunteer presented herself as a credible authority figure, after all she was inclusive of everyone and aware of diversity, even though she spent the next ten minutes exclusively discussing the proper ways to care for black hair and skin.

Staff often deflected attention from racism during their interviews, particularly when I interviewed them before I knew them well. Warner redirected attention away from whiteness overtly during his interview with me. When I asked him about the sorts of advice that adults in his life gave him on how to deal with racism, he explained that his father taught him that “the world’s not black” and the world is “not 100 percent black.” This was Warner’s way of acknowledging that racism existed and that black kids had to learn to deal with this reality—but without saying so directly and without calling attention to racism as a byproduct of white action. Describing the world as “not black” was a safe way of

acknowledging that the world was indeed dominated by white authorities and white cultural norms but without running the risk of offending me.

When I interviewed Sharice early on during our relationship, she answered a question about racism by telling me flat out that she tried to “treat people the way you want to be treated. I don’t really like to look at it as a black-white issue because you have all different types of kids, all different types of races that come to Kidworks. You can’t look at it like that’s a white issue or that’s a black issue.” That’s the same lesson, Sharice told me, that she taught the girls: “You have to look at it as a problem, and it needs to be solved. . . . It doesn’t matter if they’re white. It doesn’t matter if they’re black. It doesn’t matter.” As I got to know Sharice better, though, she opened up to me more and complained frequently that an administrator, whom she characterized as racist and sexist, mistreated her.

At other times, staff complimented me or characterized me as a different sort of white person. The staff usually did this while critiquing racism or the behavior of whites. Warner routinely praised me, and told me that I worked well with kids and was “always welcome” at Boyworks. During our interview, he criticized volunteers and staff who worked poorly with the kids, though, and then held me up as an example of the type of (white) person he wanted there: “The door’s open, but they don’t finish it [working through the hard times with kids]. They don’t finish anything with the kids. I mean, you’re a perfect example. You’re always here. You don’t give up on them. You’re volunteering. They see you all the time. Most people volunteer all the time, and then they leave.” At another point in the interview I asked him if they needed more volunteers, and he replied, “Not more volunteers. More volunteers like yourself.” He continued by explaining that other volunteers were “scared” of the kids and run away from conflicts that arise with them.

Tamera did this, too. When I asked Tamera about white people who fit in at Kidworks or were part of the community that the staff created for themselves, she responded, “That I know of? Other than you?” She continued to tell me, “You’ve become part of that family. They accept you.” The kids picked up this strategy too by telling me, for example, “no offense” when a boy described that a family member worked for a cheap white man who refused to pay him as promised.

Other times, adults directly challenged far reaching claims of racism by others when talking in the presence of whites or played up personal responsibility. A black guest presenter at a volunteer training full of whites, for example, told us that she teaches the kids she works with that “every white who asks you to remove a hat is not racist. [Removing your hat] is a rule.” After several girls labeled their teachers as racist during a Girl Might group, Danielle told me in private, “Not everyone’s out to get them. Not everything’s about race.” Later that week, the girls played a game called “don’t hate the player, hate the game” where girls were assigned different identities and then were discriminated against based on the stereotypes associated with each. Danielle made sure that several girls took on white identities, for example, and the group critiqued the stereotype that white people are rich.

Ben was critical of the stereotypes that black people supposedly constructed against whites, too. I asked Ben about the advice that his mother and other adults in his life gave him about dealing with racism. He responded by suggesting that black people needed to learn not to stereotype:

They used to talk about experiences they had, but all white people aren’t bad. Some people feel like all white people are bad. It’s just stereotypes. They think that all white people are rednecks. All white people are not rednecks. All black people aren’t bad. All black people don’t live in the projects. And, pretty much, that’s how I was brought up: you can’t blame other people for your problems. You try to get along with people. If they don’t want to be bothered with you, that’s fine. You just turn the other cheek and go the other way. That’s what I feel about that.

Ben equated stereotyping whites as rednecks and racist with stereotypes of black people as bad and poor. In addition to challenging these stereotypes outright, Ben suggested that people ought to take personal responsibility for their problems.

Warner similarly equated the racial epithets directed at whites with those directed at blacks. According to him, it took *everyone*—white and black students alike—realizing their similarities in order for his football team to pull together and succeed:

[The team’s philosophy shifted to] we were all one color. Our uniforms were black and gold so we were Chargers. We weren’t white chargers. We weren’t black Chargers. We were just Chargers. We would, you know, address each other either by your name, first name last name, or your number, or just Charger. “Hey Charger.” Kids were “nigger,” “cracker,” “honky,” you know, “coon.” My first year, you heard all of these different terms. And it would cause fights. But once we became one and realized that we were all the same, even though we were different colors, we ended up going to the championship. And you pull together and not pulling apart.

In this account to me, race disappeared entirely as boys simply became “Chargers.” Warner also equated the racial epithets “honky” and “cracker” with “nigger” and “coon.” While these words may be superficially equivalent in form, they certainly were not in weight.

On most occasions, direct-care staff aired their complaints to each other in private. Staff relayed these complaints to me in private as well, usually one-to-one, but never in the presence of other whites. In public and to whites, they sanitized their language to disguise their racial claims. The volunteer coordinator had to address white volunteers’ claims of racism while volunteering at Girlworks. “They felt like they were being picked on because they were the minority in the group now,” she explained to me. “It was the first time they had been a minority in the group. She was white and she felt like she didn’t get any respect from the black staff. Or no one tried to really help her.” I asked her what she said in response to her. She replied:

I told her that I really doubted that that was the situation because we have great employees and that doesn’t really make a lot of sense. I didn’t say that to her, but I told her that I would try my best to sit down to talk to her and to the director about it. I was thinking that we can really discuss this and work it out. She wasn’t interested. She wanted to see results, and I think the results she wanted was the director dismissed or reprimanded.

While the volunteer coordinator reported that she expressed doubt to the volunteer, she, in fact, did not. Her job demanded instead that she deal with the issue, and she did so by telling the volunteer that she would address it with the director in person and try to work it out. This legitimated the woman’s claim, even though the volunteer coordinator herself found it baseless and even offensive that she expected special treatment. She continued to explain to me that “volunteers are not VIPs. They’re not VIPs.” Even though she tried to make volunteers feel welcomed and appreciated in public, in private she expressed frustration over their sense of entitlement. She explained to staff that “they don’t need to be treated like VIPs. They’re coming out here because they want to help. They don’t want to come around here and kiss their butts 24/7. And if they’re here for that, they’re in the wrong place. They can volunteer somewhere else.”

Following a particularly offensive interaction with an administrator, for example, staff hid their dismay in front of him but gossiped about the incident later. During this incident, an administrator

referred to black kids as “nappy head kids.” A staff member recalled what happened: “It was some kind of function that was going on. It was some kind of function going on, and they wanted to make this impression. Somebody was coming to town and this and that. ‘So get some of them little nappy head kids’ and ‘take [the visitor] there to see those little nappy head kids’. And that was their [marketing] approach.” I asked how people reacted to it in the moment.

Interviewee: Everybody just sat. And some people just kind of, we kind of just eyed each other like, “He did not just say that.” What the heck? That was my thought. Who the heck does he. . . How the heck does he think he can sit here and say stuff like that?

Carissa: Would you ever feel like you could, did you feel like you could say something back? What would have happened if you had said. . .

Interviewee: I’d probably be fired, you know. But, nine out of ten, it’s going to happen [that I’m going to say something] ‘cause I know me. It’s only so many times I’m going to sit and hear that and not say anything.

Carissa: Did anybody talk about it afterwards?

Interviewee: Everybody talks about stuff afterwards. Everybody talks about it.

Carissa: What do people say?

Interviewee: You know what I’m saying? Nobody white ever talks about it, you know?

Carissa: Is that so? That’s interesting in and of itself.

Interviewee: Yeah, everybody talks about it afterwards. “Did you hear that nutcase?” “Can you believe he actually let that come out his mouth?” But I say stuff [critiquing his comment], and they’ll say, “Well we,” most of them say, “Well we’re used to it.” Well, you’re stupid. Why are you used to it? Why are you rolling over on it?

In public, the staff sat stunned when an administrator made racially offensive comments to them. This happened when he described Mexicans as always running late, as well. The black workers, in fact, were afraid to respond for fear of angering administrators. But in private, the staff talked about the incident and tried to make sense of it. Some discounted the speaker as a “nutcase,” while others justified their nonresponse because they were “used to it.” All of this negotiation, however, happened in private and away from the administration.

Other staff complained in private that they were forced to “assimilate” at Kidworks. Darin, for example, told me explicitly that he felt like he had to assimilate when he was at Kidworks. But he did not complain to the administration about the things that most offended him. Instead, he and the other staff together bashed the staff’s code of conduct and the request to give speeches at fundraisers designed for whites. Tasha believed that she was expected to reject black vernacular, dress in ways that pleased whites, and wear her hair straight, particularly when she gave presentations on KW to corporations. “Nobody

likes my hair when it's in braids," she told me. One administrator noted her "dreadlocks" to her, which she took to mean, "Why did you do that to your hair?" To me in private, however, Tasha interpreted this as a concerted effort to make black staff assimilate in order to please potential donors: "It's all an assimilating process. . . . They do target more white audiences more than anything, so those [staff] that are not white, that are there are always working on that assimilation process then." Tasha never complained to the staff that their expectations felt belittling to her. When I asked her how she felt about changing her hairstyles to fit in, she responded, "I think you get so used to it that it's not even funny." She then began explaining how previous experiences with racism prepared her to deal with it.

#### *Constructing a Worker Identity "For the Kids" and Not the Money*

Another common strategy that black middle-class people use to deal with the racism they experience is spending time in black-controlled spaces, such as neighborhoods, associations, and churches. In these spaces, research shows, black adults control the cultural environment. They also foster a black group identity where they seek refuge from racism and share strategies for coping with it (Anderson 1999; Feagin and Sikes 1994; Lacy 2004; Neckerman, Carter, and Lee 1999; Schwalbe and Mason-Schrock 1996; St. Jean and Feagin 1998; Tyson, Darity, and Castellino 2005).

Ironically, Girlworks and Boyworks served this purpose for black direct-care staff, as well. Except for run-ins with the administration, they were spaces where they could create the sort of environment that they wanted. They could cultivate the identities they wanted and teach the kids what they thought was important in the ways they thought best. At GW and BW, a second way that staff strategically assimilated was by creating and fostering a black group identity in opposition to what they perceived whiteness to mean within Kidworks: being materialistic, wealthy, and concerned about appearances. The workers defined their work around loving kids and creating a home-like environment. These strategies allowed them to create a black-identified environment.

The black staff did emotion work by constructing affirming worker identities. They constructed these identities in opposition to what they perceived to be the priorities of whites within Kidworks and

the rewards that whites got from working and volunteering there. It was not that white workers did not care about the kids or value their work with them because they did. Rather, it was the association of whiteness with status, money, and appearances that was problematic for black staff. The full-time workers, in particular, were well aware that whites made hefty salaries at KW. Staff, as I described above, drew attention to the executive director's "six figure" salary, even as some of them struggled to make ends meet.<sup>25</sup> They knew that the white staff who worked at North Kidworks (i.e., with white kids), furthermore, made more money than the staff who worked with mostly black kids. Whites ran the organization, and staff knew that whites primarily volunteered as fundraisers whereas blacks volunteered to work with the kids. When whites came to GW and BW, they often dressed in business attire that signified their wealth or stuck around for short periods of time. It was within this context, then, that staff created their identities as workers as a form of subordinate othering (Schwalbe et al. 2000). This identity existed in opposition to the roles of whites within the organization.

The black staff used rhetoric that centered their identities as workers around being there "for the kids." Working at KW was often part of a lifelong dedication to working with kids and a source of personal joy. Every black staff member and volunteer claimed to love their work and to love the kids, and they spoke of their work as if it were a homecoming of sorts. Until he began working with kids, Warner disliked every job he had had. He had been at KW for several years, though, and still did not complain to his family. That's how his father knew, KW "is the place." Warner agreed: "And I know that because I enjoy being here. I don't think I ever take off. I have to be really, really sick to take off."

Others described their work and the kids explicitly in terms of love. Tracy told me several times that "I love them," and when the kids enjoyed something she had organized, "that makes it all worthwhile." "In order to be employed by Kidworks," Sharice insisted, "you have to love kids. 'Cause if you're just walking in a KW and you've never been in one before, you'll just turn around and walk right

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<sup>25</sup> Casey was so money strapped, despite her college degree and fulltime employment, that she turned down going dancing with me and a group of employees because she had nothing to wear outside of a KW shirt. Despite a last minute trip to Wal-Mart and the mall, she found nothing that she liked and fit her that she could afford.

back out.” Danielle explained simply, “I love the atmosphere. I love kids. I always have, always will. I mean, it’s just where I’ve always loved working.” Libby found happiness in her work:

I get joy just by being around them every day. I just, I love being around them. If I called in one day if I get sick, I feel so out of place at home. Between the hours of two thirty and eight, if I’m at home, I just feel so out of, I don’t know what to do with myself because I know I’m supposed to be here, and I miss them so much when they are not here. I love them all like if they were mine. I really do. It’s a few bad ones that get on my nerves and things like that. But you know what? I love them all. I love them, too. I love them, too.

Casey explained, “It’s something that I love to do and I love kids. So I get to come. . . it ain’t like I have to come to a job and sit behind a desk and do paper work all day. I get to come to work and play. You know? How many people get to say they get to come to work and play? . . . And I can’t see myself getting tired of coming to work to play.”

To work at KW, according to black staff, meant loving the kids, wanting to spend time with them, and taking joy out of their successes. To be a good worker meant being child-centered and relationship-oriented. As several workers explained to me, it was the relationships with staff that were most important to them when they were kids attending KW. For the same reason, staff said they emphasized building their own relationships with kids. Staff wanted to prioritize the kids and be good role models to them not because it was the “professional” thing or their duty to the organization. To the direct-care staff, prioritizing the kids symbolized *real care* and *dedication to the kids*. It symbolized the right priorities.

Black staff contrasted their commitment to the kids to what they perceived as the wrong priorities within Kidworks: big money, status, and concern over appearances. To the staff who worked the most closely with them, the administration and the board epitomized white wealth and the control and domination that create it. That is why, from Darin’s perspective, wealthy whites insisted on wearing business attire when visiting BW, even when it made kids uncomfortable. The push to collect money from parents and to fundraise, he thought, got in the way of his (more important) work with the kids:

[An administrator] wants us to raise all this money. That’s *their* job. That’s what they’re supposed to do. That’s why we have fundraisers. That’s what they’re there for. Don’t bother me with that. I have other stuff to do. I don’t have time to raise money. Don’t ask me to go to these events. Don’t make me parade kids around for all these rich people. I don’t want to do it.

Darin resented that the administration asked him to participate in marketing of black kids to white rich people. Tasha characterized the executive director as an outsider to Sherburne's black communities. "I genuinely believe that he does love those kids and that what he does is about those kids," but she still viewed him as part of "the people that own everything. He's part of that part of the community." To be a part of the rich (white) community that "own everything" made him an outsider.

To work at KW for the money and to "parade kids around for all these rich people" was insulting to black workers because it seemed to exploit the kids and cheapen the staff's work. When asked to describe what made a staff person really good at the work, Warner distinguished people who worked for money and those who worked for the kids:

It's something that can't be taught to you. Like what you [Carissa] have, that's something that can't be taught to you. I can use you. You have a heart. You aren't scared of the kids. You're genuine with them. You're not fake. There are people who come here for paychecks. And the kids know that . . . They come for a paycheck. They're here just to get that check and go home. They're not here for the kids.

To "come for a paycheck," as Warner described it, was to be "fake." Money did not matter, on the other hand, to "genuine" people "with a heart" who were "here for the kids."

When new staff or volunteers arrived, the staff reported a transition time when the kids got to know them and tested their motives. The staff thought the kids were deciding whether the staffer/volunteer was there for the right reasons (because they cared and had heart) or wrong reasons (for money). The former signified legitimate authority. Kids were still testing the new program director (PD) of Boyworks when I interviewed Warner. They disobeyed the PD and, for example, continued to talk when he asked for quiet. According to Warner, the testing was to ascertain the PD's authenticity. "They're still seeing what [the new director] is all about," he explained. Taking on the voice of the kids, he continued, "'We'll just keep pushing your buttons 'cause you're only here for a check.' They want to see if he's only here for a check. That's what the kids will do."

That transition time of testing was the most challenging for Tabitha. "I think unconsciously we want everybody to like us," she explained. "But the reality is that it doesn't work like that. And of course, you know, coming in as a new staff member, they're going to challenge you. They're going to see kind of

where you are and just basically, yeah, just to see like, “Okay, let me see what she’s about.” And so I think that was the hardest part for me because I was like, “Okay, you give me respect, I give you respect.” The kids were testing her motive and trying to figure out “what she’s about.” During this testing time, Tamera explained, the kids evaluated, “What’s your purpose in being here? Is it you feel like you really want to give back to the community or are you feeling guilty? ‘Cause the kids can read that. Why are you here? And they’ll ask you, ‘What do you want? What are you doing here?’” If the staffers overreacted to the kids, became frustrated, or simply ignored them, then the kids would think that the director was “here for a check” and not for them. That adult, in turn, could not be trusted.

The flip side was that people who worked at KW “for the kids” *could* be trusted because they were viewed as authentic and caring people with the right priorities. Being child-centered symbolized self-sacrifice rather than the selfishness of money and status worship.<sup>26</sup> Sharice had this perspective. I asked her if she negotiated her salary, and she explained that money was not her priority:

Sharice: I don’t negotiate it at all. My negotiation is going to be my two week notice out.

Carissa: So there’s no fiddle room there at all?

Sharice: None. ‘Cause I’ve never been the person that money was my whole importance in life. I’ve never been that type of person. I’ve always said that money’s never going to make me or break me. So as long as I’m happy, I don’t really care what I make. And that’s how I’ve always been. As long as I’m happy, I don’t really care what I make. So I can see if I was the sole breadwinner in my family, but I’m not. So, you know, I’m very fortunate in the fact that if I get mad and I just want to leave, I can.

According to Sharice, money did not bring happiness and should not be the basis of “my whole importance in life.” She did not want to be “that type of person.”

As the staff interpreted it, demanding better pay was not only unrealistic within a framework of self-sacrifice (i.e., this is childcare work for a nonprofit), but it was inauthentic and insulting to the kids. Other staff, then, used their low pay to signify that they were truly dedicated to the kids. Amber, for example, had worked at KW for two years. She received a quarter raise after the first ninety days and had

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<sup>26</sup> Money and money-seeking took on similar roles in Sherryl Kleinman’s (1996) *Opposing Ambitions*. In this ethnography of an alternative medicine nonprofit, physicians used their nonchalance toward finances to bolster their status by framing themselves as self-sacrificing and committed to the organization. Low-paid support staff, however, could not access status by claiming to be self-sacrificing, while a concern for money symbolized a lack of commitment. Money talk, consequently, camouflaged the ways in which women in the organization were exploited.

not gotten one since. But Amber insisted that childcare workers were poorly paid and KW was a “nonprofit organization so, until like I get this promotion or something or that I feel like I really need one, then no, I’m not really interested in a raise.” Ben put it this way:

With childwork, you’re not going to get paid at what you’re working at. That’s bad that you don’t get paid for the long hours and stuff. When you’re on salary, it’s long hours. You don’t work eight. If you work eight hours and you’re on salary, something is wrong. You must have the highest job I ever seen in my life if you work with kids. It’s no way in the world you can work with kids and have an eight hour job every day. It’s no way. It’s no way.

Low pay symbolized selfishness and a strong commitment to people.

### *Creating Family*

A third way that staff strategically assimilated was by trying to create family at Kidworks. One way black workers were unique was that their sentimentality developed out of a sense of obligation to help *these* kids. They thought of the kids at KW as like them and part of a shared community. They viewed themselves as a single family and their job, to create a home away from home for the kids. Tamera put it bluntly when she said, “I deal with a lot of non-minorities on a daily basis that I wouldn’t ever deal with in my regular life. But it’s for the betterment of kids who look like me. And I really look at it that way.” None of the white staff or volunteers I interviewed attended KW as children, but Ben, Darin, Martin, and Amber all grew up at Kidworks. They framed working at KW as a way to give back to a community that raised them:

I really enjoyed it: working with kids in school, at-risk kids in school. I sort of knew what I was getting into [at KW]. It was more of a one-on-one type thing, though, but when I got here it was a much larger [place]. I consider Kidworks the number one youth organization, and to work in Sherburne... It is still bad [the neighborhood where I grew up]. To work with the same type of kid and having the same type of background... Most of these kids are coming from the same neighborhood. I grew up here in southwest Sherburne where the kids are served. So the same streets and community and houses that they live in, I lived in. I went to the same schools they went to. Some of us had the same teachers. It was an opportunity to give back to kids like I was given back to (Darin).

Ben saw himself in the kids, too: “I done been through some of the stuff they went through or starting to go through now. I had an experience with different things [too], as far as growing up in a single parent

home, inner-city environment, you know what I'm saying? And dealing with peer pressure." Their experiences, staff felt, specially prepared and obligated them to work with KW kids.

Warner told kids his personal story sometimes to show them the potential pitfalls they faced. The kids could relate to him, he thought, and would respect his opinion more after realizing that he really understood the hardships they faced. Yolanda, a volunteer, got very emotional during her interview because the work at KW felt personal to her. She started crying when she drew the connection between her own struggles in life and what she wanted for her own daughter and the kids at KW. In tears, she explained what happened when her mother died while she was in college:

I've got siblings, but my older sister was married and had a family. The one next to me became the guardian for the two, the two younger than I am, although probably not very long my brother, because he was almost eighteen, but she was a guardian for my youngest sister. So I spent all my money. I didn't have anybody to ask for money. I guess I try to help children to get what I didn't get. I got through college, went to graduate school, and now I'm working. You don't do things like that on your own. People help you along the way. So it's important to me to give back.

For Yolanda, giving back was a way to help other people the way she needed help after her mother's death. Being available to kids and giving them the emotional and social support they needed was the most important thing to her and the others.

Much of the time, staff and volunteers viewed their worker role less dramatically. They simply saw KW as part of a larger undertaking. Work at Kidworks was part of a broader commitment to working with kids. Amber, for example, had worked with developmentally disabled kids and "at-risk" kids from a run-down neighborhood. This was the work she wanted to do, and she dreamt of opening her own daycare facility one day. Casey and Alex worked with kids before Kidworks and wanted to in the future. Sharice insisted that "the only reason that I'm still here is for my girls."

As part of a common community, staff developed relationships with kids and their families outside of KW. They went out to eat with kids, and they came into KW on their days off to hang out. Casey and Libby took girls to church. They got to know kids' parents and visited their houses, and the staff looked forward to the annual staff-versus-parents basketball game. Some workers invited kids to their house for sleepovers, and Libby and Louise even went to conferences with girls' teachers. When her

college reunion approached, Yolanda invited her tutee to go with her. Louise, Martin, and Amber all had family members who attended KW, and Warner dated mothers of some of the kids. When Tamera went Christmas shopping for kids, she picked out clothes that she thought the individual kids would like, as if shopping for a younger sibling.

The staff, thus, thought of themselves as a “family” and tried to create relationships with each other and an environment that felt comfortable to them. Outside of KW, the workers regularly talked to each other on their cell phones and push-to-talk,<sup>27</sup> and they socialized together at night and on weekends (Our interviews were interrupted several times by phone calls from other KW staffers.) The GW staff referred to the young people they served as “my kids” and “our kids,” and the staff enjoyed sharing their life events with them. Danielle introduced her fiancé to everyone at GW and brought him to a Girl Might session. When she was preparing for her wedding, she brought her wedding favors to KW as a crafts project that girls begged to do. Darin’s wife came as a guest speaker, and the kids knew the GW program director’s kids. When Danielle first interviewed, she was unsure about working with all women, thinking they could not get along with each other. By the end of the first summer, her perspective had changed:

I got to know some of the staff members and just as the summer went by, I got to know a lot of the staff members. I have the best time here. Like I’ve never had to be in an argument with anybody. Even if a staff member does get in an argument with another staff member, by the next day they’re cool and they’re straight. It’s just like we about like family here, and I love that. I love this atmosphere because, and I wouldn’t even sugarcoat anything. It’s, I just like this atmosphere. You can talk, you can call, you can go to the program director or any of the staff members and talk about anything if you have a problem. And the director has said, “If you have a problem, I will, trust me. You can shut the door in my office and cry, shout, whatever. ‘Cause I don’t want you to have that same attitude when you go work with kids. If you’re having a bad day, let me know.” And that’s how she’s been since day one.

The staff consciously tried to create a sense of family or “home away from home” for the kids, too. Sharice put it like this:

What we give our girls around here is a family type atmosphere. We as a staff get along great. If we have little quarrels or issues we’ll talk about it like you would talk to a brother or a sister. We talk about it. We take care of each other. . . . If one person falls down, another is there to pick them up. And that’s how we look at it and that’s what we try to teach our girls. Don’t tear each other down, you pick each other up. So, I think by us modeling that family type atmosphere and us getting along and us talking to them and you know having a good time as grown-ups, um, they in turn have a good time when they come to Girlworks as kids.

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<sup>27</sup> Also known as “chirping” or talking on a walkie talkie.

Darin ,who grew up at Kidworks, valued his relationships with staff the most when he was a child:

That's a funny thing. I grew up with my best friends. Now we talk about the same thing. We don't remember every program we were in, or remember every activity or field trip. But we remember every single staff we came in contact with. We could sit there and say I was five years old. We could go through all the staff and talk about what they did, how they hit us up and threw us in the pond and camping or the funny things they said or the things we saw. We remember that. That's where the impact comes in. That's what we hope. When the kids leave here, they won't remember every tournament they were in, but they will remember Ben or Warner or this staff or that staff and what they said and what they did and the positive impact they had on their lives. That's basically what I remember.

Families, according to Sharice, worked through their issues and picked each other up. This is exactly what they did at Girlworks and Boyworks, she thought, because the workers were friends and the kids were "my" kids.

In sum, the black staff adjusted to the white-dominated environment at Kidworks by strategically assimilating in three unique ways. First, they deflected attention from whites and whiteness. They appeared race neutral in public to whites, even when their private analysis was not. They addressed racism with each other rather than to whites or in public settings where whites were present, and they claimed that anyone could be racist and labeled assumptions about whites as stereotypes in order to show that they themselves did not stereotype. These strategies seemed to ease the racial tension at Kidworks and certainly made the staff feel, as Tasha put it, secure in their jobs. Second, the staff constructed their identities as workers through claims of loving the kids and being at KW out of dedication and commitment to them. They contrasted this dedication to what they viewed as the inauthentic motivation to make money. The staff associated chasing money with being white so that their worker identities opposed to money and status were, in fact, in opposition to whiteness (Moore 2003; Perry 2001; Perry 2002). Finally, the staff thought of themselves as a family and tried to create a family for themselves and the kids at Girlworks and Boyworks. The black staff's dedication to kids and understanding of themselves as workers was based in being a *part of* rather than *separate from* the community of the kids.

## **Conclusion: Appropriating the Mission**

In this chapter, I have shown how Kidworks' organization and colorblind environment affected black direct-care staff members and volunteers. The black staff resented what they viewed as unfair opportunities for promotion and high pay at KW, and they felt disrespected by the administration's treatment of them, particularly their public reprimands and communication of cleaning orders via email. For this reason, black staff and volunteers who had regular or extensive contact with white administrators and the board experienced KW as a white-dominated, even anti-black organization.

White control over hiring and firing decisions and the administrations' distaste for "excuses" made it risky for staff to complain. After all, whites were in a position to dismiss complaints; they could simply fire them and hire new workers, or they could humiliate the staff person or belittle him/her in front of others as they sometimes did. The ideological colorblindness of KW, furthermore, camouflaged racism and reduced race to diversity and cultural difference. Colorblindness provided the ideological framework, then, through which whites justified their continued hoarding of resources and power within Kidworks (Bonilla-Silva 2001; Carr 1997; Gallagher 2003; Lewis 2003).

Black staff and volunteers fit into this colorblind and multicultural framework by strategically assimilating: by appearing race neutral themselves when they interacted with whites but acknowledging racism in private. Because whites use playing the race card to delegitimize black complaints (Frankenberg 1993; Wellman 1993), black staff portrayed everyone as potentially racist in an attempt to distance themselves from complainers and to establish themselves as credible. In private, though, they shared their concerns and even overtly claimed administrators were racist. They shared their dismay at being mistreated and begrudged the administration's attempts to force them to assimilate by dressing professionally, speaking with "proper" English, straightening their hair, and accommodating whites.

White control of KW's organization barely extended into the Boyworks and Girlworks buildings and programs themselves, however. The administration shifted responsibility for carrying out KW's mission to the direct-care staff, and they allowed staff to implement programs and to supervise part-time staff how they saw fit. Direct-care staff relished this autonomy afforded to them and used it to construct

worker identities so that they were experienced by the kids and each other as affirming. These strategies flipped the power dynamics on their head. Blackness came to represent authenticity and dedication to one's job, as well as love for the kids, while whiteness came to represent inauthenticity, being power hungry, and money-oriented. Blacks became the insiders and whites, the outsider and Other.

These were the ways in which black staff strategically negotiated their dualistic experience of working in a white dominated organization on which they were dependent while having the autonomy and need to construct black-identified programs. Providing workers autonomy over their day-to-day tasks, as Meyer and Rowan (1978) illustrate, kept them happy and assured their commitment to Kidworks, despite their resentment and interpretation of the organization as anti-black.

The staff's experiences at Kidworks, furthermore, shaped their vision for KW's mission. As elders of the "family" at KW, the staff viewed their job as mentoring kids, role-modeling, and teaching them important life lessons. A major part of this responsibility was the cultural training embodied in Kidworks' mission: to train kids to dress and act in ways that highlighted self-determination. The volunteer coordinator, for example, said of Kidworks' services: "[Kids] have a [safe] place to come. We provide them that. But they also come here and see people who are educated, who have degrees. They can do something with their lives. We care about them."

But acting appropriately, as the black and volunteers staff saw it, was not important because it made the kids moral people. Nor was it because they viewed the perspectives or tastes embodied in middle-class cultural capital as somehow intrinsically better than other types. It was important because, they believed, certain behaviors and styles were necessary for black kids to succeed in a white-dominated world. Kids should act in ways that countered stereotypes held by white people in authority. As Darin explained, "Here, it's not about being street. We accept everyone here. Some people think bad things. When you go out on the job market or whatever, you can't have your pants hanging down. It's all about perception here. We want to overcome these habits. I tell them, this is your place, take care of it. Expectations." If they did not, white people in charge would mistreat them and use their street style or attitudes as justification (see e.g., Dance 2002; Ferguson 2000; Moss and Tilly 1996). What's worse, they

would likely be viewed as more credible. Black kids could never realistically escape the control of whites, the staff believed, so they were to minimize it. Cultural training was one way in which black staff could teach kids to handle this racist reality. For them, then, the mission itself was a way to teach kids to mediate racism.

Danielle had gotten in trouble when a teacher misread her body language when she was in school. The lesson made her think critically about how KW young people present themselves and the responses these presentations elicited from people in power:

From when I [was] going to school, I think teachers react to you a certain way with the way you look. I mean, if you grew up in a high school or if you've gone to a high school where you always had kids that dressed in all black or the kids that dressed real urban like with the baggy pants, baggy jeans, automatically you're stereotyped. I think that teachers do it. It's more so a natural thing. I mean, I've done it before. I'm guilty as charged. I have stereotyped somebody easily by seeing them in the hall: baggy jeans, baggy T-shirts. "Lord, he probably think he's a little thug." That's my idea, whether it's in a funny approach or where I'm doing it in a serious approach, I mean I look at that. Because that's what I predict from what I've seen in the media and what I see in the streets, so. I do think teachers do tag the norm.

Not only did teachers "tag" black kids with stereotypes but so did law enforcement and employers, according to the KW employees, some of whom experienced it themselves. Casey explained that people stereotype black boys, especially, based on how they dress because they fear them:

I do think black males get targeted a lot. And a lot of people expect, you know, depending on the way they look, they do expect them to be bad. So they probably have to go through a lot of stereotypes just being a black male probably, and being young. Especially when they hit teenage [years]. Depending on how they look and dress, they're going to get judged. And that's sad. It's also sad that a lot of it is true, so. I don't know, I guess just being a boy, being a teenage boy and being judged by the community, it'd be harder. A lot of people don't judge females as much. . . . They don't fear females as much as they fear a male.

When she took kids to an amusement park, Yolanda warned kids that it was okay to be a cleaner but that "this could be their lot in life unless they do something to make sure that's not it. If that's what you want to do, that's great. But recognize if you don't plan, that's what you're going to be doing." Libby warned girls that people would stereotype them as black kids:

It's a stereotype already for black people. Whether you be a male or a female. They think males are lazy, don't want to work. Females, they think you just want to have kids and collect the money. So because it's already stereotypes about you, I need you not to uphold that stereotype. I need things to be different. Don't let them think of you as that. They may perceive that, you know, of you. May think that's all I'm about.

If you just see me in the streets or something like that but you don't know that I have a Bachelor's [degree], a master's. . . I could be an electrical engineer or just an engineer. I could be so intelligent on the inside, but you don't know that 'cause you just on the outside looking in. You don't know what I'm really about. I said, 'They can think what they want to think and things like that but it's just about. . . . You don't necessarily have to wear your degree around your neck. It's not that serious, but you just, it's just things that, don't be a number in the stereotype, basically. Do other things, you know?'

Ben's lessons were pointed, as well. Boys who did not learn to follow the rules and fit in, as he saw it, would end up in jail:

You can't work right with a chip on your shoulder. You can't be violent. Because like she, all these boys, I said the same thing about how do you act amongst society. And if you don't know how to act in society, follow the rules of society, they have a place for you. They have a place for you that you're locked down all day long and you listen to somebody.

From their own experiences and understanding of the world, black staffers and volunteers believed that authority figures, usually white, judged black kids on how they dressed and the company they kept. If they looked like a thug, they would be treated like a thug, they thought. If they hung out with thugs, people would presume they were thugs. Thus, Danielle explained to girls, they had to pick their friends wisely: "[Teachers] see you hanging around with a group of kid, they assume you like them. They do things, they assume you do them too. People judge you by the people you around. You don't want them to think that, then you don't go with them." Darin put it another way:

You have a perception about you being an African American male. Don't play into that. Don't carry yourself in no way that that perception is true. You can be the smartest, most well respectful kid there is, won't hurt a fly. But you come in here, your pants hanging down, all these big clothes, earring, head half done. They're never going to get that part of you. So sometimes you have to conform to what society [sees as] acceptable, what society tells you. Can get to a point where you can make a difference, where you can own your own business and say, "Okay, I'm going to hire these people, and it's alright to wear your earring again. Long as it's tasteful it's alright to wear a different clothing style. As long as it's respectful." But until then you have to conform to what's right.

From the staff's perspective, being stereotyped or locked up was the reality of living in a white-controlled world. Kids needed to know that the world is white-dominated, according to Warner, and they needed to learn to interact with whites in ways that facilitated their own success. This was the lesson that his father taught to him and that he passed down to KW kids, "He always said, 'The world's not black.' And so if you don't understand or if you don't learn to work with the whole world, you're never gonna get anywhere." Warner's father enrolled him in predominantly white schools so that he could learn to

“work with the whole world” rather than just black people. The black staff’s understanding of the mission of Kidworks, then, was itself racialized. They believed in the mission because it represented a way to respond to racism. Staff believed that their actions could at least in part effectively prevent whites from targeting them or discriminating against them.

The mission, as the black workers envisioned it, thus, was not superficially race-neutral or even assimilationist. Rather, it was based in code switching. The staff wanted the kids to learn an assortment of cultural skills so that they too could strategically assimilate by making use of them to their advantage while constructing black-dominated spaces and pro-black identities.

## chapter seven: Negotiating Power with Kids

*If a kid does something wrong, during the announcements or whatever [the staff will] be like, "Maureen, stop doing that." . . . [Kids] don't fight stuff [here]. . . . Whoever's in charge tells them to do something, and I think they're a lot more obedient. . . . I'm used to all my teachers beating around it: "Everyone needs to be quiet." I'll do that more, and they don't respond to that because it's not what they're used to. . . . And I was like, "The next person that gets up might as well just walk out that door because you're disrupting our homework." And they listened (Jonie, white woman, part-time staff at Girlworks).*

*I don't let them curse. Make them follow the rules. I tell the staff that they need to enforce the rules. They don't need to suspend people all the time or put them [in timeout], but we need to enforce the rules. The rules have been the same since I was here. They work (Darin, black man, full-time staff at Boyworks).*

When Jonie first started working with the girls at Girlworks, she used the interactional and disciplinary strategies that she learned from her childhood to control the kids. She first tried to entice girls into being quiet when she was in charge in the library or when she was refereeing soccer. But it was not, according to Jonie, until she asserted herself by threatening to kick out misbehaving kids that she felt like she had control over the room and the respect of the girls. Jonie learned from the other staff members to adopt this authoritarian posture with the girls, one that she experienced as surprisingly effective.

How GW staff interacted with the girls, furthermore, was heavily influenced by ideas about gender. Particularly relevant here are the ideas that girls need protection and are responsible for emotions. Authority, for example, was important to the GW staff. They bolstered their authority in order to make girls obedient to them. They punished girls as collectives, and they silenced them with verbal retorts. These strategies resembled the authoritarian disciplinary style outlined by Baumrind (1978; 1994; 1997), which rely heavily on monitoring, supervision, and confrontation.

At Kidworks, emotions were the realm and responsibility of girls and women, even though, as I showed in previous chapters, rationality was constructed as important. The staff used emotion management (Schwalbe et al. 2000) as a primary way to establish their own credibility and to influence girls' behavior. The staff, for example, told their (and others') life stories to girls to make themselves relatable and, therefore, empathetic and credible sources of knowledge. They disciplined girls as a group, rebuked them as a group, and incited them to monitor each other. They taught girls to take on the

perspectives of authority figures. These forms of staff-child interactions, thus, made girls a collective group who had an emotional responsibility for each other and others.

The staff at Boyworks, on the other hand, took a different approach with the boys. Their orientation allowed boys to “just be boys,” according to beliefs that boys should be carefree, autonomous, and competitive with each other (see Fine 1987; Mac an Ghail 1994; Thorne 1993). BW workers held life-skills groups in the gymnasium (as compared to the library at GW), for example. They presented themselves as friends to the kids who played alongside them. The staff gave the boys more freedom and autonomy to structure their own activities, and they were much more reluctant to discipline and punish boys. The staff intervened in the boys’ disagreements less often, leaving them to escalate. When they did intervene, staff often targeted discipline (suspensions, individual timeouts) at individual boys rather than groups like at Girlworks. Unlike at GW, the male staff also resorted to and justified the use of physical interventions when certain boys’ behaviors seemed especially egregious to them. In doing so, the staff demonstrated that they were real men and, therefore, in charge. When it came to interacting with authority figures, the staff trained boys to know and manipulate the rules.

At Kidworks, direct-care workers were charged with the kids’ cultural training. In this chapter, I show how the staff carried out this training and the consequences it produced. I analyze the staff’s interactions with the kids along three different dimensions that were consequential for the mission: how they established credibility with the kids, how they trained them to interact with authority, and how they disciplined them. Within each section, I address the ways in which the staff negotiated power first with the girls at Girlworks and then with the boys at Boyworks. I begin with how girls established credibility by highlighting their status as adults and caretakers, as well as by telling stories that encouraged girls to relate to them. The BW staff established credibility with the boys, on the other hand, by being their friends and telling stories that impressed the boys. Second, I illustrate how the GW staff taught girls to relate to authority figures, in this case teachers. The BW staff, on the other hand, taught boys to master rhetoric of rules. Finally, I turn to how the staff disciplined the kids. At GW, they threatened the girls, singled them out, and targeted groups for punishment. The staff at BW, on the other hand, were much

more lax in their discipline. When they did discipline boys, they punished individual boys and, during extreme situations, physically dominated them. The Girlworks staff blended working-class and middle-class childrearing strategies, while the Boyworks staff relied mostly on working-class ones. I conclude that through their negotiations of power with the kids, staff taught the girls empathy and obedience as the core interactional skills, while they taught the boys to be autonomous and responsible for themselves.

### **Establishing Staff Credibility**

#### *Girlworks*

Authority was important to the workers at Girlworks, particularly in their interactions with girls. In Edward's words, staff had the right to "challenge the behavior" of kids. In Casey's mind, religion dictated that people follow authority: "I'm religious. That's important to me, to be able to be submissive." Amber explained it another way: "If you present yourself [to the kids] as an authority figure, they're going to respect you. And if you're not mean about it but you're serious about it, they're going to respect you." The program director gave the workers, both part-time and full-time, a great deal of autonomy at GW, which allowed them flexibility in creating and using their authority. At Girlworks, the all woman staff used their authority to define appropriate and inappropriate behaviors and to reward and punish them. Workers spent their time supervising the girls and running programs. They decided how closely to stick to the life-skills and prevention curricula and what topics to cover. They also policed kids' behaviors and punished rule breakers. They put girls into timeouts and decided when they were done, and they were the ones who rewarded girls with praise or gifts. Staff members were the arbiters of disagreements among girls, and girls turned to them to tattle on each other.

Women's statuses as adults and caretakers were the bases for their authority at Girlworks. They established women's credibility with the girls and legitimated their roles as teacher and disciplinarian. To be a "baby" meant that a girl was whiny and dependent upon others. When Parchel became annoyed at another girl, then, she told her to "Stop whining! Quit being a baby. You're acting like a baby." Being an adult, on the other hand, was to be "grown," so that one could make his/her own decisions. The workers

(as adults) were seldom if ever publicly scrutinized. In fact, I never once saw a staff member at GW call out another staff person for talking during announcements or breaking any other rules. Adults also had presumed knowledge and maturity that entitled them to make decisions for kids. When an adult instructed a girl to do something, they were expected to do it. I suggested a group of girls stop whipping each other around on scooters so they would not hurt each other, for example, and another girl immediately backed me up by saying, “She told you to stop.” Being an adult came with the charge of caretaking and, therefore, entitlement to establish order and control within Girlworks.

Authority through caretaking extended beyond the adult staff members to the junior staff, mentors, and “helpers.” The staff expected these older girls to watch over younger girls and to enforce the rules. When I asked a junior staffer what junior staff did exactly, she replied bluntly, “Yell at people.” By that she meant that she got to boss around other girls. As a caretaker, junior staffers policed younger girls’ behavior and were exempt from following some rules. Danielle explained their role to a group of older girls this way: “It’s not all bad to be aggressive. It helps get things done, too. It can be good to be aggressive. A lot of you are turning thirteen and will be looking for summer jobs. You’ll want a job. You can get a job here. But you have to be a leader, be able to [control] the other girls. Get them to listen to you.” A junior staff member named Maryann did this very thing. She, for example, surveilled and punished girls during lunch time over the summer, as this account from my fieldnotes shows:

Various staff members used several tactics to quiet down the girls, although they seemed relatively quiet to me. (They were busy eating.) They dimmed the lights, did some yelling out of “Quiet!” and did the clapping call and response a few times. When this didn’t work, staff resorted to timeouts: calling out girls and sending them to the coat room where they stood facing a wall. Maryann began sending girls out of the room, too. She picked two girls at a time and then called them out by name while pointing at them, “Tammy, Maureen, you go.” Then she’d trail her finger from them to the door, motioning them to leave. They all left when ordered.

When a staff member repeatedly instructed the girls to be quiet, though, Maryann completely ignored her and continued her conversation with another junior staff member. At other times, staff helpers stayed in the program area when the staff kicked everyone out for misbehaving.

“Peer leaders” had similar responsibilities, according to Danielle. She described the qualities and responsibilities of being a peer helper during a Girl Might group:

Making good decisions helps you be a better peer helper. All of you are peer helpers. Look up there (referring to a poster listing character traits). What helps you be a better peer helper? Here, we really need you. Other girls look up to you. The eleven and twelve year olds help look after the six, seven, eight and nine year olds. You all know they be fussing over crayons. The six year olds. Some girls be fussing with each other. Say you come across girls arguing over something. You're being a good peer helper if you try to solve it, give them equal shares.

Peer leaders, thus, were supposed to watch over younger girls and settle their disagreements. When another junior staff member told me she applied for the position in order to "help" other girls, she was referring to this mentorship role.

Because age and status as caretakers brought women and girls authority, women staff members (and girls who served as junior staff members) could bolster their credibility among the girls by highlighting these statuses. The staff physically separated themselves from the girls in order to mark themselves as in charge, for example. They dressed in the professional manner dictated by the staff code of conduct, which the full-time direct-care staff religiously enforced<sup>28</sup>. When Danielle came in without her staff shirt, for example, the program director immediately instructed her to "go into the bathroom and change." Even junior staff wore t-shirts that read "STAFF" in dark bold colors across the back. When girls ate lunch at GW during the summer time, furthermore, they sat on the floor (rather than at tables or simply on chairs), while the staff sat in chairs lined up at the edges of the room. Doing so kept them out of the swept up piles of dirt on the floor and allowed them to surround and surveil the girls. During group meetings, staff conditioned girls to sit on the floor. The staff, on the other hand, stood or paced above them.

It was from this authoritative position that staff commanded respect as adults in charge of the girls. The staff delivered their announcements in this formation during daily meetings at Girlworks. The staff generally called the girls together for the meetings over the intercom around 4:30 each day: "Stop all games, activities, and talking. It's time for announcements. Put away all games and toys and come to the games room." With this, all the girls piled into the games room and sat themselves on the floor. They faced forward towards the front desk where Sharice usually stood to begin the meetings. On full days,

sometimes staff or girls would move furniture—the foosball tables, for example—to make more room for everyone. When girls were seated too far back for the staff’s taste or situated just right, staff members could not see them from the front of the room. In this case, staff instructed girls to “scoot forward” towards the desk and “get out from behind the pool table so we can see you.” The staff positioned themselves around the outside edges of the girls with some in front, some on each side, and some in back, depending on how many working on a given day. Junior staff joined them. It was on the staff’s time that the meetings began with workers standing in front chatting with each other for several to ten minutes.

Standing over and around the girls allowed staff to readily surveil them. It also marked the staff as above the girls in status: they did not have to sit on the dirty floor, and they would call the meeting to order when they were ready. This spatial separation distinguished between those who were the subjects of meetings—the adults and staff—and those who were the objects that had to follow rules—the girls. This distinction was important enough to staff that they often questioned me when I sat on the floor with the girls. On several occasions, workers motioned for me to stand up with them. Tamera and Casey both questioned me, “What are you doing down there?” Occasionally, even a girl would even ask why I was sitting on the floor, like Satrees did when she told me, “You can go and stand back there” while pointing toward a staff standing in the back of the room.

The staff also marked their authority by silencing the girls but talking freely themselves. The staff routinely commanded girls, “You’re too loud,” “be quiet,” and “stop talking,” sometimes raising their voices and shouting it repeatedly. This was especially the case in the games room where outsiders and parents openly moved about and in the homework room which shared a door with the administration offices. Here are some typical examples of the ways in which staff directed girls to be quiet:

During the daily meeting, I sat on the carpet by the snack area with a group of girls. After the staff called the girls to sit on the floor, it was a good five minutes before they worked their way over and the staff demanded they be quiet. All the while, Halima, an eight year old, sat facing me and chatting rather than facing the front desk and quieting down for the meeting. The staff

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<sup>28</sup> The staff and/or administration was fairly lax about BW staff wearing their uniforms for part of my observation period. Ben, for example, went several months not wearing a BW shirt, and junior staff routinely did not wear their staff t-shirts.

eventually did demand everyone quiet down. Casey led the way when she walked into the room, saying in a rather sharp tone, “Ya’ll need to be quiet. Shut up.”

Then Laura, another staff person, said, “I’m tired of you talking. Especially the people in the snack area. You need to be quiet. I’m tired of this. If someone calls your name, you stand up.” (This was a punishment. If talking, they would be called out and made to stand in front of everybody.) She called out one name, and when the girl didn’t stand, she reiterated more loudly and slowly: “When someone says your name, stand up.” CeCe walked over to the girl and ordered her to stand, which she did.

The workers waited for everyone to be quiet. Another staffer called out (Angela, I think): “We don’t have any deaf kids here so I’m sure you all heard Miss Sharice when she said to be quiet.”

\* \* \* \* \*

After a few more minutes, Sharice stood on the side. She put her hands on her hips, stuck out her hip, and sucked in her cheeks some so that her lips pursed outward. Libby standing in front said, “Nah, you all are too loud. Hush! Put you all outside somewhere.” They waited some more minutes. Libby and Danielle talked to each other up front.

\* \* \* \* \*

The biggest problem during the game of musical chairs was that girls who got out were left with nothing to do on the sidelines. What they preoccupied themselves with was talking, and Jill, a junior staff member, joined in. Karla, a white staff member for the summer, repeated over and over her request that they be quiet. She explained and asked, “I want you to have fun, but there are people working in the offices next door. It’s so loud that they can hear you. Please be quiet.” She instructed, after turning down the lights, “Girls, be quiet. We can’t hear what they are saying.” Then she rearranged girls, “Girls, sit down in a row. Everyone sit in a row and don’t look backwards (which was the direction that Jill was sitting).” She also explained that “you need to not only respect the staff but each other. That means being quiet so your peers can hear.”

In addition to directly commanding girls to be quiet or, more rarely, “shut up,” staff used call and response games, like the one Danielle used above, to quiet them down and grab their attention. When a staff member, for example, yelled out, “let me hear you clap once,” they expected girls to become silent and to clap once in response. When they called, “let me hear you clap twice,” the girls were to respond with two claps. Similarly, girls were to come to attention and be quiet when Casey started to sing out “Olah, olah, eh... Roll, roll, roll to the beat now...” They repeated the song along with dance motions mimicking them. When a staff member called out, “And a hush fell over the crowd,” girls were to shout out “hush!” then fall silent. Angela called out to girls, “If you’re ready say he-ey” to which they responded back with a sing-songy “he-ey!” Other times, staff would call out, “Listening skills. Got to have them,” which the girls repeated back to them. The staff as adults, however, enjoyed the freedom to speak without raising a hand and being called on, while children were expected to be silent when they were instructed to be.

## Empathizing

Staff established credibility with the girls, too, by getting them to relate to them emotionally. A common strategy for the staff was to share their—or others’—life stories with the girls. Sharing life stories established their credibility by demonstrating that they understood the challenges the girls faced and empathized with them.

Staff stories highlighted the struggles faced by adults who grew up in the same sorts of conditions the kids did. By showing them the example, the staff hoped, the kids would be inspired to believe that they too could succeed. The Girl Might program facilitator invited guest speakers in to share their stories with kids. A group of fifty retired black businesswomen with “great families and everything” provided girls mentorship. Many of them came from “really hard backgrounds,” Louise explained. This made the women seem not only accessible but credible in their advice:

These ladies would come in and talk about themselves. Talk about their careers. Talk about their education. Talk about their family lives. The family lives that they built after they were married. And then the family life that they came from.

And I think that was most impressionable to the girls because the girls would find out that a lot of these women have been through the stuff that they’re going through at home or even worse. I think the principal of one school stood out the most because she told them about growing up in a house where her dad raped her and abused her and that her mom was there. Her mom knew but because of the abuse that was inflicted on her, she couldn’t really do a lot about it. And so she talked about how she left home and she married a man at sixteen to get out of the house. She had her first kid still going to high school. She had I think two kids by the time she graduated high school. Had her third kid in college, but, nevertheless, she worked through going to school. She did not quit school. She went to college. She got her master’s and her Ph.D. And now all of her kids are successful, and her and her husband have been together thirty years, I think. . . . I mean she talked about what a struggle it was, you know? It was really hard having to sacrifice, but she did what she had to do. Going to school, still trying to take care of babies.

The girls, according to Louise who facilitated this group, “were in awe. . . . And she told [them] that without college she wouldn’t have been able to take care of her kids. She knew she wanted better for her children. And had she not did that, that it could not have happened. And no matter what, how hard it seems, know that you can do it.” The girls were left inspired by the woman’s story of struggle so much so that girls who did not intend to go to college started thinking about it.

The businesswoman’s advice held weight *because* she had struggled in her life in ways that the girls could relate to. Her story highlighted her struggles and triumph. Her background established her as a

credible authority figure, whom the girls trusted to be honest with them. This was the same viewpoint shared by many of the staff and kids at Girlworks, who viewed people who had struggled in life (due to poverty, drugs, or simply bad decisions) as credible in their warnings. For Amber, who grew up in KW but later worked as a staff member, her mother's honesty about her own experiences provided a cautionary tale to Amber without eliciting the skepticism that telling her "no" might. Amber's mother approached the topic of drugs this way:

She told me that it [drugs] was out there and people are going to try to get me to use. She was like, well it's up to me to make my decision. She wasn't going to tell me to do it or not do it because she said she tried it when she was younger. But she said it didn't do anything special for her. She told me how it made her feel. Like every child, if they want to try something, especially if you're trying to be in the in-crowd, you know, they're going to do it regardless if you tell them to do it or not to do it.

The hope was that Amber would learn from her mother's mistakes rather than having to make the same mistakes herself. Sharing people's own stories, Amber believed, prevented kids from acting out in rebellion.

Amber was cautious about sharing her own sexual history with girls, but she did use the examples of her sister and a friend to warn a girl about having sex. "If you absolutely have to do this," she told one girl, "use protection. There are diseases out here that can kill you. Children aren't easy to take care of. I don't have any of my own but, but I see how hard it is for my sister. I see how hard it is for my godkids' mother."

When Louise wanted to build credibility for herself with the girls, particularly those who found her to be too controlling as a staff person, she shared her own experiences with the girls. Louise got frustrated when girls vilified her as a mean staff person. She felt disrespected by them. But by showing them that she came out of the "same kind of neighborhood" with *worse* experiences than they knew, she legitimated her authority over them. She constructed herself as a victim who had triumphed:

And I tell them [my story]. I think that's the thing that really kind of connects with them 'cause most of the time the people that are in authority over them, kids feel like they don't know their pain. They don't know where they come from, and they can't understand what they're going through. But when they find out, "Sweetie, I came out of the same thing. . ." I had one girl tell me, "You haven't been through the things that I've been through." I said, "Baby girl, I don't care what you've named, what you can name, I can guarantee I've been through it and probably a little more." She said, "Mm-mm, I'm telling you." And she said, "I've been raped." And I said, "I

have too.” And she said, “Twice.” I said, “Four times.” So she was going, “Really?” I was like, “Yeah.” I said, “You haven’t been married yet. I have. And hopefully you won’t marry the kind of man that I married which is why I’m still by myself, you know?” At that point it was like, “Okay, well, she’s somebody I can talk to. She understands where I am.”

In sharing her experiences of rape, Louise established herself as different from the authority figures who “don’t know their pain.” She knew the pain of the girls, and then some, and she encouraged the girls to relate to her. They shared in her pain. Doing so signified her legitimacy as an authority figure.

Libby and Casey, similarly, made themselves more approachable to girls by involving themselves in their personal lives outside of Girlworks. Among other things, they invited girls to attend church with them, had them over for sleepovers, picked them up when they ran away from home, and generally made themselves available to the girls by giving them their cell phone numbers. By giving girls a glimpse into their lives and their mistakes, the staff encouraged the girls to relate to them as people who were like them or shared the same struggles that they did. It was through their empathizing, as well as their commands to be quiet and sit on the floor, then, that the staff established their credibility with the girls.<sup>29</sup>

### *Boyworks*

The goal at Boyworks was to create a safe place where boys could get away from risks and pressures of the streets. People at Kidworks generally viewed black boys as endangered, as encountering risks around many corners. When I asked Edward, for instance, if he worried about black boys in particular, he responded that he did: “Yeah, yeah. A lot of the stuff you read, the statistics of African American males, that are deadbeats, that are in jail, that are unemployed. Yeah.” As I’ve already shown, staff and volunteers alike feared the influence of bad neighborhoods on boys, the perceived expanding reach of local gangs, and drugs. People were concerned about employer discrimination against black boys and the pitfalls of unemployment. They worried that boys would get locked up.

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<sup>29</sup> The GW staff engaged in unpaid labor more than the BW staff did. They more closely blended their lives with the girls’. Their perception that the girls were their responsibility and part of their family, in addition to the idea that meaning and pay are opposition, made the GW more susceptible to exploitation. They were less likely to ask for raises, for example, or to think of themselves as entitled to them than the BW staff.

While the staff at Girlworks consisted of all women and some girl junior workers, the staff who worked with boys were adult women and men. The junior workers at BW were charged with cleaning more often than childcare or supervision of kids, and it took me several months to differentiate between them and other teens within Boyworks. Being recognized as an adult or caretaker carried much less weight with the boys, and the boys less often turned to adults, including myself, to intervene on their behalf with other boys. It was not through their status as adults and caretakers, then, that the staff at Boyworks established their credibility with the boys.

Instead, the staff tried to establish their credibility by taking on a friend role with the boys, or someone to play and have fun with. Staff tried to create a low-stress environment where they made few demands in favor of having fun and personal autonomy. Signs with the rules for each of the games in the games room ended with a hand written instruction “And have fun!” When Warner introduced Mighty Kids to a group of boys, he asked the boys to guess the key word for Mighty Kids: “It’s a three letter word. Fun. The key word is fun. We’re going to have fun in here.” Ben described the most fulfilling part of his job as “making sure the kids have a fun time and they’re smiling and doing what they’re supposed to be doing.” It was the fun that Martin remembered fondly from his years growing up at BW: “It was just all boys. It was just all boys having fun.”

The orientation of the staff was more accommodating than at Girlworks with staff routinely facilitating fun activities and playing games alongside the kids. Boys spent much more of their time engaged in semi-structured and unorganized leisure than the girls did, and they spent much less time engaging in homework or being disciplined. Boys’ first stop when they arrived was often the gym or the games room to play games alongside staff. There was a constant crowd in the gym at Boyworks (and outside when it was not too hot), for example, playing unorganized basketball and catch with a football. When different age groups took turns in the gym, the staff coordinated an assortment of competitive activities, ranging from floor hockey to relay races to basketball tournaments. I do not recall the gym ever being “closed” (lights off, no kids allowed) at Boyworks, even though it was during parts of the day or entire days at Girlworks.

The BW staff gave boys unstructured time in the computer labs, too. Unlike the GW lab which was reserved for girls who had homework until after the daily announcements, the staff allowed the boys to play computer games whenever they were in the lab. In fact, the staff organized game tournaments with the boys and tracked the top scores which they posted on the walls of the lab.

The staff assigned to the games room constantly played pool, foosball, and ping pong with the boys, too. They spent enough of their time playing or simply hanging out with the kids—rather than supervising, disciplining, and implementing programs—that the full-time staff became frustrated with them. Darin and Louise, for example, moved around several staff people to other areas when they were too lax for the education room or computer lab. Some staff blended in well with the kids, and it took substantial time or direct questioning to figure out who actually *was* staff.<sup>30</sup>

Staff also played cards alongside kids, and for much of my time there, I did too. The kids played Yu-Gi-Oh!, a competitive fantasy game, and I Declare War the most often. Some of the older kids played spades, sometimes with a staff member or me, while the younger kids preferred *Uno* until the cards were lost. I routinely carried around a deck of cards, which kids freely borrowed to play with me or each other. The workers were perfectly happy when I played cards with the kids (or pool, or other games). There was never any pressure from them to spend more time disciplining kids and less time playing with them.

A primary orientation of the staff's interactions with the boys at BW, thus, focused on having fun and allowing boys to make their own fun rather than structuring it through clubs and homework. That meant providing ample opportunities for boys to engage in sports—from basketball to football to wrestling to soccer—and self-guided leisure activities, such as computer games and cards. The staff themselves often participated alongside the boys rather than as spectators or disciplinarians. The staff, furthermore, gave the boys tremendous leeway in organizing their time and activities at Boyworks, despite their rules otherwise. By creating a place where “I [as a kid] can have fun,” as Martin phrased it, staff could make themselves appealing to boys, who would then enjoy spending time with them.

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<sup>30</sup> The junior staff often acted like kids. This was my experience with Benjy, in particular, who played heated games of Yu-Gi-Oh! with the boys. Because he became frustrated during these games and even yelled at kids, I was surprised to learn later that he was a junior staffer.

## Impressing

Just like the staffers who worked with girls did, Warner and Ben told stories about their lives to kids. Their stories provided examples of the street life: its appeal and costs. In doing so, they established themselves as credible sources of knowledge. This credibility came in part from the boys' ability to relate to their stories but also from the toughness that they conveyed. While GW staff told stories of survival, BW staff told stories of adventure. Ben partied and had run ins with the police. In sharing his stories of life on the streets, he established himself as street credible, as tough and therefore admirable in the eyes of boys<sup>31</sup>:

Ben: "I told them, 'Man, I done did stuff that you already going through.' I was like, 'Man, you need to choose the right decision or you're going to get locked up.' And sometimes I wish we could bring, I could bring people in to talk to these kids about scaring them straight . . ."

Carissa: So what, if you brought somebody in, what would you want them to talk to them about?

Ben: "Just basically tell them about tell them about their whole experience of being in the street, being a drug dealer, worrying about your life being taken for making wrong decisions. Partying and money and sex and women, things like that. They already did that, so don't go down that path because I've been there. Just pretty much scaring them straight."

Carissa: "Do you tell them, or have you told them how you managed to not get caught up in that stuff?"

Ben: "Yeah. I did. I pretty much told them, I was like, 'Man, stuff that ya'll doing, don't get caught up in because I got caught up in that stuff. Ya'll don't need to do that.' That's pretty much what I told them. And it's up to them to take this advice. If they don't, that's on them. They have to make their own decisions. But like my mom always said and you know what I'm saying, 'I did such-n-such, use it. Take my advice. You don't have to experience it yourself and then come back to me and say, 'Yeah, you're right.'"

Ben told the boys that he experienced the same sorts of things that they were dealing with. He also wanted to bring in speakers who could tell the boys about their experiences with "partying and money and sex and women" and the problems they caused. Doing so, he hoped, would scare the boys "straight." By having experienced partying and money, valued street pursuits that brought boys real power, Ben and potential speakers had credibility with the boys.

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<sup>31</sup> Note the differences in the nature between the staff's stories at Girlworks and Boyworks in this chapter and the next. The staff and guest speakers who worked with girls generally describe how they dealt with and overcame victimization or what they viewed as poor decision making. That is, they framed their stories around overcoming obstacles. It was through their ability to overcome these things that the staff established credibility. The staff who worked with boys generally described the negative consequences that came with pursuing status and money. Their tales were of adventures. Partaking in these culturally valued pursuits brought credibility.

Warner had endured the streets—and was stabbed and shot. He had been arrested, too. His stories about his early adulthood dramatically represented him as tough and street credible to the boys, too:

I've been stabbed 13 times, and I've been shot once. Again, in the wrong place at the wrong time, not listening. So I listen to them [the kids], but I tell them, "If you don't listen to your parents or you don't listen to me, you might not be lucky and you might not get off that operating table." I got off that operating table a couple of times and kept going. But there are a lot of kids I grew up with who are six feet under or behind bars, and they aren't coming out any time soon. Forty-four years is a long time. I know a few guys who got 44 years.

I know a few guys that thought that cocaine was it. They were making lots of money. At 19, 20, I knew a few of them who had three or four cars, boats. We're just getting out of high school. Driving around a \$250,000 car. And there were times when I thought, I really want to do that too. And then they'd get shot.

Warner was sure to give the boys the details of his experiences. He emphasized the volume of stabbings he had endured, as well as the luxuriousness of the cars that dealers drove. He also told the boys about his friends who had died and were serving long term prison sentences. It was through these details that Warner impressed boys with his experience on the streets. It was by appearing adventuresome and seasoned, then, that Warner established his credibility.

At the same time, both Ben and Warner's stories gave a mixed message to boys. Despite their involvement in street life, both were able to survive their experiences and to create comfortable lives for themselves. They were examples that boys could have fun, toy with trouble, and still turn out okay.

The staff impressed boys as a strategy for credibility in other ways, too. They held up as examples other men who were conventionally successful and, therefore, admirable. At the teen summit conference, for example, the staff invited several successful community leaders who were black men to share their advice with kids, as well as their perspectives. The guest speaker was a young former prosecutor and current judge. He advised the kids on his keys to success. They also invited a police officer and local politician to sit on the panel to discuss ways to improve the life for kids. This same police officer had previously led a Man-To-Man series.

The staff similarly highlighted sports stars that they thought the boys admired. During announcements at Boyworks one day, Warner literally held up a newspaper story of a college basketball player who used to attend Kidworks:

This article is “T Learns His Lesson.” T used to go to the teen center here and now plays basketball for Alabama. T, as it says, didn’t pay attention to school. His grades slipped, and he became ineligible to play last year. He had to take summer school and get his grades caught up just to be able to play. As the article said, he had to learn his lesson. You learn from it, too. For all of those who think school doesn’t matter: you have to go to the library, do our homework, do more than that. You might need even more. Darin has his degree. I have my degree. But in ten years, you might need more. You might need a master’s, or a Bachelor’s of science, or even a Ph.D. So learn from T’s mistake.

In Brandon’s mind, athletes and rap stars were the adults the boys emulated the most, so he cautioned them to distinguish between being “good on the field” and a “good role model.” During a session with a group of ten- to twelve-year-old boys, he opened the conversation by asking the boys to criticize Terrell Owens, a Philadelphia Eagles football player who was just suspended from the team:

Brandon: “Did you hear about Terrell Owens?”

Trequan: “Yeah! He got suspended this weekend.”

Brandon asks him: “What happened?”

Trequan: “He got suspended. He talks a lot of junk about his teammates.”

Another boy shouts out: “He got in a fight with one of the other players!”

I couldn’t hear Trequan’s response because other boys were talking over him at the time.

I asked him who they were talking about. He tells me: “Terrell Owens. He’s a player for the Eagles. He got suspended ‘cause he talks a lot of junk.”

Brandon asks the group: “Was it a verbal fight or physical?”

“Verbal!” several boys shout back to him.

Javante: “On the field, he’s real good, but he fights with the quarterback [Donovan McNabb].”

Trequan tells me this as well and keeps talking: “He’s real good on the field. But off the field he talks junk to his quarterback.”

Brandon: “They suspended him indefinitely for criticizing his team. You don’t do that. It lowers team morale to criticize them in public. Is he a good role model?” After the boys chatter for a few moments and the room gets too loud to discern what they are saying, Brandon names another football player as a counterexample to Owens. “He was a good role model. He’s always building up his team. There’s a difference between being good on the field and a good role model.”

During this group, Brandon held up the example of a sports hero that he thought the boys admired. The street-like behaviors the player exhibited, he warned them, not only hurt his team but hurt his chances to be a successful player. The group then proceeded to discuss an assortment of athletes and musicians whose behavior made some good role models and others bad. “Fighting,” for example, constituted a bad role model, while “being emotional on the field,” as Brandon described passionate players, made someone a good role model.

In sum, the staff at both Girlworks and Boyworks worked to establish their credibility with the kids. At GW, being an adult or a caretaker was the basis for their authority, and the staff played up these characteristics. They also told girls their personal stories in ways that encouraged girls to relate to them, which established them as credible sources of knowledge. The staff at BW tried to create a fun environment for the boys, and the staff positioned themselves as like friends to the boys by playing with them frequently. The BW staff also shared their adventures with the boys. The boys, in turn, were to take seriously the advice of men who lived the street life and those who were highly successful. The stories of BW staff established them as real men, men who were powerful, therefore, admirable. Judges, athletes, and other successful men, for example, were admirable because of the earnings and success they had managed. By being masculine in these ways and matching masculine ideals (Connell 1995; Johnson 2005; Pyke 1996), the staff were establishing themselves as credible authority figures (Schwalbe and Mason-Schrock 1996).

### **Kids and Authority**

The staff at Boyworks and Girlworks taught kids how to orient themselves to authority figures who had power over them. The lessons they taught were designed to minimize the kids' risk of getting into trouble.

#### *Girlworks*

At Girlworks, the girls' relationships with (white) teachers at school were a frequent topic of discussion and a point of frustration for the girls. The girls complained that their teachers picked on them, often implying that they discriminated against them because they were black. Even when Girl Might groups focused on other subjects (such as, the qualities that girls like and dislike about themselves), the conversation sometimes evolved into discussions about teachers. This was particularly the case with the ten- to twelve-year-old girls. Louise described the tension between students and teachers that she saw when working in a Sherburne school:

Most of the time when the girls or the guys show a lot of strength, I see where that happens. Those are the kids that are targeted. The ones that'll stand up and speak out, you know what I'm saying, for their own rights and stuff. And they are legitimate in what they're saying. They're being troublesome. They're being disruptive. They're being suspended for trying to protect themselves; you know what I'm saying.

What Louise and the girls viewed as positive protective behavior (speaking out and standing up for themselves), teachers seemed to view as insubordination among the girls. Louise reported that this often ended in suspension.

In addition to training girls to obey authority as described above, the staff addressed the girls' complaints directly with them. They gave the girls strategies for dealing with the teachers in what they viewed as the most effective ways. To prevent "being suspended" and other bad outcomes, meant, from the staff's point of view, respecting white teachers as authority figures so as not to give them reason to discipline kids. They were, in other words, to minimize their teachers' opportunities to target them by being complicit and following rules. During Girl Might groups, where these discussions often arose, Danielle framed teachers as legitimate authority figures to the girls. She instructed the girls to control their attitudes in favor of talking things through:

Danielle: "Okay, when you have a disagreement with your teacher, what can you do?"

One girl says, "I'd walk away."

Danielle: "You can't just walk away. That's your teacher. That's an authority figure. . . .

When you have a disagreement with your teacher, or you don't think she understands, what can you do?"

One girl: "Switch classes."

Danielle: "Well, if it's in the middle of the year, you can't switch classes. What else can you do?"

Girl: "Maybe talk to your teacher."

Danielle: "When's the best time to talk to your teacher?"

Girls: "Before class."

Danielle: "Before class. And...?"

Girls together: "After class."

Danielle: "Talk to your teacher. Pull her aside and ask to speak to her after class. That's the best thing to do. That's an authority figure. And if they don't get it that they disrespected you, then you can involve your parents. They can have a talk with your teacher, too. But you know that if your mama talks with your teacher, she's gonna ask you what you did, too. . . . That's better than you getting an attitude."

Danielle transformed the girls' covert claims of teacher racism into a "disagreement" or even more understated as a "misunderstanding." She distanced herself and the girls from calling the incidents racism and reframed the conversation by constructing the teacher as an authority figure. Girls who wanted to do

well in school, Danielle implied, should take on the perspective of the teacher and ask “her” to do the same.

During another conversation about the wrongfulness and harms of stereotypes, Maryann, a twelve-year-old who sometimes worked as a junior staff member, told the group that when her teacher called her stupid, she confronted him. She called him stupid back. This provoked several girls into making similar complaints about the incompetence of other teachers and even a bus driver. According to the girls, teachers judged them based on who their friends were, which they viewed as stereotyping and unfair. As Portia, a twelve-year old put it, “They do that in school. The teachers do that. They stereotype you based on who you hang out with. Even though you don’t do what they do. They stereotype you.” Even though Danielle started the conversation with a discussion of what stereotypes were, the girls transformed it into a discussion of their victimization and assertive strategies to counter it. I broke in with questions in order to see if there were differing perspectives on the teacher-student relationship:

Carissa: “Why is it, do you think, that people stereotype other people?” The girls all look at me. I have their attention for a split second.

Several girls jump on my question. Portia starts telling an off-topic story, but Maryann gives a sincere answer: “They’re mean.”

Tanika: “They try to make themselves feel better. They put you down to make yourselves feel better.”

Portia: “They [teachers] want to get you in trouble.”

Tanika: “Want to call your mama. Get you in trouble.”

I jump in again, but it’s hard to grab attention. Danielle tells them I have something else to say, and then I continue: “I think you’ve got something here, Tanika. Notice how you all used gossiping here. Portia starts talking about someone, and you all join in laughing, right? What does that do for you? It makes you a group, right? You all get to laugh together. It gives the whole group power.”

The girls digress into a side conversation, and I butt myself in again. Danielle is looking down now and seems resigned to letting the group turn into the chaos that it is becoming at the moment.

One girl says she doesn’t do that.

Carissa: “I’m not saying it’s a good or a bad thing. I’m just suggesting that maybe we should try to *understand* why people act the way they do. You can decide for yourself. So what’s the deal with your teachers? Why do you think they stereotype you? What do they get from stereotyping you or other kids?”

Tanika pinches her fingers together: “They do it to make you real small so that they feel big.”

Another girl: “They get to feel bigger than you.”

Another girl points out that some kids act badly, though.

Danielle: “What Carissa’s trying to get at here is think about why the teachers think what they do about you. What sort of behavior makes them think that? Not your behavior? But how do kids act that make them think that?”

“Crazy.”

Danielle: “Yeah, so the teachers learn they act that way.”

Throughout the discussion on stereotypes, the girls offered powerful critiques of their teachers as mistreating them and abusing their power, although not necessarily in so many words. What Danielle wanted to do was provide the girls with skills and strategies for dealing with their teachers’ behavior in what she viewed as productive ways. But in order to get the girls to consider her strategies worthwhile, Danielle again tried to show them that their characterizations of their teachers were unfair by getting the girls to see and relate to their perspective—to the point of shifting the focus from the teachers’ behaviors (as I was suggesting) to the kids’.<sup>32</sup> Teachers’ behavior, even if wrong in some moral way, then, seemed to make logical sense. The kids, Danielle directed the girls, acted in “crazy” ways that *made* them think that they acted badly.

Sharice handled girls’ complaints of racism similarly. One girl complained that “I’m not getting good grades ‘cause this lady’s old and she’s white.” Sharice’s response was to:

Talk to them about it’s not a race thing. It’s the problem that you’re dealing with. And then I always ask them when they start having problems, I always ask them, well, what have you done to try to you know rectify the situation? Have you went and talked to the teacher? Or are you just going to take it and leave it? And how if you did go talk to the teacher, how did you approach them? Did you approach them with an attitude? That type of stuff.

Here, Sharice encouraged the girls, as the staff usually did, to reflect on *their* behavior and its likely effect on the teacher in order to show the teachers’ behavior was logical and legitimate. That way, girls could see the point of view of the teacher, and the teacher could see their points of view.

Louise encouraged self-restraint, as well, even though she interpreted teachers’ behaviors as racist:

But they’re getting it because we’re teaching it to them. And they’re being labeled and taught and treated like they’re wrong in what they’re learning. And I tell them, it’s to beat your spirit down and try to break you, but don’t let that happen. If you do what you have to do, but this is how you do it because you are the kid and you’re not the parent, let the parent go in and deal with the adults because when you try to do it, this is what happens. You see the end result. I’m not saying that you’re wrong in what you’re doing. You’re right. And I’ll let them know that, but it’s harder for you to get the message across when you’re the kid because you’re the target.

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<sup>32</sup> During this episode, the girls fed off of each other’s stories. Danielle attempted to reframe the conversation and, in the process, delegitimated the girls’ critiques. I validated their critique by offering an alternative framework (analyzing what people get out of stereotyping), which Danielle used to reinforce her message. I was trying to push the girls to be critical because I thought their critiques were legitimate.

So you hold your own, be respectful, hold your tongue, bite down, write it down if you can't remember. Write it down if you can't remember and take it to your parents. And let you parent go back and deal with it. And then you'll get the result you're looking for, you know.

If that doesn't work, Louise instructed one girl, "You got the right to take 'em to court, you know. . . . But you can't do it by yourself. You have to take it to your mom. Tell your mom to call this person and, you know, write down these dates, write down these times, and do this and that and the third, and ya'll take her to court."

The staff's interpretations of the appropriate ways to respond to authority, whether that authority was, in fact, wronging the kids or not, was to talk through it and show the teacher their point of view. This strategy was middle-class in nature (Lareau 2002; Lareau 2003) in that it taught the girls how to negotiate with authorities at certain times. It also encouraged the girls to assimilate—in the moment—by holding back their critique and picking the most effective course of action. If that failed to work, then the kids were justified in bringing in an adult, usually a mother, to advocate for them. While the parent would advocate for the child with the teacher who has wronged them, her parent would likely ask the child what they did (just as the staff did), assess it, and punish it if it is punishable. Thus, even when a child was wronged, they remained accountable for their own actions/responses. Under the most extreme circumstances, one could file formal complaints with the school or even in court, but everyone viewed this as a last resort.

### *Boyworks*

There was no discussion of empathizing with authority figures at Boyworks, nor was there much discussion of obeying teachers or police as authority figures. Rather, the staff taught the boys how to interact with authority figures in an indirect fashion. They taught the boys the importance of knowing and mastering the rules in different social contexts. They taught the boys rhetoric of rules. The implication was that they had to know the expectations of people with authority over them to get along. That way, they could adjust their behavior so as not to get into trouble in the first place.

As I showed in other chapters, rules were foundational to the mission at Kidworks, and this was especially the case at Boyworks. The rules, in part, specified middle-class presentations of self as the appropriate ways to dress and act. KW's rules were posted around the building, and each game (pool, foosball, ping pong) had its own rule set written out and posted above it. A giant poster in the BW lab (one of several), for example, stated the "safety tips on staying safe on the internet": "do not talk to strangers," "do not download viruses," "get authority before you chat online," "do not give out any personal information to strangers," "do not download games," "do not open spam," "don't download screensavers," "do not play pop-up games on the internet," "don't not buy anything on the internet," and "don't scan for any anti-virus software." A sign on the bathroom door warned boys not to play in the bathroom. The posting of these and other rules made them visible to the boys and anybody else in the building.

More importantly, though, the staff repeatedly described the rules for the boys and had the boys regurgitate them back to them. At all orientation sessions for parents and potential members, BW staff spelled out the rules in great detail. Darin told a group:

Let me go over some of the rules here. First, bring your membership card. We're just trying to teach them some responsibility. No fussing, fighting, picking on other members. This place is for everyone. It's Boyworks' games. We're teaching them to share. All the games are for sharing. We program around all the kids being here. No head gear. No headbands, do rags, hats. Guys also are not to have earrings. They are to take them out when they come in the door. If they get it pierced over the weekend, I tell the kids to put a Band-Aid over it. Not one of my Band-Aids, either. They're for [injuries].

At other times, Darin simply told the rules to individual boys: "You need to bring your card everyday," he explained, for example. "That's the rule. When you're in the games room, you're entirely too loud. If the phone rings, be quiet so that we can hear the phone. Okay? When you hear the phone, quiet down." Darin's instructions covered the same issues that the GW staff often did: bringing the card to punch in and out and quieting down. But rather than simply demanding that the boys do as he said, Darin explained to the boys that these were BW rules and that those rules existed for a particular reason (e.g., so that they could hear the phone).

On the first day of the after-school program, the boys traveled from program area to program area where a staff member went over the rules for each. In the education room, for example, Louise told the boys:

We've got a computer lab here. Do not tear up the equipment, fellas. No banging on the keyboards, fellas. Once equipment breaks, it's broken. Don't go to sites you aren't supposed to go to. You will be monitored. . . . Don't be cursing. Be respectful. When someone's talking, you listen. Raise your hands. I like to be respected, call me ma'am. . . . Look up. And no rolling your eyes. That's a form of disrespect. . . .No rolling your eyes. No sucking your teeth. None of this. (She turned her back to the room and held her head sideways and then turned around and rolled her eyes at them to demonstrate.)

The boys responded to their training by asking for clarification ("What's that mean?") and showing their agreement by calling out, "Yes, ma'am."

This group of boys then traveled to the art room, where Sharon explained to them *her* rules. The boys sat around listening attentively to her, while she talked for several minutes, describing her expectations:

First, when you come in here, sit down at the table. Okay, that's the first thing you should do. Unless you're in the middle of a project, then you can get your project and work on it right away. Carl [an assistant] and I will talk and find a place to put your projects that you're working on. Then you can just grab it and begin. That way I know if you're in the middle of a project. But first thing, come in and sit down at the table. I know some of you worry about your belongings. When you come in here, put your backpack inside the door. Lay it down inside the door. You don't want to have your backpacks over here. Okay. Whenever you have a project, put your name on the back. First, last, and your age. Okay, always put your name on the back of your work so that I know that it's yours.

Sharon continued by describing the chances that kids would have to enter their artwork in competitions and to sell it locally. Then, Sharon's junior assistant Carl directed the boys on how to wash out a paint brush properly. Each boy took a turn at the sink practicing.

The boys went to the games room next, where Ben explained to them, "The most important thing is that you learn the rules. You have to play the right way. I'm going to show you how to play each of the games. Come stand around the pool table." Ben then went over the rules in detail for each game, including pool (this is how to hold the pool stick, one person breaks, if you hit a solid in then you always

hit solids), foosball (just one score for each ball in, no spitting, no throwing balls, no Cheerios<sup>33</sup>), and bumper pool (don't touch the rings, try to get all the balls in on the other side).

The boys then amassed as a large group where Darin went over the rules for all of the BW building, including the rules not to wear earrings, beg for food, or play in the bathrooms. I excerpted this exchange with the boys in chapter four.

This bombardment with rules, however, was the beginning of the staff's rehearsal of them with the boys. Brandon went over the rules (both for BW in general and for the gym) several more times during Mighty Kids groups. On the first day of Mighty Kids, Brandon stood before the boys, who were seated on the bleachers in the gym: "Today, we're just going to go over the rules and explain what the program is. Warner is going to tell you about the program because he's led it before." Warner explained the background of the program to them. Then, he instructed the boys that they needed a signed permission form in order to participate. Warner asked the boys who participated last year what the gateway drugs were. None remembered, and the boys continued to carry on side conversations. "Shush, shush," Warner told them, then followed up with a rule. "When somebody's talking, myself or whoever, you have to be quiet, so that we can hear." Warner called on a specific boy to recall the gateway drugs, but the boys continued to not pay attention. Warner interjected again, "There are three rules in this program. Listen. (There's still talking.) This is why we have this program. Five of you continue to talk and test the water. When you're up here, you're in charge." A couple of boys quibbled over a disagreement before Warner went back to the gateway drugs and the rules: "In this group, you have to step outside of your box, try new things. But blurting out, acting evil, or sucking your teeth, you can't do that." When a boy raised his hand, Warner called on him and pointed out to the group how his behavior matched his expectations: "Did you see what D did? He looked me in the eye. In public, you have to look people in the eye. When you're interviewing for a job, that's important. You have to look people in the eye, let them know you're interested. You can't be shaky, shifty. They want you to look them in the eye.... If you

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<sup>33</sup> A variation on foosball. After someone scored, a player put the ball into play in front of the goalie just scored upon. Doing so gave his team a chance to score extra points because they counted a direct goal by the opposing goalie as worth two points instead of one. The boys referred to this variation as "Cheerios."

need to say something, what do you do?” A boy responded with “raise your hand!” Warner continued the lesson:

Warner: “You raise your hand. When you play football and I say ‘eyes,’ you say what?”

Boys as a group: “Eyes on my coach.” (They reply in unison.)

Warner: “When I say ‘ears,’ you say what?”

Boys: “Ears open, coach.”

Warner: “That’s right. Eyes on you and ears open to listen.”

After Warner left the room, Brandon reiterated the rules he thought were most important:

Looking and listening. Look each other in the eye. Give your full attention. Everybody has the right to talk, all right? You have to respect that. Take turns speaking. If I’ve got up, got people talking to me at one time, I can’t listen. (The boys are not listening to him and continue to play around and talk. Brandon notes this by commenting, “You guys are not paying attention at all!” Then he continues on with the rules.) What is said in the room is confidential. Whatever is said, you might as well keep it to yourself. You’re all the same age and have to be around each other.

In these exchanges, Warner and Brandon both presented the boys with the rules, which were supposed to govern their expectations for the boys. Boys, according to the rules, were supposed to listen and look at whoever was talking (which could be a boy), and they were not to suck their teeth. Warner directly connected these skills to the boys’ future employment: this is the sort of behavior employers would expect, and the boys had to master them if they wanted to get a job.

Brandon went over the rules again two weeks later. (In the interim week, they learned about and practiced naming the gateway drugs.) He pulled a chair in front of the group and began by trying to calm down the boys:

Brandon: “You all done?” He’s referring to boys who were now playing with each other and talking. “The sooner we get through this, the sooner we can play. Today, we’re going to go over the rules. Who can name all fifteen rules of BW? We’ll see who can do this.”

Boys are talking loudly and hardly listening. Other boys sit quietly and attentively listen. Brandon reprimands the talking boys and instructs them to be quiet. The boys turn silent, something I haven’t seen too often. Before long, though, they’re back to their normal selves: some boys chatting, some sitting silently & paying attention.

One boy shouts out: “No earrings in KW!”

Brandon: “What does that go along with?”

Another boy: “No do rags, no baggy pants....”

Brandon: “Yeah. No hats, no do rags, no baggy pants. Why do you think that is?”

A boy in front has raised his hand, and Brandon calls on him. I can’t hear his answer because of the noise. Several other boys are already not paying attention.

Another boy makes a suggestion to the group: “Can we just go one at a time?” While he’s saying this, Brandon is trying to get the attention of some of the boys.

Brandon snaps back, “We are going one at a time. What are some other rules?”

Boy raises his hand, and Brandon calls on him: “No begging for money and food.”

Brandon: "That's right. No begging for money and food."  
 A boy shouts out: "No weapons!"  
 Brandon: "That's right. This is a safe place. You don't have to worry about that here."  
 Brandon reprimands a boy: "No!"  
 Another boy offers: "No eating."  
 Brandon: "Okay. No eating in the gym. Only in the snack area." . . . Brandon calls on another boy.  
 "No fussing, fighting, or talking back," he answers.  
 Brandon: "That's a good one. No fighting with each other. Don't talk back to staff."  
 He calls on another boy to my right: "No playing in the hall right there." The boys are chatting, so Brandon has a hard time hearing him, though. Brandon also can't understand his heavy language.  
 Brandon: "What was that?" Brandon leans forward and moves his hand to his ear. "Shh. I can't hear him. Say it again."  
 The boy repeats himself but changes it slightly: "Right there, no running around." He points towards the hallway.  
 Brandon: "Yeah, that's right."  
 Another one is called on: "No biting."  
 Brandon: "Okay. That goes along with no fighting."  
 Another: "No drugs."  
 Brandon: "No drugs. Another rule?"  
 Calls on a boy: "No gum."  
 Brandon: "No gum. Why do you think they say no gum? . . . Why do you think they say no gum? This is your facility. You should take care of it. It's your facility."  
 Two boys continue to sit with their hands up.  
 A boy shouts out an answer whose hand is not in the air. Brandon says, "I can't hear you unless you raise your hand and I call on you."  
 The boy repeats it, but I can't hear it.  
 Brandon calls on another boy, "Yes, sir."  
 Boy: "Maybe the gum can stick on your shoes."  
 Brandon: "That's right. Good answer."  
 The boy next to me continues to sit with his hand in the air and comments, "This is boring." I think, you're not joking. The boys get distracted by me for a while, but Brandon continues to have them list the rules.  
 After they name a few more, he says, "That's about all of the general rules. Now what are the rules of the computer lab?" At this point, I start to tune Brandon out too. He and the boys continue, though, to review specific rules for the computer lab, then for the gymnasium, the teen center, and the education room.

Brandon followed up this session with a review of the rules the following week, as well. He also threatened the boys when they were acting out: "It's okay if you don't understand the rules, but you need to use them. Clearly they don't understand. We need to go over them all one by one again. Start over."

The rules themselves, as well as the repetition of them in groups and the visual reminders of them on the walls, were designed to guide the boys into a productive relationship with authority figures. The rules provided the boys with the staff's expectations in a formal way, even when the staff did not follow through in enforcing them, which was frequently the case. Boys who understood and could spout

off the rules could look and act respectable, at least enough to satisfy authority figures and keep themselves out of trouble. At BW, as long as the boys could reasonably convince the staff that they were behaving, the staff left them free to carry on with whatever activities they wanted. The implied lesson to the boys was that they needed to know people's expectations as they varied by setting and adjust their behavior when necessary to fulfill them. The staff implied that the kids needed to obey the rules and expected them to do so. When the rules remained unenforced, though, the staff, in practice, reinforced the message that boys will be boys who could get away with breaking them.

There were few discussions of how to directly interact with teachers, police, and other authority figures. On these rare occasions, BW workers were concerned that the boys would get hurt or arrested and so advocated following orders. Warner, for example, made this clear when recounting his and his friend's run-in with the police:

They kept slamming him on the car and turning him around. Slamming him on the car and turning him around. Some of the things they were doing, they didn't have to do. And I knew that. There were different types of police officers in Philadelphia. I don't see them here. We call them Boot Cops. They were highway patrolman. They were elites. They were respected on the police force. They had the leather jackets, the leather hats. They had the boots that came up to their knees. They had these pants that bowed. Just like the Germans wore. They looked just like German, the Nazis. Uh, the troopers. [These officers] were the elite of the force. They did what they wanted. And wherever and to whomever they chose to pick on that they picked on. And, I said, "You don't have to do that." But I should have just sat there 'cause. (Laughs.) At 1[a.m.] in the morning.... Like I tell the kids here, when they are pulling you over, they have a job to do. And even if they are taken above the ... there are right ways and wrong ways. But you can report that later on. But at that point, running your mouth is just going to get you in more trouble. Bad mouthing them, that's just going to get you in more trouble. And in the end, they're going to win, and you're going to lose. They had a job to do. How many times do they come to a window and the person had a gun on them? You never understand until you're in their shoes. I don't want to sound like I agree with it. But I can take it and then go downtown and report it. That's the right way. The cussing and the fussing—not worth it.

The "cussing and fussing" were not "worth it" because it provoked the elite white police officers, whom Warner described as Nazi look-alikes with unchecked power, to do "what they want." This provocation ranged from using more physical force to taking black boys to jail. Warner himself spent the weekend in jail because he challenged white authority directly rather than relying on the formal channel of "going downtown" to report the abuse. He and Ben, consequently, advocated to the boys that they be

submissive to authority figures once they got into trouble, as long as they were isolated or left unprotected by others.

In sum, the staff at GW and BW trained the kids to negotiate authority differently. The staff trained the girls to take on the perspective of authority figures, thus, building empathy that was intended to make girls comply. The staff at BW, on the other hand, taught the boys rhetoric of rules, which could allow them to recite the rules and judge when it was necessary to follow them. Even though they expected the boys to obey the rules, they sent them mixed messages. Their lack of enforcement suggested that getting into trouble was less important than being able to get out of it. Knowing the rules and deferring to authorities in particular situations was good enough.

### **Disciplining the Kids**

Staff also taught kids cultural lessons by how they disciplined them. At Girlworks, the workers were surprisingly authoritarian in their discipline, a working-class form. Authoritarian discipline tends to be confrontational and demanding of kids, rather than based in reasoning and attachment (Baumrind 1994; Baumrind 1997). The result can be an arbitrary and punitive execution of discipline, creating obedience on the part of kids through fear (Baumrind 1997).

#### *Girlworks*

At Girlworks, the staff disciplined girls in ways that enhanced the staff's control over them through threats, confrontation, and group punishment. Their interactions were striking, particularly to middle-class volunteers who, like Jonie above, were sometimes surprised by the harsh tone that the staff took with the girls. The volunteer coordinator, for example, relayed that several volunteers had complained to her about it because they felt uncomfortable.

## Consequences and Threats

On some occasions, staff created punitive consequences for girls' actions and threatened them in order to get them to behave. On hectic days and calm days alike, workers threatened girls if they did not follow their orders. Sometimes, they warned girls to stop misbehaving otherwise the staff would carry out any number of consequences. The threats came as stern orders with little explanation and the expectation that the girls be obedient to the staff. For example, Sharice warned girls to not stand by the side of the road after getting off the school bus. She worried that they would get hit by a passing car. To push the point home, though, Sharice created an external consequence. She said she would tell their mothers if they did not stop:

In the middle of an announcement, Sharice spotted a group outside the door and walked out there and began yelling at them. Everyone inside could hear her (but not make out her words), and the entire room began snickering. When she came back in, Sharice shouted to everyone (while pacing around): "When you get off the bus, come inside. Don't stand up there at the side of the road. Don't stand up there at the side of the road. Do yourself a favor and come inside." She drove the point home by saying that people stand out there chatting it up, and cars speed by. "It's a 35 [miles per hour] zone, and last week someone was going 55. People go 65." If you don't stop, "When your mama comes you be sure I'm going to tell her you're up at that road talking to each other. When your mama comes, I'm going to tell her."

When the girls continued to talk during a prize drawing, the staff threatened to stop the fun activity altogether by throwing away the tickets they were pulling out of a bucket:

The girls wouldn't quiet down even with the clapping call and response. Angela yelled, "You either stop talking, or I'll throw this stuff away. I don't care." Sharice followed it up with: "Quiet. Hey ladies, we're trying to do something for you. If we're going to have a raffle you need to be quiet. I'm not yelling today." Then Angela: "If you don't get quiet, I'll throw this stuff away."

As the staff explained, Sharice was not going to yell that day, nor did Angela "care" if she stopped the drawing. These comments were meant to signify that the workers were serious and unwilling to compromise: they would simply warn them and then carry out the threat. Since the girls knew the punishment for continuing to talk, the staff would feel justified in stopping the fun and throwing away the tickets.

Staff used threats to show that they were serious at other times, too. If girls did not follow their instructions, the staff sometimes did little to figure out why or accommodate the girls. Rather, they simply carried out their punishment with little reasoning or dialogue. This was the case during the

beginning of basketball season, for example, when the staff repeatedly warned girls that GW would no longer provide them clothes to practice in. Instead, they told them that girls had to bring their own clothes and equipment. Otherwise, they would not be allowed to play. Laura, the basketball coach, said to the girls, “I am not giving any uniforms out this time. If you want to participate, bring your stuff. I promise you, I will not give anything to you. You will not play if you do not have the stuff.” The program reiterated the point to the girls by telling them, “That means bring your socks. Bring your shoes. Bring your shorts.” Laura invoked a threat, then, to make her intentions clear and to implement a new policy. She was also trying to prevent girls from complaining to her in the future when she excluded them from practice for not having their own workout clothes.

The staff took issues with the coat room seriously, and they used threats to organize and clean up the space. The coat room was a glass-enclosed space filled with square cubbies. It was located behind the front check-in desk, and the girls stored everything from their jackets and backpacks to their snacks in there. The staff got annoyed when the girls left their belongings on the ground and frequently warned them to pick them up or else the staff would throw them away. Sharice warned girls on several occasions that “if your backpack is on the floor, it’s to your benefit to get it up before the trash can get it” and “Come and get your shoe or it’s going in the trash!”

Every once in a while, a girl reported that something was missing from her backpack or a snack was taken from her lunch box. In order to prevent stealing, then, the staff forbade the girls from entering the room without staff permission. Still, girls continued to go in and out to grab a snack or their homework when they wanted them. The staff responded sternly to the girls’ disobedience to seek their permission with a blanket threat to punish anyone who broke the rule, regardless of why: “Do not go in the coat room without permission. If we see you in the coat room, and you do not have permission to be in there, the first time we’ll send you out to a time out. You do it again, and you leave here. Understand?” To leave GW meant the girl would be suspended from the program.

In such cases, there was little leeway granted to girls. Rather, staff created consequences for their behavior. This was a way the staff gave the girls options but minimized having to deal with individual

circumstances. The girls had the option of following their instructions (and being able to participate in basketball) or not (and being excluded). Punitive consequences and threats, consequently, trained girls to obey their instructions as authority figures.

### Singling Out

The staff at GW also singled out girls who were misbehaving by drawing attention to them in big groups. They often called out girls' names, particularly during group meetings, to put them on the spot. GW gave each girl a card with a barcode on it, which they used to check themselves in and out each day and to check out equipment. Staff could pull up any girls' record to see which days she attended or even when she left, say, if a relative called to inquire. In the middle of 2005, the staff implemented a new policy: kids who did not have their card with them had to pay a quarter to purchase a new one. Sharice explained it to the girls like this: "Everyone knows that you're supposed to bring your cards everyday now, right? If you don't have your card, bring a quarter. If you don't have a quarter, get a friend [to give you a quarter]. If you don't have a friend, well. . ." Girls, then, had to have a "card or a quarter," as the staff told them, in order to participate in activities. If they could not find one, the policy went, they were to ask their friends for one.

When GW staff struggled to get girls to adapt to the new policy, they became frustrated. Girls kept forgetting their cards (or losing them) and did not have any money. The staff responded by singling out the girls who forgot their cards during the daily announcements:

Sharice stood before the group holding a sheet of paper with girls' names on it. She began the clapping routine: whispering, "If you hear me, clap once. (There's a single clap.) If you hear me, clap twice. (Clap, clap.) If you hear me clap three times. (Clap, clap, clap)." Then, she slowly called roll call of the girls on the list. They were to answer simply, "here" when their name was called. Most of the girls did so, although a few simply raised their hands. To that, Sharice reinstructed them, "Say you're here." After Sharice went through 96 names, she instructed anyone whose name was not read to stand. Around 15 girls stood. They had not checked into the computer in the morning and did not have their cards. Sharice was annoyed by this and singled out several girls that she thought should have known better. "Ashlee, you know better," she said. "You're here during the school year. You too, Melissa! You know that you have to sign in when you get here." She sent all of the kids who were standing out of the room to go and check in.

In order to account for each girl at GW that summer day, Sharice read off all of the names of girls who had checked in. Staff had the remaining girls stand in front of the group, which showed everyone that they had disobeyed the rules. Sharice drove the point home by calling out Ashlee and Melissa and admonishing them in front of the group.

The staff routinely pulled girls from the group, too, when they continued to talk during announcements. Impressively, nearly all of the staff knew most of the girls' names, even though their attendance fluctuated and there were up to two hundred girls there. The staff, then, could readily call out girls by name during groups when they were too loud or rambunctious. When they did not know a girl's name, it did not stop them from calling attention to her with a "hey" and pointing of a finger. The staff routinely did so and put individual girls into timeout in front of the group. When girls were participating in programs in the gym or library, for example, staff directed girls into timeout in the backpack room or on a small rug next to the Executive director's office. During group meetings, staff had girls stand in timeout along a side wall: "Anybody left talking will go to the wall until your parents come!" Sending girls to the wall for talking was the most common form of individual-based discipline. The following two excerpts from my fieldnotes provide typical examples:

Laura told the girls: "I'm tired of you talking. Especially the people in the snack area. You need to be quiet. I'm tired of this. If someone calls your name, you stand up." She called out one name, and when the girl didn't stand, she reiterated more loudly and slowly: "When someone says your name, stand up." CeCe walked over to the girl and ordered her to stand, which she did. They did this with several more girls: calling on them and putting them into timeout.

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Casey stood in front of the group today: "Wait. I'm going to send you on a walk. Miss Sharice asked you to be quiet. This is the third time we've asked you. Move away from the front door. You, Selena, stand up, and go to the wall."

"My name's not Selena," the girl interjected.

Casey: "I don't care."

Sharice picked a girl or two to send to the wall. She directed Casey to go to the back of the room to watch them and Libby to head to the side. Casey picked several others by calling their names and telling them to "get up" and head to the wall. There were about ten girls they singled out. They immediately got up and took their punishment. Some went into the library.

As these excerpts show, the staff made concerted efforts to remove girls whom they thought were being disruptive to the group. Knowing the girls' names, which many of the staff made a point of learning, allowed them to do so. Singling the girls out and having them stand against the wall, in

particular, made the misbehaving girls visible to everyone. This had the intent and effect of embarrassing them in front of others in order to correct their behavior in the future, as well as making an example of them for the rest of the girls. The staff were successful in doing so in the short term. The girls they singled out stood against the walls quietly. It also signaled to the girls that the staff were ready to begin, which they usually responded to by quieting down and paying attention. In the long term, though, I saw no evidence that singling out girls affected their actions as a collective. Girls, for example, continued to forget their cards, and some complained to their parents.

### Targeting Groups

Group discipline of the girls was just as common, however, as singling out individual girls. Oftentimes, staff punished groups of girls, or the *entire* group of girls, by restricting everyone's access to something. The cadet room was a small closet room without a door, just off the side of the games room. Inside there sat a play house and a small chest with some old and battered dolls and doll accessories. When the girls failed to clean up after themselves, though, the program director shut down the room entirely, sometimes for weeks at a time. "The cadet room is not open," she informed the girls, "since you don't know how to clean up after yourselves." The room's light remained off to signify that no one was allowed inside. The program director similarly shut down the juniors room for several weeks after a video game she bought went missing. She and others took personal offense at the girls' misbehavior, and they signified that they were being disrespected by using personalized language. She explained to the girls, "My junior room is closed because I know two weeks ago when we started I bought that Pac Man game and five games to go with it. *I* bought that. *I* bought that out of my own money so that you'd have something to play on the new TV. I went back in there yesterday with Miss Terri. Somebody gone and stole it. Stole my game." On other days, she warned the girls that the room would not reopen until the game was securely in her hands. By framing the room as *her* room and the game as *her* game, she personalized the offense, making the girls emotionally responsible for the consequences, as well.

It was less common, but the art teacher Abby and other program staff occasionally kicked an entire group of girls out of a program if they were misbehaving or too noisy. When I sat in on art classes one day, for example, Abby had planned to teach the girls how to make string bracelets. The art room was especially loud that day, though, and girls kept coming inside. Abby told the girls to be quiet by saying things like, “Since when is it okay to yell in my room?” When they continued on, she kicked the entire group outside. She made a point of directing everyone to go out, despite several girls’ protestations that “I didn’t do anything.”

When direct-care workers were really fed up with the girls—and the noise in the games room, especially—they resorted to group timeouts. Group timeouts sometimes, although not always, followed a particularly noisy period when the building was close to being filled to capacity. The sheer number of girls on these days made the games room, gym, and homework area intolerably loud and the girls difficult to organize. On other days, the staff simply had a shorter fuse and resorted to group punishment out of habit or crabbiness. Any staffer could administer a timeout to girls, even if they were not in charge of that particular program area. The following description was typical of how the staff put the girls into group timeouts and their continual surveillance of them once in them. This timeout, however, lasted particularly long, and Casey was angrier than usual:

It’s now 4:55p.m., and the girls are scattered to soccer practice, meetings, and the art room. Casey comes out of the library and yells out to the group, “Ladies in the games room, sit down.” Her tone is stern and on the edge of cracking from anger. “That’s it. Sit down, right now. You are too loud. Sit down.”

The girls sit down on the floor. There are small pockets of two and three girls in other places though: in the back hallway, against the back wall, against the front door. Casey yells at the girls sitting in the back as she walks by, “Move forward. Get away from the back wall.” Lucinda, the front desk worker, is standing at the front desk now. She’s dressed professionally but casually, no t-shirt. She becomes the guardian of the girls in timeout.

I go and sit in the back of the room with the people in timeout. Every few minutes, Lucinda rebukes them with “I don’t want to hear nothing, not even breathing.” Then, “The longer you talk, the longer you sit.” “Why are you still talking?” “I still hear talking.”

Other staff members chime in too. The program director from her office: “I know you all aren’t talking.” (I’m literally on the other side of the room and can hear her perfectly shout this from inside her office.) Libby responded, “Shh. Yes, they are.”

Casey walks into the room and instructs a group of girls, “Move up away from the wall.”

They finally let girls go after being in a timeout for 30 minutes. Lucinda did so by asking the girls in the middle of the room to scoot forward, which they did, and then they left the room for other places. There wasn’t a grand announcement to let everyone know or anything, just a gradual easing up.

During this encounter, 30 girls sat in timeout for a full half an hour. These girls were all of those who were playing in the games room at the time and who were unable to sneak into another room to get out of it. The staff did not need to tell the girls that they were in timeout, just simply instruct them to “sit down, right now,” as the girls had experienced it enough to know what it was. Lucinda continued to yell out at the girls—in response to no grievance in particular—to be quiet or face a longer punishment, while standing at the front of the room, arms crossed. Casey walked through the room, too, and arbitrarily placed demands on girls.

The staff encouraged the girls to surveil each other, particularly when they potentially witnessed a wrongdoing. In the case of Sharice’s stolen video games, for example, she told the entire group of girls (not just the twelve-year-olds who used the room), “Don’t tell me that you don’t know who has it. I know some of you tried to get together and get money to pay me back for it. Money’s not the issue. That was my game, and I’m upset. If you know who has it, speak up. If you have my game, you better bring it back. And rest assured, you’ll be gone from here for a while.” When someone knotted up two scooters in a tangled bunch of jump ropes, Laura, the PE director at the time, held them up for the girls to see as a group and then said, “This is what is left of your double Dutch ropes, and I ain’t buying anymore because you keep ruining them. Someone ruined these. I have to cut the ropes to get them out. No more double Dutch. No scooters until December. (It was mid-November.) You don’t take care of your equipment, and you won’t have any.” Sharice backed up her threat by encouraging the girls to tell on each other, “Somebody know what happened. Somebody knows who did this. If you know who did it, I suggest you tell us.”

The staff, thus, sometimes punished groups of girls who were present when the room was too loud, too many girls were running around, or the staff simply had short fuses. During these times, it was irrelevant to the workers who was actually doing what. They implicated and disciplined the entire group. This working-class style of discipline made girls accountable for other girls’ behavior, directly countering the individualism of middle-class cultural capital and middle-class strategies of negotiation (Baumrind 1978; Lareau 2002; Lareau 2003). Group accountability, furthermore, came to a head when the staff

asked girls to tell them who had done something wrong. As the staff framed it, only by implicating another girl could they make any sort of restitution, avoid group consequences, or get back their access to equipment or games. This, paired with the personalizing language of the staff, made the girls—as a group—*emotionally* responsible for the workers’ sense of anger and offense. The staff, in essence, shamed the girls so that they were in charge of managing not only their own but the staff’s emotions.

### *Boyworks*

The execution of discipline was different at Boyworks than at Girlworks. Most noticeably, perhaps, was the sheer lack of discipline, particularly when compared to Girlworks where timeouts were mainstays. As I described above, the staff spent more time participating in activities with the boys than monitoring them or punishing them. Staff, for example, rarely gave group timeouts (I partook in only a couple during my observations) or did any sort of group surveillance. The staff did not hold daily meetings, and they rarely kicked boys out of groups. Brandon attempted to quiet down the boys by telling them to be quiet and refusing to call on them if they did not raise their hands. Despite the chaos of the Mighty Kids groups, though, Brandon seldom disciplined the boys.

The staff occasionally threatened suspension, too, but less often enforced it. Louise warned boys who did not sign in (as the homework program required) when they went to do their homework: “If I can’t find your name, you get a suspension. How long does your suspension last? One day.” A sign on the bathroom door similarly warned that playing in the bathroom would result in a one day suspension. Staff did suspend boys for leaving the BW building and going to a convenience store across the street and picking fights with each other. The staff occasionally put individual boys in timeouts, too. When they did, it was generally in response to an extreme situation. For example, the staff put a boy in timeout after he “slayed,” or made fun of and humiliated, another boy by making fun of his dead mother. Other times, staff pulled individual boys and put them into timeout for repeated offenses: usually running around, fighting, or picking on someone.

What was most striking, then, was the lack of staff intervention. The program director, in fact, instructed the staff to ease up on the kids, particularly Louise. “They don’t need to suspend people all the time or put them [in timeout], but we need to enforce the rules,” he told them. While the boys were well behaved, there were several occasions when I saw boys playing in physically violent ways that seemed dangerous, but no staff intervened. During a Mighty Kids group, for example, boys were slamming into the mats against the walls underneath the basketball hoops. When the mats fell down, the boys trapped other boys underneath and jumped on top of them. Even though Brandon made a half-hearted attempt to stop them by screaming, “Stop! Get up! Put that away!” he did not stop the behaviors, nor did he discipline Jawad who smashed the other boys.

Another day, a boy injured another boy while in the bathroom. Warner came out of the bathroom directing Esteban, a petite eight-year-old boy whose head was dripping blood, back to the staff office. Warner called Louise to come back there, then he left Esteban standing, crying all alone while he went for first aid supplies. Louise sauntered back but stopped to reprimand some boys. Esteban stood alone shaking, so I went back to sit with him. Eventually, the staff cleaned him up and his mother came to get him, but there were no repercussions for any other boys. Esteban simply headed home.

On my first trip to Boyworks, the boys were literally scaling the walls as the staff sat back:

Although the staff were against the wall, sitting on the coolers, the kids (maybe 40 of them) were primarily sitting on the bleachers and horsing around in the back corner and against the farthest away wall. The kids sat almost in a circle with those in front facing backwards so they could all talk. I couldn’t understand them because the noise was echoing. The standing boys were playing: a couple fake attacked each other and had their arms wrapped around each other as if wrestling. A group of boys tried to literally scale the back wall where a beam ran up the side. They threw their arms up and crawled up it as if they were rock climbing. They got surprisingly far up—I commented to Baxter that there was no way I could climb like that. Others were running around and chasing each other. No one was playing with any sort of toys. They were each other’s toys, and they were very physical and aggressive with each other.

On another day, a boy complained that he was hungry because another boy had stolen his chicken nuggets. I asked him who did it, and he pointed to a boy and said, “He did. He stole my chicken nuggets, so I didn’t get anything to eat. I hate it here. I can’t wait to go home.” I asked if he told the staff about the theft, which he did. “What’d they do?” I asked. “Nothing,” he replied. “They didn’t do anything.” The boy sitting behind us corrected him, “They put him in timeout.” “He didn’t stay, though,”

Baxter replied. "They didn't do anything." The next moment, the boys started calling out, "Fight!" I turned around and four feet behind me, a little boy (maybe eight or so) was pummeling another boy while standing on the top bleacher. Fists were flying, even though they were in a bear hug fight. I broke up the fight, grabbing the boy nearest me and ordering him to sit down. A few moments too late, DeShawn, a part-time staff person, came in calmly, asked the boys what happened, and removed them from the room.

Tabitha, a part-time staff member, also felt like the discipline was too lax at times. When she tried to get a boy to pick up a honey bun wrapper he had dropped on the floor, he started cussing at her. She recalled:

He was like, "Get out of my m-f-ing face!" And I was like, "Oh, you're cussing at me now?" I was kind of hurt like, what did I do? Why you trying to cuss at me like that? But he was like, "Yeah, get out of my face. I don't have to pick that s-h-i-t up." And I was like, "Oh, God." So I was like "Okay. That's fine." So Miss Beverly [another part-time staff member] came in through the door and she was like, "What's going on?" And I was like, "You need to come over here and get him." And so later on she talked to him and that was kind of the boy that she had taken under her wing, you know. So she could better understand. He would kind of listen to her more than me. But um, she talked to him. He came and apologized. After that he really didn't say anything to me anymore. So I was like, I mean, I'm not mad at you, but I'm not mad if you don't speak to me. Isn't that terrible?

The boy not only disrespected her authority but became verbally abusive. Tabitha also explained that at one point the boy was poised to fight her. Beverly came to Tabitha's aid because she knew the boy. But there were no repercussions for his outburst, which Tabitha thought was wrong. She wanted the boy to be suspended for three days.

Because the boys seemed to "run wild" at Boyworks, several other staff commented that they disliked going over there. Tamera, for example, told me that boys would hug her in order to feel her breasts or would swipe their hands across her butt. Others explained that the boys were still getting to know the new program director and therefore things were still overly chaotic.

### Physical Discipline

By the time that staff intervened, then, situations had sometimes escalated significantly. Boys' feelings were hurt, or they were humiliated. Sometimes boys were fighting as they were above. The staff,

consequently, found themselves reacting to a small number of extreme situations. It was under these circumstances that men staff sometimes resorted to physical confrontation with the boys. Almost universally, these workers rejected violence as an inappropriate behavior for the boys. Warner told kids that they could not hit each other. He explained during an interview, as if explaining to a kid:

You're arguing with a kid, and because you lose the argument, you haul off and hit him. There's no reason for that. You're in the games room and you see someone you don't like because you had a problem in school and you throw a pool ball at them. I've seen things like that. And you're out on the football field and you hate that kid over there so his back is turned, you clobber him. Or you steal something from someone because you don't have it. I don't like that. Those things don't have to happen.

But the staff viewed their own physical intervention as a negative but sometimes necessary form of discipline. One staff member explained it like this:

At [another after-school program], they have certain philosophies and stuff, and you can't say this and you can't say that. And in the school system, you have to restrain yourself. But here and the kids we deal with here. . . and we know who their parents are. A lot of these parents I went to school with, so I know them anyways. "Hey kid, I'm going to take my belt off and tear your butt up. You don't believe me? We are going to call your mama. She gave me permission to do that!" That's one thing that parents give us a lot of freedom with these kids. You have to know who your kid is. You can't do it with every kid, and some of them you have to sit down and talk to them and suspend them and sit them out like that. And some I don't care how bad they care, the parents give me permission to do whatever I needed to do.

There is a lady, her sons started two weeks ago, and she basically told me that these two boys they get in a lot of trouble. "They don't have a man in their life, and I don't know what to do." I said, "Do you really want help? They can come to Boyworks, of course. They have rules they have to follow, but if you really want help, just trust me and let me do what I need to do." And she said, "You do what you need to do."

On some occasions, staff viewed their physical intervention as something they needed to do. Especially when boys did something especially egregious, the staff justified their own violence against them. In such cases, the staff member above reported, "I might take them in a storage room and jack them up. I'm not going to hit them. I'm not going to beat them. I ain't going to threaten them and tell them this and that. I'm going to talk to them on their level." When I asked him to give me an example of how that worked, he explained that he had to "keep it real" with some kids and had whipped a boy once.

There was another kid who kept picking on kids that were smaller than he was. The staffer continued with this story:

I kept telling him and telling him. And one day I just jacked him up. I grabbed him by the collar of his shirt and dragged him through everybody. And this was through assembly time. I dragged

him through everybody so everybody could see to embarrass him. And I took him to the bathroom and took my belt off and hit him three times. . . . I just wanted to scare him and let him know that life isn't about you. I mean, you want to pick on people? Now I'm the bigger guy. What are you going to do now?

This staff member used physical violence—jacking up the boy against the wall and then hitting him with his belt—to teach him a lesson about picking on people. He called the boy's bluff and established himself as “the bigger guy” and, therefore, the one in control and entitled to dominate others.

The same staff member had also challenged boys to step outside with him when he thought their behavior was out of control. Out there, they could fight without any recourse to boys: “So I tell them, ‘Let's step outside so I can give you an opportunity to be a man. I ain't going to suspend you. I ain't going to call the police. I ain't going to kick you out. I ain't going to tell your mom about it. If you want to be a man, let's go out here and do this one on one. Be a man and fight it out.’ In this situation, again, the staff member viewed his own and the boys' fighting as an acceptable way to settle their power struggle. Who was really a man was determined by who won.

Another male staff member explained that “if you're disrespectful of me because you're having [a bad day] or you're wrong, I really don't like that. You come at me because you're wrong, negatively, ‘Damn f-ers’ and all that. Then we have a problem. And they don't like me when I . . . I get really, really nasty and angry. Not many people see that, but it happens. And it's not right. I can admit to that. That's not right.” One particular incident seemed to escalate quickly, and the staff member thought there was no choice but to physically restrain a boy:

There was a kid I touched this summer, and I shouldn't have touched him. But I touched him. Well, I shouldn't have, and I should have. But he was so out of control to the point where he said he was going to kill me. And he's all over Boyworks running around screaming. He broke the glasses out there [on the entryway door] and bang. He's trying to get that glass loose, and all I could think of is that if he gets that glass loose, then I can't stop him. If he doesn't cut himself with the glass in his hands, if he don't cut me, he's going to cut the girl that's sitting. . . . Someone's going to get hurt.

So I choked him all the way out the door. I was calling 911 with this hand. [The boy] didn't like the way that I held him, but he knew that I wasn't playing anymore. When the police got there, I was like, “You can lock me up if you need to, but I'm not letting him go until you cuff him.” And he said, once they cuffed him, “No, it's not the method I would of used but...”

In this case, choking a kid was deemed excessive but excusable by the staff member and police alike.

This same staff member violently removed a teenage boy from Boyworks after he grabbed a woman staff member's breast. I heard shouts coming from the computer lab, "What the hell were you doing? You cannot touch people. You have no right to touch any woman!" He threw the boy out while yelling that he leave and not come back for three weeks. The boy responded back, "Fine. I don't care." The staff member added another week, "Make it four." The boy shouted something back, which I could not hear. The worker yelled back, "See you at Christmas!"

The men staff members who grew up in Boyworks learned this might-makes-right strategy from the former program director. Martin remembered, "Everybody was afraid of Delane [the former director] so we didn't talk back. But, you know Delane had us all in check. . . . Whenever you kept talking trash to him, Delane said, 'Meet me in the wrestling room.' And he would close the door and he said, 'Now somebody's going to come out of here hurting.'"

In sum, the Boyworks workers were more lenient in their discipline than the staff at Girlworks. The staff spent more time playing with the boys than monitoring and punishing them. Although the boys were mostly well behaved, the lack of discipline was sometimes problematic because it allowed tense situations to escalate. When they did intervene, the BW workers were more likely to use individualized forms of discipline in which they singled out boys for timeout or suspension rather than punishing the entire group. On rare occasions, the staff resorted to physical confrontation with the boys, which the staff justified as sometimes necessary in order to establish themselves as dominant or to teach a boy a lesson. The lack of enforcement, paired with the rhetoric of rules, suggested that boys need not obey adult authority to the degree that girls did. They could bend the rules with little repercussion.

### **Conclusion: Class-Based Sources of Power**

In this chapter, I examined how staff who worked with girls and those who worked with boys negotiated power relations with the kids. I focused on the staff's interactions with the kids along three different dimensions: how they established their credibility, how they trained kids to interact with authority, and how they disciplined them.

At Girlworks, workers emphasized the importance of authority to the girls, as well as the girls' obedience. The workers at GW used their authority as adults and caretakers to create expectations for behavior and to enforce them. When girls did not obey them, staff became increasingly authoritarian or personalized the girls' behavior as an affront to them. They also used timeouts and rebukes as primary forms of discipline, which reinforced girls' obedience. While timeouts were sometimes individualized, they were more routinely inflicted upon groups with little discernment between who did and did not partake in the inappropriate behavior. Girls' obedience signified to the workers (and outsiders) that the girls respected them and were well behaved. It also reflected back on the staff that they were competent and good at their jobs.

The staff, in addition, used emotions to control the girls. They trained girls to understand other people, their circumstances, and their perspectives. They told the girls stories about the struggles they had endured and those that others did, for example. They also encouraged girls to take on the point of view of their teachers as a strategy for easing their interactions with them. When the girls broke rules, the staff personalized the offenses. These actions made the girls responsible for managing their emotions, too.

In response to the staff's orientation, girls (especially girls under the age of nine) relied heavily on adult authority figures to intervene on their behalf at Girlworks. They turned to adults to solve their disagreements and to make decisions for them. Girls looked to me interject on their behalf, even though I did not wear staff attire and told the girls repeatedly that I was not a staff member. For example, they wanted me to decide who would go first and who would be the realtor during a game of Monopoly. Daniella wanted me get her more game tickets, which cost ten cents each and kids traded for a turn at a variety of games during the Halloween party. She spent all of her money on snacks earlier in the evening at Boyworks. She began to cry when I did not interject, then cried to a staff person before returning to me to complain:

After standing around for a minute, Daniella spotted me and came up to me crying on her painted face: "I don't have any tickets. I spent all of my money at Boyworks." She grabbed my hand. "What?" I asked. I couldn't hear. "I don't have any money for tickets." Still crying, I said, "That's okay. You can still play with everyone, can't you?" "No, I can't play any games." The tears slowly streamed down her round face. . . . She left and after a few minutes she came back

crying again and said that the staff had told her there was nothing they could do for her. She couldn't have any tickets to play games without paying 10 cents each for them.

When girls fought or disagreed with each other, they turned to me and other adults or helpers to intervene. They often pleaded their case. Dea, for example, was arguing with other girls over who got to sit next to me and play a card game called garbage. I refused to intervene:

While she was sitting next to me other girls were excluding her from playing garbage. After a while, she got fed up, saying, "They won't let me play." She jumped up pouting, crossed her arms and stomped away into the other room. After a moment of her being gone, another girl came in to report how upset she was, informing me that "Dea says you were being mean to her."

"Being mean" to Dea, in this case, meant that I failed to live up to her expectations as an adult: adults arbitrate between kids, create the expectations, and enforce them.

It was by caretaking of other people, furthermore, that staff encouraged girls to garner control and power in their own lives. Girls who took on the roles of helper and junior staff reversed their social positioning. As children they were subject to supervision and discipline, but as caretakers they supervised and disciplined. When Sharice asked her to be my computer lab "helper," eleven-year-old Andrea happily took on a staff role. She walked around the lab, turning on the computers and logging on with a password that neither she nor Sharice told me. At Boyworks, the teenage girl who served as staff helper by working at the front desk participated in whatever groups she wanted to—including the all-boy Mighty Kids group. When Simone was computer lab helper, she guarded the door, literally shutting the door on several girls who did not have homework, declaring, "This is homework time." Several girls complained that Simone was "not the boss of me." Yet her status as caretaker gave her that very power: to be the boss of herself and other girls. By holding girls accountable for each other's behavior and other people's emotions, the staff reinforced the power in caretaking.

At Boyworks, the workers were much less concerned with controlling the boys than they were in creating a fun and safe environment for them. Most of the time staff approached the boys like friends who participated in activities alongside them. Together, they played computer games, ping-pong, and basketball. BW workers also gave the boys autonomy that allowed them to self-organize their play and their interactions with each other. The boys, consequently, spent considerable time engaged in

unstructured or self-structured leisure. Mastering rules was a primary way in which staff taught boys to interact with authority figures. By learning the rules for specific settings, boys could adjust their behavior accordingly. Knowing the rules—rhetoric of rules—would allow boys to manipulate their environment to get themselves out of trouble if they had to.

Despite the emphasis on knowing the rules, the staff at BW enforced them less often than at GW. Discipline was much less of a focus there. The boys endured fewer threats from staff and less punishment. When they were punished, the staff singled out individual boys, usually for brief timeouts where they sat out of play.

Still, in extreme situations, staff drew on their own ability to dominate as a resource. They told the boys of their own encounters with street culture which portrayed themselves as streetwise and adventuresome. They were, then, establishing themselves as credible to the boys. They also relied on their own abilities to physically dominate the boys to show them who was powerful. When push came to shove or the staff viewed it as necessary, they resorted to physical confrontation. They jacked up the boys, took them out back, or restrained them in front of the other boys—in an attempt to publicly humiliate them and establish themselves as in charge. The staff, thus, carried around their physical dominance like a resource tucked away in their back pocket but ready to use. The boys, however, were seldom held accountable for each other (and then, only by women staff), nor were they encouraged to empathize with others.

Staff, consequently, fostered autonomy and independence among the boys, as well as responsibility for themselves rather than others. Within this framework, boys were not in trouble unless they got into trouble. Their locus of control was external. The boys, as a result, rarely turned to adults to intervene on their behalf but instead almost always settled disagreements among themselves. Some boys learned to use their bodies and ability to shock others to gain power, just as researchers argue happens with low-income boys (e.g., Pyke 1996). It was the boys with the most status, quickest wit, and biggest body size that often set the tone of the groups. When nerdy Lamar tried to stop boys from cheating at foosball by telling them, “You can’t do that!” they ignored him. But boys who verbally or physically

intimidated others were not ignored but, instead, were reckoned with. It was by being brash and acting out that this small minority of boys commanded attention. Jawad, for example, was routinely crass with the boys and adults at BW. He tackled Aaron, calling him “nigger” and “fag.” He blatantly disregarded Brandon’s instructions during groups by sitting on the floor in front of the group next to him rather than on the bleachers with the other boys. He also asked me repeatedly during a Mighty Kids group, “You ever (rubbing his hands together repeatedly and then whispering) had sex?” His comment sparked a reaction from other boys that disrupted the entire group and put him at the center of attention. Other boys achieved the same result by interrupting the staff during groups, asking, “Can we play now?” or by approaching me and asking me, “Are you racist?” The boys’ autonomy and independence left the boys responsible for themselves so that they developed interactional skills to have fun but exact power over others. The staff reinforced this orientation by relying on their own abilities to dominate the boys as the ultimate source of power.

The BW staff were grooming boys to be risky but avoid trouble. They disconnected consequences from the boys’ behavior so that there was little accountability for them. They also reinforced the boys’ responsibility for themselves and diminished their responsibility to others. The staff, in other words, created an environment that justified troublemaking as long as the boys got away with it.

Despite the mission of Kidworks and the staff’s desire to help the kids learn and practice middle-class skills, the ways in which the staff negotiated power with the kids fostered them in limited ways. In her interview and observation study of families, Lareau (2002; 2003) found that middle-class parents took a “concerted cultivation” approach to parenting. They emphasized the development of their children’s special talents, involvement in skill-building activities, and language and reasoning in their discipline. Children who were nurtured through this approach developed an “emerging sense of entitlement” in their interactions with others. They also learned to navigate institutions and use institutional resources to their advantage (see also Pyke 1996), as well as to be self-directive (Kohn 1977). Research on institutions that cater to middle-class kids illustrate similar forms of adult-child interaction. In Moore’s (2001; 2002) anti-oppression summer camp, for example, staff interrogated homophobic remarks and their larger

implications, rather than simply telling kids not to use them. They engaged kids in discussion about inequality, which effectively curbed kids from acting out even when staff were not present. Responsive teachers in schools also engage in two-way discussions with kids and listen to them. The general trend within education has been towards reward systems, encouraging positive behavior, and treating students with “dignity” by not embarrassing them (Conte 1994). Psychological research shows that students in these sorts of environments have higher levels of achievement, social competence, and behavior than students in other environments (Gregory and Weinstein 2004; Hetherington 1993; Pellerin 2005).

Staff encouraged kids’ entitlement to be free of discrimination and to use of institutional resources to gain restitution if necessary. However, the staff at KW, particularly at Girlworks, generally deflated a sense of entitlement among the kids, unless they were peer helpers. They especially discouraged girls from reasoning or negotiating with them as authority figures, except in response to discrimination. There was little encouragement or praise of positive behavior, particularly with the boys.

The disciplinary strategies that the staff used were more often working-class strategies. In Lareau’s research, working-class families emphasized the “accomplishment of natural growth.” Rather than cultivating special talents, these parents provided basic necessities in order to promote development: love, care, food, and shelter. Their discipline was directive in nature and more likely to include physical discipline. Demanding obedience and conformity, as well as closer supervision, are common childrearing techniques among working-class families (Kohn 1977). These strategies rely on fear among kids as a basis for controlling them (Baumrind 1997). As a result, within Lareau’s research, working-class children gained an “emerging sense of constraint,” which taught them to be deferent to authority, even as they were self-directing in their free time. Research on schools shows that kids are more also likely to act out or dropout of chaotic and punitive or closely supervised school environments (Davis 1986; Hetherington 1993; Pellerin 2005).

It was this working-class approach that was evident at Kidworks particularly in how the staff negotiated their own power relations with the kids. The staff expected obedience to their rules and orders, and it was through the kids’ deference that they felt respected. At Girlworks, this working-class

approach was most evident in the ways the staff established their credibility and disciplined girls. At Boyworks, the workers were more likely to allow the boys to develop their own skills but less likely to force boys' submission. Still, they did not hesitate when they felt kids were threatening.

## **chapter eight: Good Girls and Real Men**

The staff-kid interactions examined in the previous chapter indirectly socialized girls and boys in gender-typed cultural capital. Girls learned to identify with caretaking and helping others. They were also controlled emotionally. Boys enjoyed autonomy and concern for themselves with little real recourse for acting out.

In this chapter, I examine the ways in which the staff directly defined what it meant to be a girl and a boy and the roles into which they socialized the kids. The greatest concern regarding girls was that they would become pregnant as teenagers, making it more difficult to succeed in school and eventually go on to college. The Girl Might and Mighty Kids curricula were designed to advocate “sexual postponement” to kids rather than a “sex is bad” message. Yet, in practice, the emphasis on sexual risk and consequences (Fields 2005; Fine 1988; Overlien 2003) and the lack of a “discourse of desire” (Fine 1988; Tolman 2002) resembled the (ineffective) abstinence-only approaches that frame sexuality as bad. The staff highlighted the consequences of sexuality for girls, for example, and characterized sexual restraint as a matter of self-respect. Thus, I argue that the staff socialized the girls to be “good girls” who were sexually restrained and responsible.

Being a good girl did not preclude girls from being providers. Rather, staff viewed achievement in school and work as necessary for girls and part of their responsibility as women and mothers. For this reason, the workers also organized Girlworks to value education and promote girls’ success at it.

Sexuality or its consequences were decidedly less of a concern when it came to boys, on the other hand, and so were left out of the Man-To-Man curriculum entirely. What boys learned in Mighty Kids groups was that girls potentially got pregnant and suffered consequences if they did. Bigger concerns, however, were the consequences that being street posed for boys. While the staff at GW pointed out the negative effects of pregnancy, the staff at BW followed the curriculum’s instructions to highlight the potentially dangerous effects of drugs and violence. The staff hoped to scare the boys straight, just as some of them were when they attended Kidworks as children. They framed their expectations for the boys as a matter of being a man. Becoming a man, according to the curriculum and

staff, meant rejecting these behaviors in favor of men's traditional roles of provider and leader. Being providers, as they constructed it, was characteristic of men while being street was typical of "mamas' boys." The staff reiterated these points by encouraging boys to take ownership of BW and their own lives. This ownership, in turn, was intended to create leadership and emotional investment in middle-class cultural capital. The staff, thus, used the boys' identity stakes in manhood (Schwalbe 2005) to promote the desired cultural capital.

In this chapter, I explore the ways in which the staff and KW programs encouraged girls and boys to take on traditionally gendered roles. I begin by examining the ways in which GW staff and the Girl Might and Mighty Kids curricula socialized girls to be good girls. They valued sexual restraint among girls, which they promoted by shaming sexuality, instilling fear, and on a few rare occasions disseminating misinformation. Next, I show that girls were taught to achieve by dedicating themselves to school. Boys, on the other hand, were socialized to be leaders and workers. At Boyworks, the staff did not shame the boys but instead taught them to avoid the trouble of drugs and violence by trying to scare them straight and redefining manhood. I conclude that to be a good girl meant taking on responsibilities for reproduction and production, while real men were defined as providers. It was through these gendered roles that boys and girls could be powerful.

### **Teaching Girls to Be Good Girls**

At Girlworks, staff taught girls to be good girls. Emphasized femininity, as Connell (1987) defined it, are the ways in which women act in compliance to their own subordination to men. While the nature of emphasized femininity varies across time and place, women's sexuality continues to be a key component. At Girlworks, staff taught girls to be good by restraining from sexuality and taking responsibility for its consequences. Their version of femininity, in addition, emphasized achievement as an important pursuit for girls, particularly for mothers.

### *Sexual Restraint*

As described in the previous chapter, staff both informally (through sharing their own stories) and formally (through guest speakers sharing their stories as part of life-skills programs) proselytized to girls as a way to establish their credibility as an understanding and approachable adult. Storytelling also provided girls with positive examples of the success possible by overcoming the obstacles they faced. Equally often, however, this storytelling provided cautionary tales which highlighted the consequences of failure to meet traditional expectations for girls. These stories drew attention to the challenges that come from failing to control sexual impulses or fend off predatory men. Girls might become pregnant or become a young (unmarried, uneducated, un-resourced) mother. During a Girl Might group, some girls challenged Libby and CeCe, who were leading it, because unmarried CeCe had a baby. The staff took advantage of the opportunity to explain the burdens of having a child:

So we're telling them "don't have sex before marriage," but [CeCe] has a child. So she explained her situation. She made choices she shouldn't have, and she's now suffering the consequences but dealing with the responsibilities of situations. She has a little boy, and she was explaining to them, "It's hard, you know? He [the baby's father] might not want to be there" and things like that because her baby's father wasn't there. At the time, her parents weren't even there, so all she had was me.

And she explained that to them. That was one of the consequences of her situation. Things are a whole lot better and it's much harder than what it seems. You can't put the baby off. You know, if the baby's sick, it's going to be up all night and things like that. You can't put things like that off, so. She was explaining it to them, all the responsibilities that come with it. . . . I'm explaining to them, "You might not have that support. Your parents might not be there. Your parents could disown you after that. You baby's father might not want to be there. He might say that it's not his, and it's just you and your baby. You might have people that step in and out of your life."

According to Libby's account, she and CeCe described for the girls what life with a child was supposedly really like rather than just "what it seems." CeCe no longer had the freedom she once enjoyed as she had to meet the demands of her child first. The baby's father and her own parents abandoned her. CeCe was left with little money, social life, or support. The staff wanted the girls to see the freedoms she gave up and the hardships she faced because of her sexual activity.

It was the negative consequences of sex that life-skills programs also emphasized, even though the curriculum had explicit lessons on what constituted healthy relationships. The Girl Might program,

for example, asked girls to reflect on their preparedness to deal with the consequences of sexual activity.

Before deciding to have sex, the program instructed, girls were to ask themselves the following questions:

- Am I willing to risk obtaining a sexually transmitted disease?
- Am I willing to risk getting pregnant?
- Can I be an effective single parent or could I handle putting a child up for adoption?
- Can I handle the guilt and emotions that I may feel if I decide to have sex?
- How will my decision to have sex impact others, like my family and friends?

The reflection questions each focused on a potentially bad consequence that could come from a girl's sexual involvement: getting a disease, getting pregnant, feeling guilty, and disappointing others.

Both Girl Might and Mighty Kids emphasized sexual consequences, particularly for girls, in their exercises on the myths of sex and reproduction, as well. These exercises had girls and boys evaluate the veracity of the following statements among others:

- Girls who haven't started their period yet can't get pregnant.
- Girls and young women can get pregnant the first time they have sex.
- Teenage parents are less likely than other teens to finish high school and, as a result, are less likely to get high-paying jobs.
- A girl can't get pregnant by having sex while standing up.
- The safe time for a girl to have sex is in the middle of her menstrual cycle.
- Most teens who get pregnant don't intend to.
- More than a million teenage girls get pregnant every year.
- Young women who get pregnant are more likely to have babies with birth defects than mature women.
- Sexual activity can spread disease.
- If a girl's period is late, she may be pregnant even if she has never had sex.
- Saying "no" to sexual involvement is the only 100 percent way of avoiding pregnancy.
- Girls can get pregnant from just "making out."

The "myths" or "truths" framed sexual activity as a bad decision for girls by overwhelmingly drawing attention to the potential negative consequences of having sex (pregnancy, spreading disease, dropping out of school), even when they were unlikely. The myths, furthermore, routinely placed sexuality within a pregnancy framework rather than one of sexual desire or intimacy. The curriculum provided girls with advice so that they could "communicate 'no' to sexual advances in an assertive yet non-aggressive way." Following a lesson on female victimization was the lesson on making smart decisions. The first step of this activity was to "have girls brainstorm ways to avoid becoming pregnant. . . . It is important for the

list to include the following: knowing the benefits of postponing sex; ways to say ‘no’ to boys who want to have sex; and things to do with boys other than sex.”

Staff emphasized the potential negative effects of having sex during life-skills and prevention programs with the girls. Danielle explained that she did not want to tell girls not to have sex—she thought it was counterproductive and likely to induce rebellion on the part of girls—but that she preferred girls to be abstinent and told them so:

My top [reasons for abstinence] are: No, because you’re too young. No, because there’s more in life than, there’s more to a relationship than sex that you need to learn about and at your age. . . . You have the risk of having a child. You have the risk of catching STDs. You have the risk of upsetting your parent and really breaking that trust that they have with you. Especially when you don’t tell them.

The message during an all-day Girl Might session was that abstinence was best and that other sexual practices could lead to disease and pregnancy. The session was led by several sisters from a sorority that volunteered to lead the life-skills group that day. Towards the end of the day, the sisters covered the topic of HIV in order to prep girls to take a post-test on it:

Sister 1: “The best way to protect yourself [from HIV] is through abstinence.”

Sister 2: “Abstinence is the only way to protect yourself 100 percent.”

Sister 3: “If you are sexually active, then condoms are best.”

Sister 1: “But abstinence is the best way to protect yourself.”

Sister: “If you’re taking birth control pills, does that prevent STDs?” (She poses this as a question to the girls) . . .

Sister 3: “No, they don’t prevent them. They only prevent pregnancy. That’s why they’re called contraceptives. Only condoms prevent the passage of HIV.”

Another Sister jumps in to qualify: “Condoms aren’t a hundred percent, either. AIDS is small enough to get through the condom. So that’s not a hundred percent for sure. The viruses are small.”

Sister: “The best way to not have to worry about HIV/AIDS and having kids is what?”

The girls call out together: “Abstinence!” . . .

Same Sister: “That dry humping you all are doing—not you but your friends—you can really get some STDs that way.” The girls laugh and question what she means by dry humping. “Dry humping. You all know what that is. Humping with your clothes on.” She ended by saying again that diseases get spread that way.

The fear-inducing misinformation about spreading disease through non-bodily contact and HIV through condoms reinforced the message that girls learned to call in unison: rejecting sex was the only way to protect oneself fully from the dangers of sexuality.

Amber explained that the staff were trying to come up with more ways to educate girls in the consequences of sex. “We’ve been talking,” she explained, “about different programs that we can teach them. . . Put more fear in there to the fact that it’s not safe [to have sex].” She described in detail:

We’re trying to come up with programs and field trips to the health center to get them more information about STDs, about pregnancy, about complications. We actually want to teach them more about AIDS. We’re trying to . . . we’re in the midst now of trying to find somebody with AIDS who doesn’t mind coming in, talking to the older girls.

Amber described her motivation for taking girls to a health center bringing in a person with AIDS: “I’m really concerned about them because a lot of them aren’t responsible. . . . Sex leads to pregnancies nine times out of ten. I’m concerned that they’re not able mentally to handle something like that. Not our girls.”

Following the refusal skills scripts of the life-skills and prevention programs provided girls practice in rejecting sexual behavior. Louise had kids rehearse doing so during a Mighty Kids group for ten to twelve-year-old boys and girls. She described what happened:

Role play was so cute. . . . They would act so shy, and it was some of them that actually liked each other. They’re into this new stuff, and so I said, “Okay, you guys, show me how you would approach this girl if you wanted to talk to her.” Or it would be a scene. How [would a] girl show respect for herself? How would she handle a guy coming to her? What would she say to him?

And so I would get the little scenario: “He’s going come up to you. He’s going tell you his parents are not home, you guys have the house to yourself. What are you going do?” It would be so cute ‘cause the little guys would get there, “Hey. What’s up? Don’t you want come with me? My mom and dad’s not home. We got the whole house to ourselves. Hey we can do this, we can do that.”

And the girls be like, “Mm-mm! I’m not going to your house. I know what you want.” And stuff like that. And it was sooo cute. And one girl was like, “Heeek yeah! Let’s go! Let’s ride this thing!” I was like, “Uh-uh! Wrong answer! No chick! Mm-mm.” She said, “Oh I’m just playing Mrs. Louise.” But she wasn’t. ‘Cause she really liked him, so.

In this “role play” scenario, the kids played out gendered dating scripts. The boys pretended to be sexual aggressors, while the girls were forced to take on the role of refusing their sexual advances. When the girl who liked a boy joked that she would go with him, Louise bypassed the opportunity to talk about sexual desire or even intimacy in favor shutting her down with “wrong answer.”

Girl Might group taught girls to refuse sexual advances, too:

Group facilitator: “What if you had a boyfriend and went to the movie—I don’t think you all should be doing that—but you go and he wants to hold your hand? You don’t really want to. Then he wants to kiss you. What do you do?”

Girl: "Slap him!" The room erupts with giggling.  
Another facilitator: "That's not funny. That's violence."  
Girl 2: "I'd tell him I'm not ready to do that."  
Facilitator: "That's good. That's a great answer. Tell him that you're not ready for that yet."  
Another Facilitator: "Don't smile and be like 'no.' This is serious. If you say 'no' when you're smiling, he's not going to take you seriously. He's going to think you're not serious. It could turn into something more."  
Girl: "Like rape."  
"Yeah, like rape."

When KW staff and volunteers interacted with girls during life-skills groups or when sharing their own stories of struggle, they warned girls of the failures that potentially accompanied acting on their sexual feelings. They bombarded girls with the dangers of being sexual and of failing to reject boys' advances in a convincing way: getting pregnant, getting sick, disappointing their families, feeling shameful, even getting raped. Acting out one's sexuality, the staff implied, meant that girls consciously and knowingly gambled with their futures. Creating a life for oneself required putting "mind over matter," as Amber put it. It meant controlling one's sexual feelings and boys' desires.

#### *A Matter of Self-Respect*

According to other research on working-class and low-income groups (Anderson 1999; Dance 2002; Ferguson 2000; Jones 2004; Kaplan 1997; Kubrin 2005; MacLeod 1995; Newman 1999; Schalet, Hunt, and Joe-Laidler 2003), being respected by others symbolizes a person's value and worth. Demanding the respect of others, on the other hand, is a way to establish one's own worth and self-esteem. Boys who campaigned for respect (Anderson 1999), for example, built up their image in front of others and established themselves as leaders.

"Respect" was a particularly powerful and meaningful concept to the kids and black staff. It was a central part of being a good person and having healthy relationships, according to Girl Might group. My fieldnotes demonstrate how the group facilitator emphasized respect:

The group facilitator begins reading off a list on the sheet of paper she's holding that's from the Girl Might curriculum: "Love can be respect, hard work, pleasure, commitment, sharing, compromise. What love is *not* is pain, violence, aggression, dependency, giving up self, getting pregnant. Respect is..."

A girl jumps in: "To treat someone how they want to be treated."

Facilitator: "That's right. How do you feel when you're not respected?"  
Another girl: "Upset."  
Facilitator: "Does it make you angry? Or sad?"  
Same girl: "Sad."

Adults at KW who wanted to impress upon kids the importance of acting in a particular way or having a particular attitude invoked a discourse of respect. Staff used the language of respect, for example, when emphasizing the importance of rules. Sharon told the boys as a whole group that stealing was bad because it was disrespectful: "That's someone's property. Things belong to people and we respect that. Not take it from them. We respect their belongings." When Amber wanted me to know that her grandmother had taught her very important lessons in life, she explained that "she taught me a lot of morals and respect, and I was always told I was a different one [from my friends whose parents were alcoholics and abusive]." Staff felt most comfortable and at ease at work once they had earned the respect of the kids.

Previous research suggests that for low-income black girls, sexuality is central to respect, particularly because they experience it as contradictory. On the one hand, girls are concerned with maintaining their heterosexual relationships. On the other, they worry about protecting themselves (Tolman 1994; Tolman, Spencer, Rosen-Reynoso, and Porche 2003). Getting a reputation as a slut, becoming pregnant, or getting a disease are particularly worrisome to girls (Tolman 1994). Girls have used sexual autonomy (Schalet, Hunt, and Joe-Laidler 2003) and sexual restraint (Espiritu 2001; Fine 2005; Tolman 1996; Tolman 2002) both to shore up their sense of self-worth and control over their lives within this context.

At Girlworks, learning to have and display the proper cultural capital was a matter of self-respect for girls, according to the staff. According to a Girl Might facilitator, for example, treating oneself and each other well created self-esteem:

Facilitator: "Self-esteem comes from different kinds of relationships. How do you enhance your self-esteem?"  
Girl: "Not put yourself down."  
Facilitator: "Uh huh. That's right."  
Another girl: "Talk about it with that person."  
Facilitator: "Spend time with people who like you and care about you. Reward yourself if you've accomplished something. Set goals that you know are achievable. When your goals are

too high and unachievable, you get frustrated and feel bad about yourself when you don't accomplish them. When your self-esteem is high, other people feel good. When it's low, people feel miserable and bad. Ever hear the saying that misery loves company? It's true. If a friend brings you down, you can get them some help. Help them. Or you get new friends."

Girls with high self-esteem and girls who respected themselves, furthermore, could protect their sexuality through abstinence, or in the language of KW's life-skills programs, "postponement" of sexuality. Rejecting sex was a way to protect themselves and build up their self-worth. The Mighty Girl's "relationship rights," for example, stated that "girls have a right to ask for what they want in a relationship and to change their minds. Something that might be acceptable to a young woman in one relationship might not be acceptable in another, and everyone has a right to say no. A woman's voice, when used to express her feelings, can empower her and enhance her self-respect." Having high self-esteem meant being in control of one's life and, therefore, in control of one's body and sexuality (see Fine 2005; White 1999). "The group leaders and health professional should remind the girls," according to the Girl Might manual, "that they are responsible for their sexual health and that they must make good choices to stay healthy. It is important for the group to know that *not* making a decision as to how they will be sexually responsible is making a decision to *not* have control over their lives."

The staff, consequently, trained girls to reject sexuality (even if they felt compelled otherwise) as a matter of having and improving their self-esteem. By maintaining control over their bodies and not getting pregnant, girls were "respecting" themselves, the staff told them. Sharice explained that the most important lessons from the life-skills programs:

[That] would have to be the self-esteem and the ones learning about taking care of their bodies. Because I feel like from those programs if they learn to have a positive self-esteem, and they learn how to take care of their bodies, then they're not going to let anybody harm them. So I think that's the number one thing that we look for those kids to get out of those programs. To come out of those programs having a good, a good feeling that I am somebody.

Amber similarly expressed to girls that "if you really want to save yourself for the right person and you care about your body enough, you will want to do that [abstain from sex]. Then you have to put mind over matter."

Danielle most frequently led the Girl Might groups at GW and, therefore, talked about sex the most often with the girls. When she was first asked to deal with the girls' sexuality, she had the

impression that “they were just really, really, really, really sexually active. Like way out there.

Uncontrollable. Just you can’t control it.” She learned from the girls, though, that only some of the older girls were sexually active, and they had sex infrequently. When dealing with them, Danielle said she “always told” the girls:

You have so much more in life that you can accomplish and do and worry about besides having sex. Find a hobby. Abstinence. You can practice abstinence. It’s something that’s going keep you, first of all, safe. And without a doubt, having to worry about consequences that come with having sex. And then also just, like I said before, once you’ve given yourself to this guy, you’re taking a part of them with you.

Not having sex would allow girls to focus on other things, potentially things that would help them get ahead in life. For this reason, both Danielle and Amber told girls to “find a hobby” as a productive alternative to engaging in sexual activity. Danielle continued the lesson by framing the girls’ bodies as their sole possessions and the most important: “Their body is the only thing that’s theirs. That’s their, I always tell them, ‘That is your pride and joy. That’s all you have is your pride and your reputation. And you need to cover it and protect it at any cost and at all cost because once it’s gone, it’s gone.’” According to Danielle’s lesson, girls’ bodies were their “pride and joy” that needed to be protected at “any” and “all cost.”

Still, there were rumors flying around GW that girls were sexually active and misbehaving in school. “It was just disappointing” to the staff, Danielle recalled. In response, she and Terri met with the girls, telling them “that if they ever need any help, any advice, to come to us.” Within a week, one girl came to her and told her that she had had sex out of curiosity. Her current boyfriend also wanted to have sex, but she did not. “I guess she felt like he was going to still pressure her.” Danielle talked with her “for a while” and “we came to the conclusion she wasn’t ready. She said she wasn’t ready. She didn’t think she needed to be in a relationship if the conclusion was going to be that he was going to continue to pressure her and be upset about it.” The girl took away from the group that she should not only *not* have sex with him but she should consider breaking up with him because he continued to “pressure” and “upset” her.

During a Girl Might group that Louise led, the girls took on this message of protection and building self-esteem and taught it to a peer, a girl who was struggling in her relationship with a boyfriend.

This girl, Louise reported, had sex with him on a baseball field. Quickly afterward, rumors were flying about her. The girls in her Girl Might group, however, tried to steer her on the path of abstinence, which they characterized as esteemable:

They were telling her, “You have to respect yourself. You don’t give that to a guy. That’s for when you’re married. That’s a special thing that he has to earn. He has to prove himself. He has to prove himself that he is the person that can provide for you and take care of you. You know that is your virtue. That’s the most important part of you. That’s a person entering into your spirit. Into you. You don’t just give that to any boy that decides they want to dump their garbage off in you.”

Louise and the girls framed their bodies and sexuality as their “virtue” and “most important part” of themselves. The girl’s body was like a temple that housed her spirit, and to “respect yourself,” a girl was never to let a boy make sexual decisions for her.

The staff’s strategy of attaching sexual restraint to self-respect was predicated upon an image of heterosexual boys (and lesbian girls) as sexually aggressive and manipulative. They would, staff feared, objectify and use girls for their own sexual gratification. In the words of Louise, they would simply “dump their garbage off in you.” She explained further:

‘Cause that’s what you’re becoming at that point you know when you’re just letting guys just do this. And then he’s getting up and walking off ready to go dump into the next person. But then he’s taking the very essence of who you are. He’s taking your virtue with him when he goes and he hasn’t earned that. He doesn’t deserve that. So respect yourself and you hold on to that. And I guarantee you’ll see more of him if you’re giving him less.

Louise’s role play exercise framed boys as sexual aggressors to be stopped, and the Girl Might curriculum, for example, warned girls of developing relationships with people of the wrong character. In the “Dating Checklist,” Girl Might specified high-self esteem, honesty, expressiveness, goal-oriented, responsible, and high well being as preferable attributes in a partner. Getting involved in “unacceptable/abusive” relationships, Girl Might implied, exposed girls to alcohol/drug use, physical abuse, emotional abuse, and unwanted sex. Within this heterosexual context, then, boys carried the potential for abuse and girls, the potential for victimization. Girls were supposed to be on the look out for the boys’ attempts to manipulate them. Doing so, Danielle explained to girls would prevent them from becoming a “trophy” while simultaneously protecting their “reputation”:

Danielle: Of course, you all know that with guys, it's like a trophy. . . . It's always been found that guys, yes, they have the upper hand in being able to have as many relationships as possible. But when it comes to a girl, once . . . the rumor is around that you don't practice abstinence and you actually are sexually active, that's just wrong. Your reputation is gone. You are not labeled as something positive, as we all know, so.

Carissa: So you're really concerned about them protecting their reputation?

Danielle: Their reputation. I feel, I think that's one of my biggest things that somebody can have, especially at their age with them going to school. I mean [in] high school, we knew that girl was just the ho of the school. That [girl that] had slept with every guy or that we thought slept with every guy. We didn't really know, but it was rumors. That's what we had. And I would never want these girls to have to experience what girls I knew went through. . . . And it's something that I want the girls to understand. Their reputation is all they have.

In sum, the staff used the powerful discourse of respect to discourage girls from engaging in sexual activity. Implied in what they taught the girls, girls' abstinence could work to both build and signify self-respect as they protected their bodies from potential abuse. It also, potentially, could protect their image and reputation in the eyes of others, enticing others to respect them.

### *Schooling*

The girls' performance in school was a high priority for the staff at Girlworks, and they viewed academic and career achievement as part of being responsible girls now and mothers in the future.

Schooling and a college education were critically important to girls' success, according to the staff and volunteers who worked with them. Karly explained her vision for the girls this way:

Well, I guess through my framework right now, a success story is she does well in school. She gets a scholarship to the university of her choice. She is out and finds the career she loves and she does that. Or she goes on to graduate school in that area. As long as they find what they love, and they can be financially self-sustaining. I associate a college education and advanced education with that.

Education, adults presumed, would open up opportunities for girls and, thus, create the chance to be a self-sufficient adult. Pregnancy was problematic for girls, in part, because it could interfere with girls' ability to further their education. Louise, for example, told the girls that this was the case:

They've got to see that it was not an easy thing having kids first and then trying to go to school. They know when I graduated[; recently, as a middle-aged woman]. . . . I encouraged them, "Go as soon as you get out of high school. Protect yourself. Do not have kids. You don't want that responsibility [when you're] trying to go to school. It is hard. I had to quit twice. Two or three times and start over because of family things. And you don't want that. And then without a degree you work at dead-end jobs making no money. You don't want that. Then your kids are suffering. And they are lacking. They're doing without because you can't make enough to make

ends meet. And then you're partially on the system and stuff like that. You don't want that. Take advantage of school."

To be a good mother, as Louise explained it, meant being economically autonomous. It meant being able to provide for one's own kids rather than relying on the government or other people. Women who were unable to do this, other adults also implied, developed hardships and feelings of guilt around being a poor parent. Education, furthermore, was seen as the key to escaping dead-end, low-wage work.

The staff, consequently, wished for girls to develop career ambitions like Krystil had. Krystil explained to me that she wanted "a husband who don't abuse his wife. A good job and well-behaved kids. Not kids on drugs, getting into trouble. A husband who lets his wife work." They hoped, as Danielle and Tamera did, that the girls would eventually become lawyers and doctors. In the meantime, though, they wanted them to work hard to get good grades in school.

The staff not only wanted the girls to do well in school, but they devoted considerable time, energy, and resources to help them do so. GW, for example, had one large room dedicated to homework, a library, and a small study room compared to two medium-sized rooms at BW. Even though all Kidworks' programs in Sherburne had Education Plus programs that rewarded kids with points for doing their homework, the staff at GW consistently implemented it, even though Boyworks staff did not. When the girls arrived at GW each day, staff expected them to head straight to the homework room, which was always supervised and generally full of girls. Even when girls had no homework to do, the staff instructed them to read a book or help a younger girl with her homework. If girls failed to go into the homework room on a daily basis, staff tracked them down or announced their expectation at staff meetings. Staff made themselves available to help the girls with their homework, and they routinely assigned older girls and staff members to tutor them. When I was volunteering, girls asked me to help them with their homework. Staff also routinely announced the top point earners as part of the Homework Plus program and rewarded them with free pizza parties and trips to college campuses.

To Libby, who was the staff who supervised the homework room for most of the course of this study, the girls' performance at school was personal. When the girls' grades fell, Libby became frustrated

with their lack of commitment to their homework. This is what she told the girls during the group meeting:

Libby: “Are you listening? Juniors [ten to twelve year olds], are you listening? When you come through those doors [to the homework room], you’re on *my* time. Come in and do your homework and get out. Read your book. [Don’t come in and talk.] Don’t get an attitude with me. I don’t care. I don’t need it, and I couldn’t care less. Is that understood?”

The girls as a group respond with a collective, “Yes.” Several Juniors say “no” more quietly.

Libby: “Is that understood?”

Girls, more loudly this time: “Yes, ma’am.”

Libby: “Like I said yesterday, I’m very disappointed in your report cards. Very disappointed. Whatever you did on this one, probably going to get on the next one. If you don’t do better, you will be there next year, too. Won’t move on to the next grade. We’re here to help you. That’s our job. But we can’t read your minds. You have to tell us if you need help with something. Tell me or Miss Danielle. We’re here to help you. I’m very disappointed. Very. Not acceptable. Makes me look like I’m not doing my job. I’ll check your homework. I don’t care if that’s treating you younger than you are.”

Libby was disappointed in their efforts and made her expectations clear: they were to study everyday and to help younger girls, too. If the girls needed help, Libby told them to come to her so that she could provide it. Libby reinforced this message by personalizing it: she was in charge of the homework room and was disappointed by their academic underperformances.

Being there to help the girls extended far beyond tutoring them at Girlworks. It also meant setting up appointments with girls’ teachers and keeping open communication with them. It meant communicating with girls’ parents if Libby or other staff thought a girl was faltering in school. Danielle similarly told girls that she would sit down with them and their families if they told her they were sexually active or distracted in some other way.

The staff took learning seriously in other ways, as well. They encouraged girls to spend time reading independently in the library, for example, rather than playing games in the games room. They celebrated the college graduations of staff members. When Casey graduated from college, Sharice announced it. Casey stood and bowed, while the girls clapped vigorously and cheered for her. The same thing happened when CJ returned from college in another state to work for the summer. Sharice announced her return to the group, which hollered and whooped in celebration. The staff held Girl Might and other life-skills programs in the cozy library surrounded by books rather than in the

gymnasium where the BW staff usually hosted them. This environment encouraged the girls to take seriously the lessons the staff were teaching them, as well as reinforced the staff's endorsement of schooling as worthwhile. The Girlworks' building, finally, took on the feeling of a school classroom. The walls were painted off-white and the doors were painted bright colors. There was usually art on the walls, and the staff made bulletin board displays on everything from inspirational sayings to healthy eating. Colorful posters lined the walls.

In sum, the GW staff constructed good girls as those who were sexually restrained, thus preventing themselves from risking pregnancy, disease, and low self-esteem. Getting an education and doing well at school were also characteristic of what good girls do. Trying one's hardest at school was part of the responsibility of being a girl and a mother. Good girls, thus, were to devote themselves to getting ahead in order to create stability for themselves and their families.

### **Teaching Boys to Become Real Men**

Training boys at Boyworks centered on developing real men. Just as definitions of femininity vary, so do definitions of masculinity (Connell 1987; Connell 1995; Connell 2000). At Kidworks, the staff defined manhood around being leaders and workers and held these roles up as models. The staff disregarded boys' responsibility for sexuality and, instead, focused on the consequences that drugs and violence potentially brought. They also redefined manhood to explicitly reject street culture.

#### *Sexuality as Girls' Burden*

The staff at BW taught the boys the same lessons about sexuality that they taught girls at GW—they implied that there were *no* consequences of sexuality for them as boys but several for girls. Rather, the behaviors that the staff stressed as most risky, as I show below, were looking street, engaging in gang-like activity, and getting caught up in drugs. These activities, the staff taught the boys, were potentially life threatening, even though they were exciting and fun. They could lead to jail or even death.

The Mighty Kids' sexual myths exercise made clear that there were fewer, if any, consequences of sexual activity for boys. Girls were overwhelmingly specified as the subjects of sexual activity—even to the boys—and as the potential parent through pregnancy. During a Mighty Kids group, for example, Brandon led the boys in discussion of sexual myths. I sat on the ground on the gym floor in a group with Terris, Lil' L, Jawad, and Baruc. All were between ten and twelve years old:

Brandon comes over to our group: "Okay. Number one. If a girl hasn't started her period yet, she can't get pregnant. Do you know what a period is?"

Terris: "What?"

Lil' L: "Yeah, my mom told me." He leans his head on the back of Terris for a moment.

He repeats. Then, "Is that fact or fiction?" Then walked away to another group.

Carissa: "I think we are supposed to write down if we think the statement is fact or fiction. What do you think?"

Terris: "What was it? I think it's fiction."

Lil' L: "Write it down!" He's standing up and running into the mat against the wall. He slides down and sits next to us. "Write it down."

Jawad: "Write down number one, fiction."

Carissa: "Maybe you should write what the topic was, too. So you think a woman can get pregnant even if she doesn't have a period yet?"

Jawad answers fiction again. (At this point, I can't tell if they understand the question or not.)

Terris begins to write the topic and asks me how to spell pregnant. He begins writing, and the other kids are running around and screaming. He restarts several times with me specifying the spelling.

Brandon comes back: "What do you think?"

One of the boy says: "Fiction!"

Brandon: "That's right. It's fiction." Then he reads from the sheet: "A girl can get pregnant even if she has never menstruated. A woman's body ovulates (releases an egg) about two weeks before her first period. If that egg gets fertilized by male sperm, she can get pregnant. Number two. Pregnancy is one of the main reasons why female students drop out of high school."

It's hard to hear this because of all the talking and the boys ask "what" again. He repeats it several more times.

I suggest that Terris write it down.

Baruc just sits at the edge of our group silently.

This time my group doesn't have an agreement. Jawad thinks it's fiction and someone else thinks it's fact.

Brandon comes over again. "What do you think?" Terris tells him fiction. "Fiction? No, actually it's a fact. (Reads:) Pregnant girls are more likely to drop out of school than girls who wait to have children. Out of every 10 young women who have a child before age 18, only three will earn a high school diploma by age 30." The boys can't really hear him because of the noise, though, and they aren't really paying attention. "Number three. A girl can't get pregnant the first time she has sexual intercourse. Fact or fiction?"

Behind me, Lil' L says, "Ewwwww!" to the sex part. Baruc laughs at this. . . .

Brandon comes over: "What do you think?" Terris shouts out an answer.

Brandon: "Fiction. Girls and young women *can* get pregnant the first time." Terris writes down fiction next to his answer. "Number four. Most teenagers who get pregnant want to get pregnant." They ask him, "What?" He repeats and leaves.

It is hard to capture the exact wording from him, but I get the gist and say, "Do most teenagers who get pregnant plan to or get pregnant on purpose?"

Terris: "Plan to."

Baruc: "On accident." . . .

This exchange of "factual" information between Brandon and the boys continued on around the statements "the only way a young woman can be 100 percent sure of not getting pregnant is if she doesn't have sex," "Young women who wait until they are older are more likely to have healthy babies," "Sexual activity can spread disease," and "Teens who only have sex once in a while won't get pregnant." To the latter one, Baruc answered "fiction," but Terris had no idea. I could tell that the boys were unclear even as to how someone *could* get pregnant. I asked Terris if he knew and he shook his head no. I tried to explain that in order for someone to get pregnant a sperm had to come in contact with an egg and that could only happen during certain times of a woman's menstrual cycle. Terris continued to look at me blankly. "What's sperm?" I continued:

Carissa: "What's sperm? Well, a sperm is like an egg for a man. Do you know what ejaculation is?" Terris shook his head no. "Well, you know that boys have a penis." At this, Baruc laughs, and Terris' eyes get really big. "A penis can become hard or erect when a male becomes sexually excited. Sometimes he has what's called an orgasm and this releases a milky white substance." Baruc says "ew" to this. "In that substance are sperm." I realize right away that this is way too complex for him to just understand from talking. He needs a picture, but I don't have his attention enough to show him.

Brandon is back already. "Every time a couple has sex, there is a possibility of pregnancy." He then calls all the boys back to sit down as a group on the bleachers. We still have several more myths to go through. Brandon tells the boys, "We're going to review these now." He repeats number one and asks the boys what they think, fact or fiction. The boys as a group give both answers. "We just went over this!" Brandon says exasperatedly. "It's fiction." Then he moves onto the ones they haven't finished: "The majority of junior high school students are having sex." . . .

During this life-skills session, Brandon was charged with instilling KW's message of sexual postponement to the boys by having them identify whether a statement about sexuality was fact or myth then explain the reasoning. In both its design and its implementation, the session delivered the message that girls bore the responsibility *for* and *of* pregnancy. It was girls or women who menstruated, could or would get pregnant, and who risked dropping out of high school. What's more, the boys' lack of knowledge of how

bodies function and pregnancy works assured that they would take little from the exercise other than they need not be burdened by the details.

This was the case in the implementation of other programs, too. Despite the time and effort devoted to training girls in the potential consequences of sex and the skills to refuse boys' advances, sexuality was intentionally excluded from the life-skills program designed for boys. Man-To-Man had no lessons that directly addressed sex itself but rather had lessons that promoted and trained boys to be leaders and power brokers. These lessons focused on fatherhood, community leadership, and employment. The manual explained that "because it is a topic in other personal development curricula, including Mighty Kids, sexual intimacy is not a focus here." The lessons on intimacy, to the contrary, focused on "communication skills." This lesson taught boys how to start conversations with girls, which the manual framed as part of becoming a man: "part of growing into manhood is to learn to talk and converse with girls. . . . While some young men at this age find talking with girls completely natural, others are self-conscious or feel awkward." The lesson plan proceeded to teach boys how to more comfortably initiate conversation with girls. Note that sex, sexual consequences, sexual responsibility, and power dynamics within relationships *were* a focus in the girl-only program Girl Might. That discussion, however, lacked the framework of adulthood that Man-To-Man had. Part of learning to be "young men," then, was to learn how to initiate relationships with "girls," but being a girl meant being responsible for sex and its effects. Louise's role play exercise implemented this lesson by having the kids act out their gendered dating scripts.

### *The Consequences of Violence, Gangs, and Drugs*

What the life-skills and prevention programs *did* emphasize as consequential for boys, however, were the natural and social consequences of violence, gangs, and drugs and alcohol use. A lesson on gangs in *Saying No To The Streets*, for example, asked young people to list the negative consequences of being involved in a gang or trying to leave one. Although young people were also to list the positives, the manual warned, "Make sure members see the deep negative effects of even starting to get involved in

gangs, and that they understand the consequences of each decision they make.” To reinforce the message through a “realistic look at the consequences of gang involvement,” staff were to plan trips to an emergency room, morgue, or police precinct to “see how gang members are processed at each location.” The message would be clear: the potential benefits of gangs (money, security, sense of family) paled in comparison to the potential risks (injury, death, detention).

The curricula’s coverage of drugs, alcohol, and cigarettes similarly highlighted their consequences. The Mighty Kids manual listed potential consequences of smoking marijuana as addiction, arrest, damaging lungs, getting into trouble at school, and acting silly. Drinking alcohol brought with it risks of getting into trouble, getting drunk and having an accident, getting into a fight, feeling high, and throwing up. Fact sheets on particular drugs also stated the effects of different types of drugs. For example, Mighty Kids for teens explained that trying cocaine or crack even once “can cause death or serious injury from heart attack, strokes, respiratory failure or brain seizure.” People who use cocaine, it warned “often lose the ability to function sexually.” Even “good” LSD could lead to a bad trip, the manual explained, and people could become moody and paranoid when they use methamphetamines. Cigarettes smokers risked shortness of breath, smelling bad, coughing, spending a lot of money, and getting cancer. Even though the curriculum suggested eliciting all sorts of consequences, it was the negative ones that facilitators were supposed to emphasize. In the discussion instructions for ten to twelve year olds, for example, the Mighty Kids manual instructed, “the ‘good’ consequences are not enough to outweigh the bad consequences.”

The staff, too, emphasized the consequences of drugs, gangs, and failing at school with the boys. Just as the curriculum specified, they presented their harms. Staff told cautionary tales, for example, that ended in jail or ruined the careers of athletes. This was the case with Warner’s lesson on the basketball player named T who let his grades slip. During a Mighty Kids group, Brandon went over consequences explicitly:

Brandon: “Do you know what consequences are?” He stops for a moment and then continues: “Say you talk back to your parents. What are the consequences of that?”  
Boy: “A whupping.”

Brandon: “Yeah, you get a whopping. What are some other consequences if you talk back to your parents?”

Boy: “A pimp slap.”

Brandon: “What are some other consequences?”

Another boy: “If you kill someone, you go to jail.”

Brandon: “Yeah, that’s a consequence. What if you break the rules at Boyworks?”

He calls on a boy with his hand raised. He answers enthusiastically: “Get expelled!”

Brandon: “If you break the rules at Boyworks, you’re going get suspended.”

To my right, Julius says to the boys around him, “If you run in the bathroom, you’ll break your neck.” Montell agrees with him and says you shouldn’t run in the bathroom.

Brandon: “What’s the consequence of taking a gun to school?”

Jesus: “Get suspended.”

Brandon: “Yeah, you get suspended for a year.”

Another boy calls out: “Can we play now?”

During this group, the boys covered the consequences of everything from breaking BW rules (get suspended) to bringing a gun to school (get suspended for a year) to killing someone (go to jail).

Warner shared his stories about life on the streets with kids, too, as I showed in the previous chapter. He illustrated consequences of running on the streets. Getting shot, getting stabbed, going to prison for decades, and even death, were the risks of that lifestyle, as Warner presented it to the boys.

Ben similarly used story telling to highlight the negative consequences he faced on the streets. He warned the boys not to make the mistakes of partying too much:

Certain kids I try to steer in the right path. Like, “Look man, you’re a nice athlete, man. Don’t ruin that out here on the streets.” That’s why I try to get them because I done been through some of the stuff they went through or are starting to go through now. I had an experience with different things as far as growing up in a single parent home, inner-city environment and dealing with peer pressure.”

Ben told boys to not “get caught up in” the mess that drug dealing and partying could bring. Ben was explicit that he wanted to scare the boys straight by emphasizing the potential for death. Ben wanted the boys to learn from his mistakes.

Darin was scared straight when he went to BW as a child. The program director took him and the other boys on a trip to prison: “He took me to a jail when we were kids,” Darin recalled:

He took me to the prison – and it wasn’t one of those scared straight programs and the prisoners were expecting you to come. We just went and walked down the middle of the aisle with prisoners on either side, and they didn’t even know we were coming. They were cussing at us and saying this. Scared us half to death. A lot of us, that’s why we didn’t do nothing, ‘cause we were scared of that as little kids.

Darin recalled the experience and viewed it as positive, even though research shows that scared straight programs, on average, do more harm than not participating in any program does (see Petrosino, Turpin-Petrosino, and Buehler 2003 for a review). As a staff member, Darin got to decide the lessons that he taught kids. “We don’t take them to prison, but we keep it real,” he explained. One of the ways that he kept it real was by telling the boys that excuses would get them nowhere: “You hear one say, ‘He hit me first.’ You go tell the judge that he hit you first. They don’t care. You are going to get locked up.” Living the street life, then, would lead to prison.

The life-skills programs and the staff’s didactic storytelling, thus, showed the boys that they risked dire consequences if they engaged in street behaviors. Unlike for girls, sex was framed as not particularly risky for boys because girls were the ones who bore the emotional responsibilities for sexuality and the material ones for pregnancy. What boys did apparently risk, though, was their safety and freedom by engaging in drugs and dealing, violence, and partying.

### *Becoming Real Men*

The Man-To-Man program was designed to appeal to boys’ ideas about and hunger for manhood. The program initiated boys into manhood by showing them what behaviors and dispositions constituted manhood. As the program manual put it, “Developing sound character, positive behavior and a sense of a moral compass in youth is an achievable goal.” The program was designed to aid boys in becoming such by focusing on thirteen specific aspects of manhood. Making rational decisions and having a personal code of conduct, for example, were defined as characteristics of *men*. So were rejecting substance abuse, becoming responsible fathers, and being a “good employee.” It was, according to this program, by taking on these roles that boys *became* men. Boys who managed to complete the program, consequently, got to ceremoniously celebrate their transformation into men.

The language of “man,” “men,” and “manhood” was no mistake. The program was intended to be facilitated *by* men, to be *about* men, to train boys to *become* men. Women and girls were to be peripheral objects, such as the target of a boy’s conversational advances. It was through the discourse of manhood

that the program was to be enticing to boys. Men were high status and powerful. They held authority not held by women, and they were esteemed as leaders full of responsibility and authority. Men had money and the support of women, or at least they were supposed to. Defining certain behaviors as markers of manhood was meant to inspire boys to adopt them. Manhood was the goal to be reached, and the Man-To-Man program specified the ways to get there.

In a discussion of role models, for example, the manual tells the facilitator to lead a discussion about “men whom I admire.” This role model “might be a person close to us and in our family, such as a father, uncle, or brother. He might be someone from our extended community. . . . Or, he might be someone we don’t know personally.” The manual even noted that some boys “may not have a male role model who is a part of his family (such as a father) or a member of his immediate social group or community.” In that case, “the member may wish to choose a role model from our popular culture, and for some, a more distant role model may engender easier conversation.” Regardless of where he comes from, the role model was to be a man, someone a boy could look up to and aspire to be like. This someone, implied the manual, was more appropriately an unknown man than a woman to whom the boys were personally connected.

Despite widely held beliefs that women are particularly adept at parenting (see Hays 1996; Risman 1998), motherhood and parenthood in general were not the subjects of Man-To-Man lessons either. Rather, fathers were the subjects of the lesson on family. Activities focused on “models of fatherhood” and “what makes a good father.” The former, for example, requested boys to fill in two spaces below the caption “Fatherhood”: one on the “responsibilities” of fathers and the other on “authority” held by fathers. The latter exercise asked boys to generate a list of the common roles of fathers and the traits necessary to carry them out. The examples the manual provided were:

- To help educate a child will require the father to be educated himself and to exercise patience in teaching the child.
- To provide financially for a family will require the father to have good job skills and to be employed.
- To discipline a child will require the father to be clear himself about what is right and wrong and to be able to communicate that to his child.

These lessons, I argue, both played off of and reinforced the status of men as unique, special, powerful, and the opposite of women. To be a father was to mean something in particular, defined by the curriculum as someone in charge. It would be appealing to boys, then, for fatherhood to be defined by the roles of educator, provider, and disciplinarian. In order for boys to fulfill these roles, as the program sold them, they had to adopt middle-class sorts of character and practices.

On some occasions, the staff attacked boys' masculinity in order to sell them particular models of manhood, as well. Warner, for example, explained that the boys at BW were not tough enough—man enough, like him—to really make it on the streets. He labeled them “wannabes,” “punks,” and “mamas' boys” instead. “They believe in the gang thing,” Warner explained. “And the drug thing. But it's all wannabe stuff. It's all . . . They're not quite ready to die. They're not quite ready to go to jail for 40 years. So it's all BS.” Wannabes, according to Warner, got themselves into trouble but were unable to handle the consequences. Admirable men, on the other hand, could handle the consequences or should represent their mother's efforts better:

We played football, and we went to parks and recs. But the little mamas' boys, they're not strong enough to be on the streets. And that's good. I mean, I'm glad parents don't allow that to happen. But they [the boys] portray something that they don't really want to be and don't need to be. If your mom loves you enough to put you in a KW and your mom loves you enough to educate you and you have all the nice things, then that's what you should portray yourself as: a nice young man and a nice young woman. Why would you pull your pants all the way down and put your earrings in your ears like you're a thug from the street, and you're not? So why do that? That's glamorous. So they glamorize things that aren't cute, and they're not fun. And they could get you killed.

The staff held up a middle-class model of masculinity in which an intellectual man was preferable to masculinities that valorized physical power and dominance (Connell 1995; Pyke 1996). The staff, then, could advocate staying out of trouble to the boys and prioritizing work because they were characteristics of real men. The staff did this very thing. Kraig had been acting out, and Warner tried to control him by telling him that he was not a thug and should not act like one:

Because Kraig had his father stick a gun to his head and his mother's head last year and tell that he would kill them both. I remember Kraig coming to KW, and he was so rebellious. Every time he would come through the door, he was arguing with me. We're fussing and fighting all the time. And I didn't know what was going on in his life. I just felt like, you can't abide by my rules then you need to go. When I finally found out what was going on, I felt bad.

But I saw him change slowly but surely. He started talking about his problems. He started working through his issues. And this year, he asked me to be his mentor. Well, to me that was a big stepping stone because we never ever could see eye to eye on anything. It was always harping on education and you're not a thug. You're a little punk and blah, blah. And he hated that. And now, you know, here he is calling me for information. Can we sit down and talk about this, and I'm having trouble with science. Can you help me with this? I've seen him grow. And now all of a sudden, education is important. And being respectful is important. And leaving the streets alone is important. So I think he will do well because he's finally growing past the problems.

Acting like a punk, according to Warner, did not make Kraig a man. But doing well in school and being respectful did. Warner used this definition of masculinity, then, to convince him that "leaving the streets alone" was important because another model of masculinity was better.

Real men, the staff taught the boys, worked for what they got. They were responsible and disciplined, and they took advantage of the opportunities that lay before them. Ben explained that many of his friends got caught up in the streets and made bad choices for themselves:

Probably about three or four of us [out of ten or fifteen] graduated, went to college. Graduated high school, went to college, went to the military. Everybody else was just caught up in the streets. After the eighth grade pretty much, back then people were not choosing the right things to do right then. After eighth grade, pretty much ninth grade, they were kicked out of school, and pretty much they were done from that environment.

And I believe that Kidworks was a good, positive way for me to learn the right things and be around people to teach you how to be a responsible young man. KW was really influential in my life. I played sports here at Boyworks. That also teaches you discipline and gets you ready for every day life 'cause in sport you have a winner and a loser. And you compare that to society, how we try to get jobs and everything isn't promised to you. You have to compete with somebody to get a job. It's always out there somebody thinking the same way you are. How can you better yourself to get this job here? And that's what sports and the KW taught me: how to be more responsible and to choose the right decisions.

What Ben learned as a child and now passed along to the boys he worked with was that to be a "responsible young man," one had to make himself competitive. He had to be responsible and "choose the right decisions."

The staff, in their informal discussions with boys and through the implementation of the Man-To-Man curriculum, invoked the boys' identity stakes (Schwalbe 2005) in what it means to be and become a man. They held up manhood as an ideal that the boys could achieve by way of disregarding the street life in favor of self-determination.

## *Leadership*

While the staff at Boyworks clearly valued education for the boys and verbally encouraged them to do their schoolwork and seek higher education, education was not the high priority it was at Girlworks. The boys, for example, routinely skipped doing their homework in favor of playing without recourse from the staff. The staff failed to implement the Homework Plus program by not keeping track of points at times or failing to reward the boys for accumulating them. The staff rarely encouraged boys to read, and I never heard them encourage the older boys to read with or tutor the younger boys. The staff held life-skills groups in the gym where the boys were easily distracted. Brandon rewarded them for finishing the life-skills lessons with free play, which the boys came to beg for. The BW building itself felt more institutional than the school-like feel at GW: the walls were white and the carpets, gray.

It was not school success, then, that the staff framed as bringing about success for boys and men. Rather, it was boys' leadership that staff framed as characteristic of men. The staff tried to create a sense of ownership among the boys, too, which they hoped would instill responsibility to be a leader. The staff who worked with boys made a point of personalizing Kidworks as *their* organization and Boyworks as *their* building, rather than using the language of "my" and "ours" as the GW staff did. Darin, for example, told parents and kids at orientation that "this is your Boyworks, take care of it." Brandon above told boys that "this is your facility. You should take care of it. It's your facility." On the rare occasion that the staff put the boys into group timeouts, they justified it to the boys by defining them as a single cohesive group. Louise told boys that "we serve together. We serve together" and "if we need to sit here practicing being quiet, that's what we'll do. You serve your time together. This is your Boyworks. We understand that. But this is not a place where you can run loose and wild."

Edward tried to make kids feel like they belonged at KW and were part of something bigger than themselves. He did this by creating individual relationships with kids and emphasizing North Kidworks' history. He recounted during an interview:

You would have to have a real good relationship with that kid [to make a difference]. In other words, nowadays to get them to respond to you, they have to have that level, that connection with you individually. That respect for you individually so that they don't want to disappoint you. The other kids that you have no connected with on that level, on that plane, they don't have a

stake in KW. It's not going to hurt their feelings because you're disappointed in their behavior, [they] have embarrassed KW.

We tell the kids all the time. One way we try to combat that is we tell them all the time, "KW is bigger than us. It's bigger than me. It's bigger than you. It's tradition. It's twenty years of history." You know, they're, you know the summer of 1986 there was kids in KW, you know. And so you try to build that feeling of "I'm part of something." I'm not just here 'cause my mama dropped me off."

To be connected to Kidworks meant protecting it. "Protect that twenty years of history," Edward told a boy. "There were kids before us. Fifty years from now, you come down [that] street, I guarantee there'll be a KW sitting right here. And that's what I mean. And that's part of being part of a KW." Being part of the "same team," according to Edward meant feeling a connectedness to the organization. It meant acting in ways that would make the staff proud and that would well represent Kidworks in public.

For the staff who worked with boys, creating ownership meant discounting excuses, just as the administration rejected excuses from the staff. Warner explained to boys who were failing in school that they needed to think about *why* they got Fs: "Let's talk about why you have the F. And when they put ownership on that F, it feels pretty good." According to Edward, who as a full-time staff person was in a position to hire and fire boys who wanted to work as junior staff members, boys *needed* to take responsibility for themselves in order to make it in life. This meant changing their behavior to fit in rather than making excuses. Meeting people in power "towards the middle," as Edward put it, suggested that boys take responsibility for their behavior and dress and act according to their expectations. At other times at BW, boys were expected to take responsibility to do their homework, care for their toys if they chose to bring them, watch over their own money, and take home their jacket rather than someone else's.

The Man-To-Man program made it clear that taking responsibility included giving back to the community through service and leadership. A five-activity lesson on "personal leadership and community responsibility" was designed to get boys to "consider traits of leaders, and develop an awareness that responsible adults serve their communities." The manual had boys analyze the traits of leaders and match leaders to leadership qualities. Boys were also to discuss what constituted a community and carry out a volunteer project. Being a community leader was a potential source of power to the boys, then, which

could motivate the boys to act like a leader now. This program, thus, used the promise of power as a disciplinary device.

Darin emphasized leadership qualities in the Man-To-Man groups. In their discussion of men they admired (several of the boys interjected examples of mothers or grandmothers), for example, Darin said that he admired his father who was hardworking. “He wasn’t the type to yell at me. Took me aside. Trusted me. That’s the most important thing. I don’t want to disappoint him. Represent him. All the love and trust.” Other boys described that they admired mothers who were “the only parent who cared about me,” “came a long way financially,” “showed me you can start real young and mess up some.” They admired a grandmother who “keeps me out of trouble. Taught me values of manners and how to treat people” and a grandfather who owned a window washing business. Darin took all of their responses and summarized the characteristics they admired. “It’s not the easiest thing to be a leader,” he told the boys. “When you make mistakes, you learn from them. There’s a simple thought, a simple phrase [that you learn to use]. Help.”

The boys in this Man-To-Man group were also members of a leadership club. The members selected their own officers, including a president, vice president, secretary, and treasurer. The boys campaigned for these positions during the Man-To-Man group before voting. Through this process, the boys reflected on and verbalized their own leadership qualities that would make them appropriate for the positions. Marshall campaigned for president by arguing: “I think I would be a good president, for one thing, I know what’s going on. I think I handle myself in a professional manner.” Clifford ran against him: “The reason I think I should be president is because I think you should do stuff and earn it. Once we go out [of the BW building], we represent Boyworks and Girlworks. We represent our families too. I will be a good representative.” The treasurer candidate argued, “To tell you the truth, I’m real responsible. You all are going to want a real responsible person as treasure[r].” His opponent described himself as good at math, and “you want somebody who keeps track of money. Someone who’s good at math and keeping track of stuff.” Together the officers, according to Darin, would be the people the

administration would turn to to give speeches at public events. “You’ll give tours instead of staff people. You’ll be ambassadors for Kidworks.”

Being responsible also meant that a man provide “materially for his family,” according to the Man-To-Man program. This seemed to require having a good attitude and pleasing customers at work, presumably in a service job. The “roadmap to success” lesson provided a “conceptual plan for achieving [boys’] career goals.” The manual instructed the facilitator to “tell the group that to reach personal goals, one needs a plan of action to take him from his current place to where he wants to be; otherwise it is unlikely that one’s dream will ever become a reality.” The group was to generate a list of “usual things that must be accomplished in order to prepare for an enjoyable career.” The suggested list included things such as “do well in high school,” “save money for college,” and “prepare for good job interviews.” The potential roadblocks that boys might encounter were “taking drugs,” “starting a family too early,” “dropping out of school,” and “doing poorly in college.”

The next activity turned to an analysis of workplace behavior itself and the sorts of “attitudes and behaviors” that were supposedly essential to success. The facilitator was to instruct the group that “one of the most important aspects of finding and pursuing a rewarding career is to develop first the attitudes and behaviors that ensure success in the workplace.” These attitudes and behaviors, as I show below, were those that made men steady providers rather than the middle-class ones implied in KW’s mission. The boys were to generate a list of various work settings. The manual gave six examples, all of which were low-level or working-class service settings: “fast food restaurants,” “post office,” “grocery store,” “clothing stores,” “banks,” and “music stores.” The curriculum continued: “From the list of settings created by the group, pick one. Role-play a situation, with the help of a Peer Leader if available, in which a bad attitude or poor service is carried out in that setting. After the role-play, reinforce how a bad attitude or poor service makes a customer feel unappreciated.” The next section had boys “consider positive and negative work habits” by evaluating the “attitudes and behaviors that favorably impress you as a customer” and those that “affect the customer in a negative way.” “How do these attitudes and behaviors make you feel about the worker and the place of businesses?” boys were to ask themselves.

Being a responsible father and man, as this curriculum taught the boys, was to adopt the sorts of attitudes and behaviors in service-type jobs that would please customers. According to Man-To-Man, then, boys needed to have good attitudes and be pleasant in order to achieve their employment goals. To work steadily at all, KW implied, was to find “rewarding” employment, even if they were “bad jobs” (Kalleberg, Reskin, and Hudson 2000).

In sum, the boys’ staff tried to create a sense of leadership and power among the boys. They framed BW as “their” program. Ownership, then, was a basis for boys’ emotional investment in Boyworks and their source of power. The boys were also to be responsible for themselves by rejecting excuses for their failures. To do so was to be a leader, a quality that the staff and programs alike promoted in a generic, ideological way and used to promote a traditional, breadwinning model of manhood. Leaders, for example, cared for their communities and dressed and acted professionally. They were supposed to maintain stable employment, even if it was not enjoyable.

### **Conclusion: Good Girls and Real Men**

The staff at both Girlworks and Boyworks were highly influenced by dichotomous traditional notions of gender that specify reproduction as the responsibility of girls/women and being a provider as the responsibility of boys/men (Connell 1987; Lorber 1994; e.g., Nock 1998; Risman 1998). It was by fulfilling these roles, then, that kids could become good girls and real men.

At Girlworks, sexuality and its consequences were the frequent focus of adults’ worry, intimate conversations with girls, and life-skills groups. During life-skills groups and in personal conversations, staff stressed the potential negative consequences of engaging in sexual activity. They framed sexual restraint and rejection of boys’ advances as a matter of self-respect for girls.

A facilitator’s guide to a KW prevention program claimed that KW provided a “postponement message rather than a message of ongoing abstinence or avoidance of sex” because “helping young people to postpone sex does not place a value judgment on sex and certainly does [not] imply that ‘sex is bad.’” Yet, in the programmatic foci and in practice, sexuality was almost universally characterized as

burdensome to girls. Sexuality was framed as emotionally draining and self-demeaning. Girls purportedly risked disappointing their loved ones and being abandoned by them. They could not be protected from sexually transmitted diseases, they were taught, nor could they elude the lurking danger of impregnation or sexual victimization. Girls, in other words, were specified as sexual objects and the bearers of sexual consequences (oftentimes unlikely and even fictional ones). Boys and their responsibilities were pushed aside during these conversations, except when portrayed as sexual aggressors and unreliable partners. Girls' sexual desire or sexual agency was rarely a point of discussion, nor were kids given reliable information about birth control or abortion. That left girls with the overwhelming message that sex itself may not be bad, but it was certainly bad for good girls like them.

These messages made sense under the circumstances. On the one hand, the workers knew (and in some cases were) single mothers and worried that the girls would cut off their chances for higher education, for example, if they became mothers. Their fear of manipulative boys, particularly older ones, was also legitimate. Some of the staff were abused by male partners and thought that girls were too caught up in pleasing them. Sexual abstinence, furthermore, provided girls a way to create respect and self-esteem in an environment that framed black girls as troublemakers and unfeminine (Kaplan 1997). Additionally, these sorts of sexual messages were appealing to the donating public that provided financial support to Kidworks. The Sherburne school district had an abstinence-only sex education program in accordance with state law. It emphasized heterosexual relationships within the context of marriage and restricted teachers from directing students to birth control or abortions. KW similarly advertised their sex education approach as emphasizing sex within marriage and disregarding birth control.

Responsibilities for reproduction did not preclude breadwinning as a role for girls. Rather, fulfilling responsibilities as girls and eventually as mothers required financial independence and the eventual ability to take care of and provide for one's family. Staff, thus, encompassed performing well in school and dedicating oneself to homework in their construction of girlhood and womanhood, much like other researchers have found low-income and working-class black women do (Edin and Kefalas 2005; Hill 2005).

The staff at Boyworks tapped “manhood” as a resource in their interactions with the boys. They advocated particular practices and beliefs by redefining them as characteristic of manhood. Research shows that street cultural capital is, in part, enticing to low-income boys because it gives them a basis for establishing power over other people and a high status. Street boys also enjoy a wall of protection as others fear them. Through street presentations of self, dominating others, and violence, furthermore, boys can prove themselves to be real men in the eyes of other boys when there are few alternative ways to achieve respect. It is by way of masculine power, then, that street culture is so appealing to boys.

Boyworks staff and the Man-To-Man curriculum authors recognized this reality on some level and used the boys’ hunger for respect and status as men to their benefit. They redefined manhood around non-street behaviors, which played on that hunger. Within the Man-To-Man program, for example, real men were defined as “responsible” fathers, leaders within their communities, and employees with good attitudes. In order to be real men, then, boys had to adopt those roles. Based on their interactions with the boys, the BW staff defined manhood around a breadwinning model that emphasized becoming invested in BW and other communities, being a leader, and making oneself a viable employee. Boys who wanted to be real men rather than wannabes or mamas’ boys were to invest their time, energy, and identities based in getting ahead.

**chapter nine:**  
**The Promise of Code Switching**

*No earrings at Kidworks. Leave your earrings in your bag. If you just got your ear pierced, tell your mama that you need a Band-Aid to wear over the top. No earrings* (Darin, black male staffer, instructing a group of boys on the rules of Boyworks).

The earrings rule and its enforcement, described above by Darin, offers a particularly poignant metaphor for how the black staff and black kids at Kidworks had to straddle the boundary between middle-class and other forms of cultural capital. Earrings represented the street culture, particularly the taste for exaggeration and flashiness. To many adults, though, they also represented unprofessionalism and disregard for decorum and authority. They signified a lack of potential and a person's unworthiness. Gatekeepers—teachers, police officers, employers—could create rules to enforce these definitions and choose to reward or sanction based on them. KW's administration did, in fact, create a professional code of conduct for the staff and kids alike, a code which prohibited do rags, earrings, and an assortment of other street-typed practices that could damage Kidworks' reputation in the eyes of the white public.

The underlying concern among KW adults was for the wellbeing and future prospects of Sherburne's youth. They wanted each KW kid to have the chance to be an independent and self-sufficient adult, one who could support him- or herself and a family. They wanted the kids to find fulfilling work and to be connected to their communities. KW adults, in short, wanted every kid to have a chance to make a comfortable life, the sort of life that many of them were enjoying.

This vision for the kids' future, however, was clouded by a fear that some kids were "disadvantaged" and, therefore, "at risk" for a different future. Adults worried especially that dropping out of school, getting pregnant, or going to jail would cut kids' opportunities short. Underlying this concern was the assumption that Kidworks' mostly black and disproportionately poor clientele was susceptible to these outcomes.

The adults' concerns were warranted. Within Sherburne and its county, many black youth *were* susceptible to poverty and getting into trouble. According to a 2006 assessment of the county, there were pervasive gaps between whites and blacks in an assortment of social indicators. Black families and youth fared less well economically, for example. The median household income for black adults was 44 percent

lower than for whites.<sup>34</sup> Although childhood poverty rates in Sherburne were below the national average, one in five black children in the county lived in poverty, a rate six times higher than for whites. Health indicators also showed race disparities. Teenage pregnancy rates decreased over the past decade by over 25 percent and were at their lowest rates since 1990, yet teen pregnancy rates for minorities were still double that for whites. Infant mortality rates for blacks were over three times higher than for whites and Hispanics. Trends in HIV diagnoses resembled national trends. Black adults were six times more likely to be diagnosed with HIV (81.4 per 100,000) than white adults (14.6 per 100,000). Large race gaps existed in Chlamydia, gonorrhea, and syphilis infection rates, too. Black kids within Sherburne, consequently, faced more disease and death.

Within Sherburne's education system, race gaps also persisted, which meant that black kids faced unique struggles in school. Black kids were six times more likely to score below grade level than whites, and kids who received free and reduced lunch were more likely to perform below expectations in reading and math. Despite modest improvements in high school graduation rates over the past five years, around six percent of black students dropped out of high school every year, as compared to two and half percent of whites. More disconcerting were the rates of suspension from school. Over 11,000 black students were suspended from Sherburne's schools during the 2005-2006 school year—they constituted over one third of all suspensions. Black boys were suspended four times more often than white boys, and black girls were suspended six times more often than white girls. Black youth were also more likely to be targeted by the criminal justice system and faced the real possibility of jail time by adulthood. The rates of black and Latino youth within the criminal justice system skyrocketed over recent years, and local gangs were predominantly black and Latino. Despite reporting similar rates of carrying guns, blacks were two times

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<sup>34</sup> National annual median earnings data show that blacks average 63.5 percent of whites' earnings (Lemmonik Arthur (2005). National-level census data show that a third of black youth live below poverty compared to 10 percent of non-Hispanic whites. See U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Income, Poverty, and Health Insurance Coverage in the United States: 2004*, Report P60, n. 229, Table B-2, pp. 52-7. The race gap in Sherburne's infant mortality rate was higher than the national-level race gap of just more than two times higher for blacks than for whites (Lemmonik Arthur (2005). Sherburne's teenage pregnancy rates were lower than national levels. In 2002, the pregnancy rate for whites was 65.0 per 1000,000. For blacks, it was 134.2 per 100,000. See Alan Guttmacher Institute. 2006. "U.S. Pregnancy Statistics: Overall Trends by Race and Ethnicity and State-by-State Information. Guttmacher Institute, New York. In 2004, the national HIV infection rate for blacks was 8.4 times higher than for whites (CDC 2005).

more likely to be arrested for doing so than whites. Black adults were fourteen times more likely to be imprisoned and represented over 70 percent of the county's prison population.

Consequently, within Sherburne, in the language of Kidworks, black youth were particularly vulnerable to doing poorly in school and getting into trouble with teachers and the law. This stark reality meant these kids faced unique challenges in securing the future that adults (and the kids themselves) envisioned. KW workers believed that kids themselves risked their own futures when they got pregnant as teenagers or ran on the streets with the wrong crowd. Kidworks placed itself at the center of the issue and created a strategy to solve the problems faced by low-income black kids (and increasingly by Latino kids) within Sherburne. KW's solution was to prepare the kids to overcome the obstacles they faced by transmitting cultural capital that could, potentially, make the kids more dedicated to school and favorable in the eyes of teachers and police.

In this final chapter, I return to the larger issues I posed in chapter two: what a cultural transformation mission really means and what its implications are for the reproduction of inequalities. I approach the issue from three different angles. First, I deconstruct the meanings behind Kidworks' mission to culturally transform young people and examine its implications. I show that the whites who ran the organization interpreted it to favor assimilation, while the direct-care staff themselves code switched. I argue that an assimilationist approach to change required black staff and kids to be complicit to their own othering, whereas a code switching framework provided more room to resist othering and was, therefore, preferable. Second, I show how the black direct-care workers tried to fulfill the mission and their level of success at doing so. I begin by analyzing public events and then turn to the gendered strategies of the staff. I argue that while staff members successfully appropriated the mission part of the time, particularly by prioritizing schoolwork, they often reinforced working-class cultural capital and they did so in ways that reinforced gender inequality. Third, I assess the opportunities that using middle-class cultural capital actually brought at Kidworks and the conditions that were necessary for cultural training to be more effective. I conclude by laying out concrete changes that Kidworks can make, such as making GW and BW overtly pro-black cultural spaces controlled by blacks, that would facilitate fulfilling its

mission better. Without them, though, Kidworks' mission remained a myth that seemed appealing on the surface but superficially covered the problems that lay beneath it.

### **Meanings behind the Mission**

The official mission of Kidworks offered a solution to overcome the disadvantages that black kids faced within Sherburne. This mission was designed to create opportunities through “youth development.” Cultural transformation was the prescribed avenue for social mobility. Kidworks' staff, administrators, and organizational materials embraced a common mission to define and transmit middle-class cultural capital. This cultural capital consisted of three skills and orientations: middle-class presentations of self, self-determination, and rationality. Middle-class presentations of self, for example, included using Standard English when speaking, dressing like a prep or professional, and using professional mannerisms (looking people in the eye when talking, for example). Self-determination suggested having a “winning attitude” and dedicating oneself to getting ahead. It included aspiring to a bright future and planning to get there. For young people like the clientele of Boyworks and Girlworks, self-determination was primarily directed towards school and evinced in valuing education and getting good grades. For adults, prioritizing work would transfer to a workplace. Rationality meant acting in calculated, instrumental ways to achieve a desired result. Rational people supposedly kept their emotions in check and used institutionalized forms of communication rather than violence or revolt. Kidworks tried to transmit cultural capital to kids through its rules, life-skills program curricula, and public events.

#### *Assimilation*

To white elites within Kidworks, cultural transformation meant rejecting street culture and assimilating to white middle-class culture. Their definition of middle-class cultural capital existed in direct opposition to street cultural capital, which adults at Kidworks believed got transmitted to kids through their families and neighborhoods. Whereas middle-class culture seemed to embody “professional” behavior to them, street culture seemed to embody nonprofessional behavior. Middle-class people saw

themselves as self-determined, and street people as not. People with character were purportedly rational, as people without character were thought to be emotional and reactive. Street appearances (such as wearing revealing clothes and avoiding eye contact) and having an “attitude,” thus, were interpreted as offensive and disrespectful to authority. Street displays supposedly showed a lack of effort and understanding of how the “real world” worked.

Kids who wanted to get ahead, white elites believed, had to fit the expectations of their (usually white) teachers and potential employers. And *they* expected “professional” appearances and behaviors. To display middle-class cultural capital signified that a kid was trying to do better for him- or herself, while street cultural capital displays meant that a child was obstinate and unwilling to work hard. Thus, how middle-class cultural capital could be displayed by the kids at Boyworks and Girlworks, from the standpoint of whites who ran the organization, was through an overt rejection of street culture. It was by fitting in and meeting *their* expectations that white elites wanted kids to create opportunities for themselves.

It was this same message of assimilation that Kidworks more subtly disseminated to the white donating public on whom it was financially dependent. I showed in chapter five that white elites’ involvement was central to KW’s credibility among other whites, and this credibility was the basis for new money and volunteerism. Much like new institutionalism theory (e.g., Meyer and Rowan 1977; Meyer and Rowan 1978) suggests, though, this credibility was maintained through myths and ceremony rather than on-the-ground practices. At Kidworks, these myths centered on KW’s mission of cultural assimilation, and they played out through ceremonious public events, such as the campaign celebration, Best and Brightest Youth scholarship contest, and teen town halls. The most compelling parts of these events, from the point of view of current and potential white donors and volunteers, were young people’s testimonials. Their stories accentuated the troubles faced by KW young people, often framing them as a byproduct of dysfunctional parenting or troublemaking friends. They highlighted the kids’ assimilation to white, middle-class expectations as symbolic of kids’ success.

The emotional appeal of testimonials—they were gripping—was grounded in donors’ and volunteers’ construction of the kids as fundamentally different from themselves. Whereas they had stable two-parent upbringings, white donors thought KW kids had tumultuous single-parent upbringings. Whereas they had morals and college aspirations, KW kids seemed to not. Kidworks, however, appeared to remedy the situation by transforming them into ambitious, high achieving, culturally mainstream kids. The result of KW’s efforts was someone whom the donors could see as like them. Public events, thus, were designed to caricature the culture of KW young people so that KW could change it—by training kids to reject the street in favor of the culturally mainstream. These depictions were appealing to potential donors because they reaffirmed a sense of white superiority. In particular, they reinforced the perception that whites have a culture superior to blacks. Whites then position themselves as gatekeepers: as entitled to moralistically evaluate others’ actions, styles, and attitudes; as entitled to oversee resource distribution. They justify their gatekeeping, resource hoarding, and exclusion of blacks as the byproduct of cultural superiority (see Bonilla-Silva 2001; Della Fave 1980; Wellman 1993). Presenting an assimilationist front to the public, thus, reinforced the framework of white cultural superiority.

Still, the mission of Kidworks, as with almost everything else, was presented to the public as race neutral. Ideological colorblindness (Bobo, Kluegel, and Smith 1997; Bonilla-Silva 2001; Frankenberg 1993; Wellman 1993) at Kidworks and the concerted strategies to make the organization “multicultural” hid race from view. Administrators, for example, requested that kids of all races attend public events in order to represent the full range of young people they served. KW posters and videos, similarly, depicted kids from an assortment of races and ethnic groups playing. These displays of diversity suggested that race did not matter at KW and all kids were welcomed. In the same way, the organization did not mention race in its mission in favor of watered down language describing kids as “disadvantaged” or needing help.

Assimilation expectations were fraught with faulty assumptions, particularly about what it means to be black. They assumed that street culture opposed ambition in favor of illicit activities or dependence upon others. In other words, street kids were assumed to not *want* to “make something of themselves”

and, therefore, rejected schooling in favor of crime. Studies find, however, that the more troublesome aspects of street cultural capital, particularly dropping out of school and violence, are the byproduct of concentrated poverty in areas with few job opportunities (Massey 2001; Wilson 1996) rather than personal will or desire. Within the context of a suppressed opportunity structure, kids and adults can come to see cooperation with dominant institutions—education, for example, or the criminal justice system—as either pointless or even self-defeating (Tyson 2006; Tyson, Darity, and Castellino 2005; Willis 1977). People respond in a variety of ways in order to access resources and status and to create positive identities. Developing an anti-school ethic and resorting to violence or crime are ways that some people adapt, but even then they are rare. Research finds, for example, that even the most isolated and poor kids usually want to succeed and do well in school (Ainsworth-Darnell and Downey 1998; MacLeod 1995; Tyson, Darity, and Castellino 2005), even though they may doubt that their efforts will bring rewards (Mickelson 1990).

Assimilation expectations, however, presumed that rejecting school or mainstream values were inherently characteristic of black kids and their families. Whites described, for example, black-coded cultural symbols—do rags, hip-hop fashion, and wearing pink—as street. They directed me to the mostly black KW facilities and black housing projects when I described my project to them. They spoke of concern over gangs in the area, which the local media and schools routinely characterized as black and Latino gangs. To them, street images seemed intermeshed with blackness. This assumption, too, was faulty. While there is some overlap, particularly through hip-hop culture, black culture and street culture are not synonymous, nor were they at Kidworks. In fact, research shows that middle-class African Americans are often quick to reject the styles and mannerisms of lower-class blacks to highlight their class status (Neckerman, Carter, and Lee 1999). Particularly troublesome, however, is the depiction that reasoning and ambition were lacking in black culture. Conflating anti-school sentiments with blackness became popular both in scholarship and in the press through the “acting white” thesis. This thesis put forth that doing well in school and whiteness have become so intertwined that black kids avoid doing well in school in order to avoid being teased as “acting white.” Research shows that this process is much

more complex than that. It is rare for black students to tease each other for “acting white,” and then it only happens within particular contexts: among adolescents in the schools with the most restrictive opportunity structures (the most impoverished schools, Ogbu 1987; schools where race and opportunity are highly correlated, Tyson 2006; Tyson, Darity, and Castellino 2005; Young 2004). In these situations, students try to construct identities that will draw admiration from their peers, including acting like clowns or being cool. Doing so is not particular to black kids, nor does it account for the dynamic relationship between student behavior and teacher evaluation (see Carter 2005; Dance 2002; Ferguson 2000).

The depiction of the absence of ambition and rationality as a black thing is based in long-standing historical constructions of black Americans as potentially violent and sexually loose. As Patricia Hill Collins (2000; 2004), Michael Omi and Howard Winant (1994), Joe Feagin (2001) and Jessica Fields (2005) show, the images of black men and women as dangerous and hypersexual have existed through much of American history. Whites with political and economic power have reshaped these images in response to the political struggle of the moment. They use the images to justify and legitimate political mobilization against blacks. During slavery, for example, whites constructed Africans as non-human, hypersexual, pagan, and heathen. Policies (e.g., 3/5<sup>th</sup> legislation), thus, were conceptualized as attempts to tame Africans and proselytize to them in order to save their souls (Feagin 2001). During the 1980s, the welfare reform movement gained momentum around the image of a black, unmarried, unemployed “welfare queen” who lived on the backs of (white) American taxpayers (Collins 2000; Collins 2004). In the media, black men continue to be overrepresented as perpetrators of crime and underrepresented as victims (Klein and Naccarato 2003; Lundman 2003; Oliver 2003).

At Kidworks, definitions of street culture were a manifestation of these longstanding but pliable images. “Street” at Kidworks referred to a group of black troublemakers who were likely involved in crime and drug dealing. At the core of this characterization was the understanding that street men as a collective were potentially violent and, therefore, needed to be contained and controlled. It was this perceived propensity towards violence and skirting the law that people interpreted as liabilities in the workplace and, thus, undesirable in employees. Additionally, as the Man-To-Man curriculum implied,

street men were thought to have poor interactional skills, which could also affect the bottom line. Black men and boys, thus, were viewed as undesirable because of their purported inability to function within a work environment and because of their supposed inclination toward violence. It was by making themselves un-intimidating, within this framework, that black boys could display their middle-class cultural capital. They were supposed to wear, for example, preppy clothing instead of the baggy jeans that “thugs” so often wear on television. They were to talk through disputes rather than fight to solve them.

On the other hand, street culture, as conceived in relation to black girls, existed in the realm of reproduction. Street women and girls were seen as sexually promiscuous, which supposedly led to pregnancy and maternal irresponsibility. “Bad” mothers supposedly transferred street cultural capital to their kids, neglected them (for example, by partying too much), or spoiled them. These women, some people at KW also believed, too often turned to welfare or handouts and became a drain on taxpayers. Black girls, thus, could display their middle-class cultural capital, in part, by hiding their sexuality and rejecting boys’ sexual advances.

For these reasons, an assimilation framework was problematic. It implied that middle-class cultural capital, particularly its orientation towards school and authorities, was characteristic of whites (and not blacks), while street culture was caricatured as a dysfunctional quality of blacks. These underlying assumptions and typifications of blackness were not only inaccurate but also psychologically harmful to kids and staff.

### *Code Switching*

At first, it seemed that the black staff who implemented programs at Kidworks shared the perspective of the white elites who ran Kidworks. They seemed to buy into a common Kidworks’ mission of class-based cultural transformation. But closer examination reveals subtle differences in how administrators and direct-care staff made sense of the mission. While the black staff believed in cultural transformation, they themselves code switched rather than assimilating as the way to job security and social mobility. Assimilation took too great of a toll on them.

From the direct-care staff's perspective, the work of Kidworks only made sense with an understanding that "the world is not black." They thought that white people continued to control access to education and jobs, which they prevented black kids and adults from accessing. During their interviews, the staff relayed stories in which they themselves experienced unfair treatment by whites in power. The full-time staff especially viewed their own work environment within Kidworks as controlled by whites who sometimes disrespected them and were unresponsive to their needs. They expected the kids they worked with to face a similar reality and saw evidence that they already did.

The black staff resented the pressure to assimilate to the administration's anti-black characterization of the "professional." To be professional meant to dress in business clothes, to style hair straight rather than in braids, to prioritize work over family. These expectations cultivated deep resentment among the staff who viewed them, when paired with the limited opportunities for high pay and promotion within Kidworks, as anti-family and anti-black. They also diminished the staff's commitment to the organization and even motivated some staff to look for work elsewhere.

A small minority of KW's young people also seemed to resent the pressure to assimilate or the meanings implied in middle-class cultural capital in opposition to street. Some kids, for example, resented their white teachers who seemed to pick on them when they were chatty during class or uninterested in the work. Girls argued that their teachers and other adults had no right to judge them based on their friends' behavior or appearances. Teenage boys said "that ain't right" for employers not to hire them based on their attire. Young boys resisted white staff members' and volunteers' attempts to organize and teach them during prevention programs. During life-skills groups led by Brandon (a white college student), for example, a small minority of boys routinely challenged his authority. They disregarded his orders and instead did the opposite. They interrupted his discussions on drug prevention and KW's rules. Some offered counter-interpretations when Brandon classified OJ Simpson as a murderer and famous athletes as bad examples. Girls similarly rejected a white staff person's exaggerated claims connecting particular colors with gangs. At other times, girls at GW made fun of me for using Midwestern speech.

All of these examples show young people's resistance to white-controlled cultural standards, which some kids already experienced as anti-black.

For direct-care staff, cultural training was one way to combat the reality of racism and to resist pressures to assimilate. They appropriated the (superficially) race-neutral mission of Kidworks to meet their own racialized needs. In many ways, cultural training was not about fitting into white expectations that would potentially bring individual mobility. Rather, it was about dealing with white authority figures in practical and productive ways that would prevent harm to individuals and benefit the group.

Using cultural capital could combat racism in two ways. On an individual level, using middle-class cultural capital could potentially mediate some of the crippling consequences that street behaviors bring. Displaying middle-class cultural capital could mute whites' sanctioning powers and deflate their justifications for targeting black kids. It could, for example, prevent teachers from kicking black kids out of class for "having an attitude" and keep cops from throwing them in jail when they are in the wrong place at the wrong time. Displaying middle-class cultural capital had another effect, one with implications for the group as a whole. Black kids could potentially harness the support of whites who were ideologically committed to meritocracy and equal opportunity. Whites could not use their actions as fodder to justify mistreating them or denying them opportunities. Blacks who had institutional resources, then, could make use of them to advocate for black kids. They could act on behalf of others without delegitimizing the cause in the eyes of whites whose institutional power they needed.

The direct-care staff themselves code switched by matching administrators' expectations while creating black-identified programs. Code switching was their vision for the kids, too. That meant adjusting their use of cultural capital according to the setting rather than legitimating dominant definitions of cultural capital or characterizing them as part of white culture. By displaying some middle-class cultural capital, for example, kids would appeal to whites in white-dominated settings, even if they were based in misconceived notions about black culture. The staff, furthermore, rejected that middle-class cultural capital was inherently better—more moral, more productive—than other forms. Within a code-switching frame, the same displays would not be favored in other settings, while other typically

working-class displays could be. The skill was to cultivate different forms of cultural capital and to make use of them in strategic ways.

The benefits of code switching over assimilation were evident in the staff themselves, who constructed worker identities that transformed blackness into an asset. The staff's own strategic assimilation mediated some of the injuries of racism and the pressure to assimilate. It allowed them, for example, to avoid the verbal assaults of the administration while simultaneously cultivating affirming identities and race consciousness. The staff did not define themselves around fitting into whites' expectations, as other research finds. Nor did they identify with white administrators. Even as some staff changed their behavior to match the administration's expectations, particularly when they were in public with them or at meetings, the staff viewed the *administrators' behavior* as problematic rather than black culture. Additionally, they valued the qualities that they viewed as characteristic of black culture. They constructed worker identities around supporting the kids and creating families rather than pursuits of status and money, for example. They held up black leaders as admirable people who were just like the kids when they were growing up. By code switching rather than assimilating themselves, thus, the direct-care workers were able to construct identities that embraced rather than rejected their blackness. Doing so not only protected them psychologically but also left room for collective political organizing to combat racism in other ways. It cultivated race consciousness.

This framework appeared to be successful in mediating the connotation of blackness with failure and whiteness with supremacy or cultural hegemony for the kids, too. Although the staff's enforcement of the rules and their expectations was inconsistent, I saw little evidence that the kids interpreted the staff's expectations as characteristic of white standards. I did not find evidence supporting the acting white thesis, for example. The kids did not challenge the black staff's encouragement to do well in school or have ambition on the grounds that they were white-identified pursuits. Nor did they seem to interpret the staff's calls to talk through disagreements as characteristic of whiteness. They did not, in other words, interpret the staffs' behavior in relation to whites or whiteness in any particular way. Rather, the kids related to black staff and thought of them as important adults in their lives. They were hungry for their

attention and fed off of their praise. They viewed the staff as legitimate authority figures, who sometimes used this authority in annoying or confusing ways. On the other hand, the kids did not have a discourse in relation to code switching discourse either. None spoke of the staff's behaviors or expectations in code-switching terms, even though some kids had already learned to code switch to a degree.

In sum, Kidworks adopted a mission around cultural transformation. The organization was set up to train kids in middle-class cultural capital so that kids could display it, thus, bringing upon themselves positive appraisals by gatekeepers and opportunities for upward mobility. As KW defined it, middle-class cultural capital consisted of middle-class presentations of self, self-determination, and rationality.

The white administrators, board, and volunteers at Kidworks viewed cultural assimilation, although not in these words, as the best form of cultural transformation. Assimilation suggested that kids internalize middle-class expectations as their own so that they fully fit into white middle-class culture. It also required that kids reject street cultural capital. The organization, for example, held up examples of kids who had done so at public events, and elites personally mentored kids to reject hip-hop styles. Assimilation encouraged kids (and KW adults) to center their identities around their class status thereby discouraging race consciousness as “making excuses.”

The inculcation of middle-class cultural capital in opposition to street cultural capital, however, was predicated upon underlying beliefs and caricatures of black culture as dysfunctional: favoring dependency and irrationality. Advocating that kids embrace middle-class cultural capital within this context required that kids be complicit to the othering of blacks as potentially violent and hypersexual. It required them to acquiesce to or even adopt the framework that black families were culturally deficient. Thus, assimilation reinforced systematic racism and sexism (Bonilla-Silva 1997; Risman 2004) rather than challenging them, even if individual kids were able to become upwardly mobile through it. It was this very anti-black framework, furthermore, that created race-based resentment, as was evident in the direct-care workers. It was also evident in a minority of KW young people, too, in their reactions to white

authority figures. The assimilation framework was further problematic because it fuels oppositional culture in the first place, which can push kids to opt out of real opportunities that would benefit them. This is what Willis' (1977) lads did.

The direct-care staff, on the other hand, code switched rather than assimilated. Code switching suggests that people redefine cultural capital and their displays as different situations dictate. Code switchers are self-reflective of their use of cultural capital, adjusting it to match their audience. At Kidworks, the code-switching framework allowed staff to make use of and advocate some middle-class cultural capital as a contextualized strategy rather than as a moralistic necessity. Code switching could still benefit individuals who displayed middle-class cultural capital. It could open up opportunities guarded by gatekeepers who required kids to show middle-class presentations of self, self-determination, and rationality. But doing so would not require them to internalize these cultural displays as fundamentally anti-black, or, for example, to reject their friends and families who used working-class displays as flawed. A code-switching framework discouraged the othering of other blacks and the fracturing of group identities along class lines.

The code-switching framework simultaneously challenged to a substantial degree the underlying anti-black assumptions of opposing middle-class skills to street culture. It allowed staff to redefine some aspects of middle-class cultural capital as consistent with blackness or even characteristic of it. The staff challenged some of the mischaracterization of blacks as poor or black cultural traits (e.g., wearing braids in the hair) as street, for example. Many workers, particularly those who had close contact with whites within KW, developed race consciousness. A code-switching framework allowed staff to construct cultural transformation as a response to racism rather than inherent cultural deficiency.

### **Meeting the Mission**

In order for code switching to be possible, Kidworks young people had to know and make use of middle-class cultural capital. For this reason, it is important to consider the extent to which Girlworks and Boyworks staff successfully transmitted middle-class cultural capital. In this section, I analyze the

success that KW workers had in doing so and the consequences of how they went about it. I begin by assessing kids' involvement in public events before shifting to the cultural capital implications of the gendered strategies that staff used to create good girls and real men.

### *The Reality of Public Events*

One of the primary ways that KW tried to transmit middle-class cultural capital was by involving kids in public events. Events potentially served KW's mission in a couple of ways. They created an opportunity for staff to role model middle-class behavior and styles. Black staff attended these events, and the kids could see them in their suits and professional roles. On a few occasions, staff took on leadership roles by facilitating group discussions or giving speeches. Most importantly, events gave kids a chance to develop and practice their code-switching skills. These skills came by way of looking professional, sounding professional, and interacting with elites.

Through their participation in events, then, kids could develop impression management and public speaking skills. The kids who gave speeches at public events did develop these skills, sometimes with the assistance of staff members or volunteers who trained them in speech writing and speech giving. Because a few adults mingled with them before and after events, some young people learned to negotiate hand shaking and polite banter, too. They also got to see the staff in professional roles, occasionally watching them give speeches or facilitate question-and-answer sessions at town hall events. The kids who attended public events dressed up when they did so, and at least once a year, they wore tuxedos. The annual winner of the Best and Brightest Youth contest got extensive practice in public speaking and middle-class presentations of self as an official KW ambassador.

For the most part, however, few kids participated in public events in these productive ways. Their speeches were brief, and kids stood on the periphery both before and after they delivered them. Despite the centrality of testimonials and public speaking to fundraising, most kids participated by hosting or being entertainment. Like the direct-care staff, for example, kids prepared for meetings. When events took place at GW, they set up tables and chairs. They also helped clean up afterward. They tore

down decorations, vacuumed the floors, and picked up garbage. Other times, young people were “hosts” who greeted adults at the door and escorted them to the appropriate room. When potential board members came to KW, for instance, kids played tour guide. At other events, they did much more. At the Gala, kids opened the doors for young professionals as they entered an upscale department store. They ushered them inside onto a red carpet and checked their overcoats, as the staff had trained them to do. The potential donors then enjoyed an evening of private shopping, wine, and upscale auctioning, as the kids played by the door. At a volunteer appreciation at a restaurant, staff paired kids with servers. They spent the first part of the night taking dinner orders and serving drinks. Kids also provided entertainment at events by singing, for example. When the food was late at a volunteer orientation, the volunteer coordinator called in the cheerleaders to shake our hands and talk to us as she bought time. Much to the delight of the volunteers, the girls also performed cheers and chants that declared KW to be the best.

Despite the promise of kids’ participation in public events, then, how adults incorporated kids’ participation often put kids in working-class service positions as servers, hosts, or entertainers. In these cases, the kids learned to serve people, pick up after them, and entertain them—all service-oriented tasks. There was a disturbing racial undertone to this aspect of public events, too. It was often low-income black kids providing testimonials to white professionals, black kids serving white adults, blacks entertaining whites. Certainly, public events had the potential to model different race relations as black staff members and white sponsors were in the same room. But black staff sometimes took on the same roles as the kids. They too set up and cleaned. They greeted people at the door and stood on the periphery. On rare occasions, they were asked to provide their own testimonials. KW adults, then, modeled the same working-class skills with the exception of middle-class presentations of self.

### *Gendered Strategies*

Equally important to examine were the strategies that staff used to organize, control, and discipline the kids. Research shows stark differences in disciplinary strategies that cultivate middle-class cultural capital and those that cultivate working-class cultural capital (Baumrind 1978; Baumrind 1994;

Baumrind 1997; Kohn 1977; Lareau 2002; Lareau 2003). Middle-class parents raise kids to think and argue analytically, for example. Parents develop reasoning skills by explaining rules to their kids and the consequences of breaking them—rather than spanking or disciplining punitively. They allow kids to negotiate with teachers and interact with doctors freely so that they learn to advocate for themselves. Teachers and camp counselors similarly dialogue with kids and encourage positive behavior through reward systems (e.g., Conte 1994; Moore 2001; Moore 2002). A recent trend among middle-class parents, Lareau's research shows, is to hyperstructure kids' lives in order to find and cultivate their particular talents. They, for example, involve young people in an assortment of extra-curricular activities—reading tutoring, dance lessons, piano lessons, soccer leagues, Boy Scouts, etc. Doing so, parents believe, will give their kids the skills that will advantage them in an increasingly competitive labor market. These strategies teach kids to navigate institutions and, in the language of Lareau, to develop a sense of entitlement.

Working-class parents, teachers, and counselors, on the other hand, generally teach kids to obey the rules rather than negotiate them. Their discipline is directive and authoritarian with less explanation. They also rely more on physical punishments. Lareau's research found other interesting patterns among working-class parents, too, that resembles the self-direction of earlier research on middle-class kids (Kohn 1977). Rather than scheduling activities and monitoring them, working-class parents give kids the freedom to develop naturally. They allowed them to structure their own play with other kids, and focused their parenting energy on meeting their basic needs. Kids learned to be self-directive, in this case, but obedient to authority.

At Kidworks, staff used different methods to teach boys and girls to code switch. The staff took for granted that coded switching itself was to be done in gendered ways.

### Creating Good Girls

In their attempts to create good girls, the staff at Girlworks used a contradictory array of disciplinary strategies, some of which fostered middle-class cultural capital while others undercut their efforts. In this section, I analyze how closely their strategies came to meeting the goal of transferring

middle-class cultural capital to kids. On the one hand, the staff successfully defined ambition as important and held up girls' achievement as part of being a good girl. I show that this version of girlhood and womanhood, furthermore, challenged girls' subordination to boys by encouraging financial independence and contesting the expectation that boys become breadwinners. The staff similarly defined sexuality as something for girls to control. But the staff undercut their efforts, particularly in relation to sexuality. They used authoritarian approaches to sex education that emphasized risk and sexual repression at the cost of ignoring sexual desire. Defining motherhood as central identities also undercut their efforts to discourage pregnancy. Finally, the staff emphasized obedience which they enforced through authoritarian discipline. While the staff successfully encouraged girls to achieve, I conclude, they also reinforced girls' responsibility for emotions and intimacy.

The workers at Girlworks most successfully met KW's mission in relation to ambition and self-determination. The staff fully expected—and wanted—the girls to achieve in school and in work. They, for example, celebrated when staff members graduated from college. They encouraged girls to make career goals for themselves and to plan to go to college. What's more, they organized Girlworks in middle-class ways in order to enhance girls' success in school. Staff enforced the homework program, for example, by directing girls to the homework room and rewarding them for accumulating points. They tracked the girls' grades, and organized tutors for them. They organized other programs, such as Girl Scouts and an anti-tobacco group, which encouraged them to get involved.

For the KW staff who worked with girls, ambition was part of womanhood and being a good girl. Being financially independent was central to workers' own identities as women, for example. Only two female direct-care workers volunteered information about their male partners to me at all, and only one framed him as a financial provider for her. Instead, GW workers took pride in their own achievements and independence. They valued their college degrees, and they were proud to be able to support their families financially. In fact, they viewed the ability to provide for a family as a critical and fulfilling part of motherhood. The girls were determined to get ahead, too. Girls routinely aspired to go to college and to have careers, often high status ones. They usually did their homework. As a group, the

GW girls had the highest grade point average out of the kids at all of the KW sites in Sherburne. The staff at Girlworks, thus, successfully emphasized self-determination with girls and used middle-class strategies to do so.

Other research has similarly found that doing well in school has become feminized over the past several decades. That is, trying to achieve in schools has become associated with girls, while rejecting school has become a marker of manhood. One of the most significant and overlooked pieces of Paul Willis' (1977) research was the connection between the oppositional culture that rejected schooling and boys' pursuit of manhood. The lads were devalued because of their working-class origins, but they reversed this valuation by favoring physical work of the shop floor over the mental work of the classroom. They did so by associating mental labor with femininity, while valorizing manual work as the work of real men. They had laughs by teasing the academically oriented ear'oles as sexually inferior, for example. It was by associating schoolwork with girlhood that the lads waged class resistance through working-class identities. Other studies suggest that some boys reject schooling as a feminine pursuit, as well (Carter 2005; Mac an Ghail 1994). In Jones and Myhill's (2004) research, teachers and other students evaluated high-achieving girls as conforming to gendered expectations, while they considered high-achieving boys to be gender transgressors. These studies suggest that being good girls has come to include work, making the pursuit of status through work a core source of girls' identities as girls.

Some research shows that a breadwinner version of womanhood has become central, in particular, to black women's and girls' identities (see Kaplan 1997 for a counter example). Black Americans generally support women's labor force participation and gender equality in the workforce (Blee and Tickamyer 1995; Kane 2000; Powers, Sutor, Guerra, Shackelford, Mecom, and Gusman 2003). In Hill's research (1999; 2002; 2005), black families of all classes advocated equality in the workplace. Hill also found that black parents taught daughters to be independent and to take care of themselves. These findings reflect the trends in labor force participation among African Americans. Black women have had consistently high labor force participation across history, which is now a necessity for many women,

particularly low-income women and those who head households (Harknett and McLanahan 2004; Lichter, McLaughlin, Kephart, and Landry 1992).

To a degree, a breadwinning model of womanhood challenges traditional expectations that result in men's dominance over women. Most centrally, it defies the gendered division of labor that specifies men as breadwinners and women as caretakers. The image of the ideal worker as man developed in the United States through industrialization starting in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. As Acker (2006) and Williams (2000) both show, the ideal worker came to be someone with physical strength who could devote copious amounts of time and energy to production. It was also someone unburdened by family responsibilities. The ideal worker was, in essence, a man: someone with a male body that could engage in physically demanding work and, because of the social privileges of (heterosexual) manhood, not be burdened by childcare or domesticity. Women within this traditional model of the nuclear family were economically dependent. Childcare and domesticity were their central responsibilities.

Within this context, the pursuit of economic independence from men was one way in which women successfully challenged their own subordination. By teaching girls to be financially independent and to strive for success in school and in the workforce, Girlworks employees transmitted middle-class cultural capital in ways that simultaneously resisted subordinating girls to boys.

To a degree, middle-class goals also challenged girls' subordination when it came to sexuality, as well. The staff and the Girl Might curriculum, for example, advocated that girls seek healthy heterosexual relationships that were free from abuse. They discussed sexual assault with the girls and framed the girls as powerful sexual actors who should make their own sexual decisions. They taught the girls to reject boys' sexual advances, particularly if they felt disrespected, and gave them some tools for doing so. Girls, in turn, could use sexual restraint to prevent boys from abusing them and to keep themselves from having children when they were unprepared. In this way, the staff appeared to be constructing sexuality as another arena in which the girls could take control in their lives, much like other research has found some girls do (Kaplan 1997; Schalet, Hunt, and Joe-Laidler 2003) and other researchers have advocated (e.g., Fine 2005).

The staff undercut this effort to establish sexuality as a source of power and resistance for girls, however, through the authoritarian way that they advocated sexual restraint. The staff framed reproduction and sexuality as girls' burden, suggesting that they could only be appropriately feminine when they repressed their sexual desire. The staff used two problematic strategies to teach girls this lesson. First, they used scare tactics that overwhelmed girls with potential negative consequences that could come their way via their sexuality. Girls who were sexually active risked ruining their reputations, squandering their self-esteem, losing their boyfriends, being rejected by their families, getting pregnant, catching HIV, and dropping out of school. The accuracy of information seemed to fall to the side—some of it was frighteningly inaccurate. In turn, the message that good girls do not have sex and they certainly do not get pregnant took on greater importance. Staff taught girls that *they* were primarily responsible for sexuality by framing it as their “soul.” This portrayed girls as sexual actors whose embodied ability to get pregnant, have children, and carry disease was the most important and consequential aspect of their sexuality and, perhaps, their identity as a whole. The result was a moralistic dimension to the lesson, even when it was unintended: anyone who did have sex *deserved* whatever consequences came her way. Second, even though staff and the life-skills curricula depicted boys as sexual aggressors and girls as potential victims, it became the girls' responsibility to protect themselves from them. In addition to tips on what makes for safe and healthy relationships, Girl Might, for example, gave girls strategies for rejecting boys' sexual advances. The role play exercises gave them practice in doing so.

Several important things were missing from these conversations about sexuality. The sexual responsibilities of boys, for example, were never addressed. The staff's reductionist “don't do bad” approach, furthermore, failed to address the complexities involved in intimate relationships that girls were already experiencing. Some girls were already, for example, trying to balance their desire for intimacy with boys with their fears of being teased. Other girls, as Warner indicated, were struggling to find sexual identities that made sense to them. But sexual desire was seldom discussed with girls, let alone what it meant or healthy ways of expressing it. Rather, staff taught girls to repress their sexual desire and attached their self-esteem to doing so. The staff, furthermore, provided the girls little information and

some misinformation about the transmission of STDs and contraception. These omissions severely undercut the staff's efforts to provide girls with the tools to make well-informed, healthy sexual decisions. Research suggests that girls with lopsided information on sexuality actually take sexual risks that leave them vulnerable to sexual manipulation, abuse, disease infection, and unwanted pregnancy (Bearman and Bruckner 2001; Fields 2005; Fine 1988; Tolman 1994; Tolman 2002).

The staff also contradicted their own lessons about the negativity of pregnancy by defining caretaking and, by extension, motherhood as core sources of power and identity for girls, just as other groups of women do (Hays 1996). The staff who had children took tremendous joy in being parents, and the GW staff constructed the girls as like their own kids. Several staffers envisioned themselves as working permanently in childcare because it was through caring for others that they found meaning for themselves. The staff encouraged girls to be caretakers, too, by holding them responsible for each other: having them read to each other, break up fights, and discipline other girls.

Furthermore, at Girlworks, being an adult, being “grown,” meant temporary respite from the expectation to be submissive. Adult women who were engaged in childcare were, at those times, supposed to dominate others (the kids) rather than be submissive and obedient. Being dominant was legitimate as long as it made women effective caretakers. In turn, “adult” and “caretaker” became roles and statuses that girls and women cultivated to their advantage. They could play them up, for example, in order to justify their own autonomy or rule breaking. Moore (2002) and Thorne (1993) illustrate a similar process when girls in their studies created status hierarchies in their peer groups. The “little women” in Moore’s study, for example, established dominance over those who were “younger” than they were by bossing them around, taking on authority, and opting out of certain events. It was by making themselves older and in charge of younger girls that girls created and marked their status even as they aged and crossing gender boundaries became more risky. At Girlworks, girls who were “helpers,” “peer mentors,” and “junior staff” distinguished themselves from the younger girls in similar ways: by bossing them around, disciplining them, and ignoring the rules themselves. They, with the assistance of staff, created an intermediary status between adult and child in which they too became authoritarian by heavily exacting

the rules and demanding obedience. By taking on a caretaker role, then, junior staff girls were able to break from the expectation that they be submissive without the risk of staff disciplining them.

The staff made the traditional realms of emotions and empathy the province of girls, as well. They trained the girls to do emotion work. The staff helped girls to develop empathy for others and, on the other hand, to take on their emotional burdens. The workers, for example, told stories about their own mistakes and experiences in order to enhance their credibility with the girls. They also taught girls to empathize with others—their teachers, their peers—as a way to assess their actions. The girls were supposed to feel how others felt, to put themselves in their shoes.

In one final way the staff reinforced working-class cultural capital with the girls. They trained girls to be well-behaved using working-class strategies. They ordered girls to be quiet and to drop the attitude. When the staff wanted something done, they expected the girls to do it without negotiations or asking questions. The staff, in other words, expected that girls respect their authority and be submissive to it. They reinforced their authority and the girls' obedience using typically working-class authoritarian disciplinary strategies. The staff gave directive orders to the girls without negotiating and with the expectation that girls follow them or be disciplined. They yelled at girls and threatened them, and they inflicted lengthy group timeouts that punished the group for the actions of a few. These working-class strategies were unlikely to produce middle-class cultural capital among girls and expressly inhibited reasoning and rationality in favor of the obedience related to being good girls.

The workers at Girlworks, consequently, were particularly successful at promoting middle-class cultural capital when it came to ambition and self-determination. They defined school and work as important for girls, and they structured GW to support it. When it came to sexuality and caretaking, however, staff reinforced traditional notions of womanhood and girlhood. Emotions and intimacy remained the responsibility of good girls, which promoted sexual repression on the one hand and risky behavior on the other. It was in these aspects of GW life, furthermore, that staff were most authoritarian with the girls and emotionally controlling.

## Becoming Real Men

Different processes were at work with the BW staff and boys. The staff at Boyworks tried to redefine manhood around breadwinning rather than physical domination in order to dissuade boys from using street cultural capital. In this section, I show that the staff successfully did this on an ideological level but failed to do so in practice. Instead, the BW staff themselves resorted to four distinctly working-class disciplinary strategies that seemed to undercut their own efforts to teach boys to be self-regulating and ambitious. They encouraged boys to be service workers. Second, they failed to enforce the rules that promoted middle-class cultural capital. Third, the workers took on the role of friend that prioritized having fun over schoolwork. Finally, they resorted to physical domination in order to enhance their authority with the boys. Together, these practices cultivated working-class cultural capital among boys that prepared them for instable working-class jobs rather than middle-class careers.

As implied above in Willis' work and also in Mac an Ghail's (1994), cultural capital for the boys is closely tied to how boys establish their dominance over other boys and girls. On the one hand, middle-class cultural capital equips boys to achieve manhood in traditional ways. It prepares them to become fathers, providers, and protectors (Nock 1998). Middle-class cultural capital, for instance, orients boys towards workplaces and prepares them to compete with other boys in the labor market. It also centers boys' identities around breadwinning and holding institutional positions of power (Pyke 1996). Street forms of cultural capital, on the other hand, equip boys to establish their power through physical domination of others (Anderson 1999; Pyke 1996; Wacquant 2004). Boys who intimate others, for example, enjoy a high status. So do boys who sexually dominate girls.

For low-status boys with few opportunities to establish manhood through institutional means, middle-class cultural capital brings few rewards. Even those who are particularly skilled still face a constrained opportunity structure that makes middle-class (or even blue-collar) employment difficult (MacLeod 1995; Royster 2003). Street cultural capital, on the other hand, can be particularly enticing because it provides readily available resources for boys to garner power: their bodies, sexuality, and physical strength. The staff at Boyworks, then, rightfully worried that boys would favor street cultural

capital as the way to establish their credibility and status. Several of them had done so themselves as kids and witnessed the consequences firsthand. They feared that masculinity based in street cultural capital endangered the boys. Being “hard” and “tough” put boys at risk for getting shot, for example, or locked up. What’s more, the boys risked incurring consequences by simply adopting street presentations of self, even if they were just small children, even if they were not dealing drugs or part of a gang. Impression management really mattered, from the staff’s point of view, because adults mistook “wannabes” for thugs.

It was out of concern for the risks brought about by street culture that staff tried to deflate its appeal to the boys. They recited the rules of Kidworks that discouraged street behaviors over and over with them. They instructed boys not to wear earrings or baggy pants that hung down too lowly. They held up examples of boys who failed to heed their warnings and the harsh consequences they incurred.

But the mission to culturally train boys required a concerted effort to define manhood around something other than physical domination. For this reason, the life-skills programs rejected street definitions of manhood in favor of a breadwinner model. The staff belittled street behavior as typical of “mamas’ boys,” for example. Being real men, as they taught the boys, entailed something different. It meant being good employees who could maintain steady employment. Working would allow them to one day be responsible fathers who could support a family financially and discipline the kids. Boys could also become leaders within their communities by breadwinning; they could set positive examples of how to get ahead. It was through achievement in the workforce, thus, that BW staff taught boys to establish real manhood. Breadwinning—not their street styles and behaviors—entitled boys to power.

Women and girls were largely inconsequential within this breadwinning framework. There was little discussion of girls in any form during life-skills groups, for example, and the Man-To-Man curriculum intentionally left them out. Discussions around sexuality framed girls as responsible for any consequences that could arise, and boys were not bothered with issues of intimacy or caretaking at all. It was simply a taken-for-granted assumption that breadwinning would provide boys access to girls and,

eventually, wives if they so chose. The only additional skills that boys apparently needed, at least according to the Man-To-Man curriculum, were how to initiate conversations with girls.

In practice, however, the BW staff fell short in advocating this model of manhood, as well as the middle-class cultural capital that could potentially make it possible. They did so in four different ways. First, the work life that the Man-To-Man program prepared boys for was not middle-class. The program did little to teach boys to be entrepreneurs, for example, or bosses who ran companies, even though the staff did try to foster leadership and ownership in KW's programs. Rather, it taught boys to work steadily in working-class service positions. It trained boys to please customers. It was through service work, thus, that KW prepared boys to become breadwinners. This makes sense given the economic restructuring that has taken place over the past several decades. Service positions, particularly in food service and retail, have displaced manufacturing positions, leaving urban men with few employment options (Charles and Grusky 2004; Newman 1999; Royster 2003; Wilson 1996). However, female-dominated service positions are too often low-paying "bad" jobs (Jacobs and Gerson 2004; Kalleberg, Reskin, and Hudson 2000) to assure that workers *can* make a living at them. Even if boys had adequate interaction skills to be good service workers, they would struggle to fulfill the breadwinning model of manhood. Thus, the boys would be left with the same social, psychological, and material deprivation that makes street culture appealing in the first place (see Newman 1999).

Second, the staff often failed to enforce the rules that transmitted middle-class cultural capital, even though they highlighted them. BW workers were most diligent in enforcing the rule forbidding earrings. When it came to others, however, the staff were often lax in following through. Instead, boys were given freedom: they had autonomy to decide how to spend their time and to resolve their own conflicts. Underlying assumptions about boyhood as a time for exploration and freedom kept staff from closely supervising the boys like the GW staff did with the girls. This hands-off approach resembled the natural growth methods of childrearing that Lareau showed cultivated working-class cultural capital. The boys were largely left to monitor themselves, and powerful boys were still risktakers. Following the rules, thus, was no more beneficial than getting away with breaking them. Staff similarly delivered mixed

messages about the consequences of street culture. It was risky, but only if boys were weak or on the losing end. If one could avoid death and jail, the staff's examples showed, the long-term effects were unclear.

Third, the staff took on the role of friend with the boys which prioritized having fun over schoolwork. An adult status was not enough to establish staff members as authority figures among the boys. Rather, staff authority was negotiated on an on-going basis so that BW workers spent considerable time and energy making themselves credible in the eyes of the boys. Staff often did so by positioning themselves as friends and playmates of the boys rather than as supervisors or disciplinarians. Workers at BW, for example, participated in activities alongside the boys, making a fun environment for them.

Within this naturalistic and self-directing atmosphere, BW workers were particularly lax in making the boys do their homework. Few tutors helped the boys, and I never saw the staff direct boys to read to each other. Limited space for homework prevented the boys from all doing their homework at once, yet the staff did not enforce the rule that boys rotate in and out of doing homework. Nor did they follow through with the homework reward program. Instead of doing homework, consequently, boys generally came straight to the games room or gym when they arrived. They played games when they were in the computer lab rather than working on class projects. There were rarely more than a dozen boys doing their homework at any given time. Staff at Boyworks, then, did little to enhance the boys' preexisting commitment to schoolwork and little to challenge the derisive association of academic achievement with femininity.

Finally, the staff resorted to physically dominating boys in order to enforce their own status as rule makers at Boyworks. The men staff presented themselves as more powerful than the boys in order to bolster their own credibility. They, for example, told the boys their own stories about the police and violence. When boys were out of control, staff physically confronted them, restrained them, or jacked them up in an attempt to control them and to show them who was boss. Their ability to physically dominate the boys proved they had power. In doing these things, however, the staff themselves resorted to physical aggression when they were trying to dissuade boys from using.

These practices together suggested that despite the ideological commitment to a breadwinning model of manhood and efforts to promote middle-class cultural capital in place of street culture, the staff at Boyworks trained the boys in few middle-class cultural capital skills. They often reinforced working-class cultural capital that prepared boys for the low-wage employment that was most readily available to them but unlikely to give them the status or power to become “real” men. The breadwinning model, thus, did little to help the boys.

In sum, in practice, the staff and public events were only partially successful in carrying out the mission to train kids in middle-class presentations of self, self-determination, and rationality. In some instances, the staff actually trained kids in *working-class* skills. Public events placed kids in the positions of service worker and entertainer for elites.

The workers at GW were more successful than the staff at BW. Most importantly, GW workers’ definitions of the good girl and womanhood coincided with middle-class cultural capital in relation to fostering ambition. They advocated that girls be economically independent and organized GW to support it.

When it came to emotions and rationality, the staff’s interactions with the girls were less promising. They coerced the girls into following their expectations by instilling guilt for breaking rules, and the staff used authoritarian discipline that fostered obedience rather than reasoning. What’s more, it was through the girls’ role as helpers that girls experienced the most autonomy. The importance of motherhood to the staff’s identities as well as older girls’ status as disciplinarians reinforced girls’ responsibility for caretaking. The staff made emotions the realm and responsibility of girls and, by opposition, rationality the province of boys.

The GW staff had more contradictory results in terms of sexuality. They advocated that girls develop sexuality as a source of personal power, yet they failed to give the girls the tools to make it such. Most problematically, GW employees used scare tactics and even misinformation to prevent girls from engaging in sexual activity. This anti-feminist approach to sex education instills shame (Bartky 1990) in girls around their bodies and sexuality so that girls’ bodies become both “at risk and at fault” (Tolman

1996: 255) for pregnancy and damage to their reputations. Their very sexual desire becomes both the problem and the solution, which encourages girls to stifle and control it rather than understand it and use it in healthy ways (Fine 1988; Tolman 1994; Tolman 1996; Tolman 2002). Tolman (1994; 1996; 2002) showed that framing girls' sexual desire in this way brings the opposite of the desired effects to girls, then. It prevents them from making healthy sexual decisions and actually encourages sexual risk taking by handing over their control to boys.

The workers at Boyworks were less successful in meeting the mission with the boys and did so at great cost. Ideologically, the staff tried to mediate the appeal of street cultural capital to low-status boys so that they can construct themselves as real men. They defined manhood around breadwinning rather than physical domination. This practice was problematic, however, in that it left intact hegemonic definitions of manhood (Nock 1998). Men remain defined as ideal workers (Acker 1990; Acker 2004) with little or no responsibility for carework, emotion work, or domestic labor (Williams 2000). This approach also took for granted men's entitlement to dominate others, thereby reinforcing the gender structure that garners men's superordination and women's subordination (Connell 1987; Risman 2004).

Even still, in practice, the staff undercut their efforts by using working-class rather than middle-class disciplinary strategies. They gave the boys few chances to practice being bosses but instead taught them how to be successful service employees. They did not enforce the rules, which reinforced boys' freedom to act out. In positioning themselves as friends to the boys, the workers allowed them to structure their own time around fun rather than homework. Finally, the staff physically dominated the boys and jacked them up at times.

Boys, thus, were left with two dissatisfying versions of manhood. On the one hand, they could gain status by risktaking. They could physically dominate other boys by making use of street cultural capital. Being bigger and tougher than others, then, remained a source of power. Competing for physical domination, of course, encouraged boys to hurt each other psychologically and physically. The breadwinning version of manhood, on the other hand, framed the consistency of employment—rather than the quality of it—as important. This emphasis groomed boys to accept low-wage service jobs, just as

the public events did, in order to become real breadwinning men, even though service positions were unlikely to allow them to do so.

But at Kidworks, the direct-care staff's inconsistency in transmitting middle-class cultural capital went largely unexamined, and, from an organizational perspective, was unimportant. As long as the staff maintained the perception that Kidworks was achieving its mission, Kidworks' credibility remained intact (Meyer and Rowan 1977; Meyer and Rowan 1978). The staff, as a result, enjoyed considerable autonomy in their work. There was little direct oversight on the part of the administration, the board, or program directors. The board only did quality control once or twice a year. Record keeping and paperwork were minimal. Because administrators used anecdotal and some aggregated data (average GPAs for each site, for example) in their reports, public presentations, and grants, the staff only had to superficially account for their work unless something in particular became problematic. The staff's autonomy served as an important concession on the part of white administrators and board members that facilitated the staff's willingness to work for KW (see Meyer and Rowan 1978), even as many viewed their employment conditions as exploitive. Were it not for the autonomy that staff had to shape the environments at Girlworks and Boyworks, they likely would have found another place to work. It simultaneously meant, though, that the staff did not have to fulfill the mission.

### **Accessing Opportunities at Kidworks**

Displaying middle-class cultural capital did open up access to opportunities for young people at Kidworks. In this section, I evaluate these opportunities and illustrate the particular social conditions that facilitated them. I show that in order for cultural capital displays to be meaningful for kids, there had to be dedicated gatekeepers with pliable resources to reward middle-class cultural capital, and these resources had to exist in abundance.

The most consequential opportunities at Kidworks came from sponsorship by white elites. This sponsorship came in different forms, all of which could be life changing and had potential long-term effects for kids. A board member, for example, pledged to sponsor a handful of Kidworks young people

by personally mentoring them, taking them to social events, and paying for their college tuition. She selected these kids when they were rising sixth graders (they were seniors in high school at the end of this study) based on staff recommendations, a formal application process, and interviews. The staff helped her pick out the kids who had “drive and the potential” to make something of themselves. They also had to have parents who supported their dedication to school. The kids agreed to sign a contract promising to keep up their grades and stay involved in Kidworks. The sponsor made sure that the kids abided by the contract through quarterly meetings with them. She dropped the sponsorship of one girl whose grades slipped and started misbehaving. For the Board Scholars, being self-determined and looking middle class (as she demanded of them) really paid off.

Along the way, this same board member provided resources to the Board Scholars and to other kids. She took kids to museums, to fancy restaurants, and bought them school supplies. Other white elites, particularly on the board but also administrators, also accessed their social networks to gain services for individual standout kids who displayed some special talent or potential. A board member, for example, arranged violin lessons for one such child by a personal friend, a local orchestra musician. Other times, white elites allowed kids to shadow them or their friends at work, or they paid for kids’ tuition for summer camp. White elites arranged these opportunities for individual kids who were brought to their attention by staff.

There were more systematic opportunities afforded to KW young people who expressly displayed their middle-class cultural capital. Staff took groups of kids on college tours, for example, when they attended life-skills groups regularly. They also rewarded kids for amassing points through the homework program. In addition to things like pizza parties, kids went to college basketball tournaments and to nearby college campuses. Staff also picked which kids applied for the Best and Brightest Youth contest, the winner of which received a couple thousand dollars scholarship and the chance to win more. Administrators secured a major grant that paid for a few dozen kids to attend a computer camp. Each kid who went brought home their own brand new personal computer. Staff also decided which kids they would hire as junior staff people and offered to be professional references for kids.

Staff rewarded kids in other ways. Sometimes staff bought individual kids clothes and toys when they saw a need and thought the child deserving. They awarded them with Kid of the Month at Kidworks, for which they got their picture taken and posted on the wall. They acknowledged kids' successes to the whole group and met them with applause.

In each of these instances, the staff and white elites served as gatekeepers who judged the kids based on their middle-class cultural capital. Kids who “behaved” were eligible for these opportunities, and the staff expressly excluded kids whom they thought were troublemakers or would potentially embarrass Kidworks. Cultural capital displays, thus, were the dominant criteria that adults used to discriminate. Even though the most significant rewards were not common and the staff could not provide as many opportunities as they would have liked, the kids who caught a break at KW were appreciative. Gary's most significant memory at Boyworks, for example, was that Darin bought him a bicycle. Schoolwork frustrated NuNu because she simply did not get it, but with the help of her tutor, who came twice a week, homework got easier. The opportunities that did arise for kids were largely possible because elite businesspeople in Sherburne used their resources—financial support, personal connections—to sponsor kids.

Thus, I conclude that middle-class cultural capital displays were effective for individual kids who were able to impress elites or staff. These adults sponsored them by providing them scholarship money, sending them to camp, and the like. But middle-class cultural capital displays brought only limited rewards, generally to a few select kids. There were far more kids who displayed middle-class cultural capital and *did not* get sponsored than kids who did. In other words, kids who did not look and act middle class got few if any goodies at Kidworks; and some kids who did, got some goodies. For cultural capital displays to be the most effective, furthermore, rewards had to be available *outside* of Kidworks. That suggests that middle-class cultural capital is necessary but insufficient to create opportunities, and potentially mobility, for kids. There has to be a substantial reward system in place to support it. Kidworks simply did not have the resources to sponsor every kid who looked and acted middle class.

It is impossible to know the long-term effects of KW's cultural capital training on the kids' educational attainment or success in school or the workplace from my data. The direct-care workers at Girlworks and Boyworks, however, offer a glimpse into the kids' futures, particularly in terms of the benefits and costs. The experiences of the black staffers support the interpretation that appearing middle class is necessary but insufficient to create opportunities for African Americans. Within a racially-stratified organization like KW, even competent cultural displays provided access only to mid-level positions, and these were available only to a handful of workers. The full-time black staff knew, for example, that they would not likely be promoted into administration. The part-time black staff outright rejected the idea of asking for a raise because they thought it so unlikely. While they had stable, meaningful employment, then, the direct-care staff still remained deferent to the decision making and authority of whites. Even when black staffers were good at code switching, the racialized and gendered power structure remained intact. Blocked opportunities, furthermore, led to tremendous frustration for the staff and a sense that they were being exploited. They experienced the glass ceiling and codes of conduct as a rejection of their blackness. Cultural capital displays, thus, may have opened up opportunities that existed within Kidworks, but they did little to challenge the racial and gender stratification within the organization itself.

#### *Facilitating Opportunities through Kidworks*

There are several changes that KW could implement, based on the data presented in this study, which would better facilitate the effective use of culture. These changes are designed to do so while combating rather than reinforcing racism (Bonilla-Silva 1997) and sexism (Connell 1987; Risman 1998) as systems that advantage whites and men.

First, KW should rethink its public relations strategies, particularly the roles that kids play in public events and the use of their personal stories as marketing tools. I argued that KW currently presents caricatured realities that draw on and reinforce racist images of black families as dysfunctional in order to maintain an emotional investment on the part of white volunteers and donors. These fundraising

strategies were particularly effective with whites, in part, because they provided anecdotal evidence that Kidworks was fulfilling its mission to change kids' lives. A more accurate way for KW to accomplish the same thing would be to collect and present systematic data on the kids and the effects of KW on clearly defined areas of their lives. Of course, systematic data might also present a worse picture of KW's reality. Still, BW and GW have started to gather the background information in application forms that would make such data meaningful. They ask families to disclose, for example, who lives in the household and the household income. They also record counts of how many kids participate in which programs, as well as the results of some pre- and posttests in the life-skills programs. KW could expand these efforts by systematically evaluating what kids take away from these programs. KW could use these data in both grants and during public events. They would accurately reflect the role that KW plays in kids' lives, hold the organization accountable for fulfilling its mission, all the while raising money to support the pay of staff and the programs for kids.

Second, KW needs to tap black staff and community members for leadership roles within the organization. It is a necessity, in fact, for KW to diversify its funding base because the board is very closely tied to the executive director, who is beyond retirement age. KW could meet both needs by extending to black social networks and serving the same sorts of networking and status functions for black professionals as it does for whites. Sherburne has many black community leaders, professionals, and businesspeople who can provide leadership to the organization and have fundraising potential. Black workers have connections to them and successfully tap them as resources to lead programs or mentor kids. A group of black businesswomen also funded shopping sprees and college trips. Although black businesspeople probably have less wealth than their white counterparts (Oliver and Shapiro 1995), there was a history of financial investment by black professionals. The board and administration of KW need to make a concerted effort to reach out to them and to fully incorporate them into the board and public face of KW. It is necessary to bring in a cohort of black leaders in order for this to work, rather than an occasional black board member here or there. It is also necessary that whites hand over real decision making power to these board members and to black staff.

Third, Girlworks and Boyworks spaces should be overtly pro-black and Afrocentric. At present, KW invests time and energy in drawing in white people (as members, as volunteers, as staff) and being “multicultural.” Multiculturalism and colorblindness, however, erase white people’s accountability and diminish the benefits of having black staff by forcing them to invest too many resources in accommodating whites. Pamela Perry’s (2001; 2002) research illustrates that multiculturalism carries the danger of defining white-typed cultural attributes as more “rational” or in other ways better than other cultures, even within a mostly black environment. Cultural training within a black-dominated and black-identified environment, however, results in *code switching* rather than trading power for patronage (Schwalbe et al. 2000), or simply meeting white expectations. Because it is the race and gender hierarchy within institutions—the symmetry between race/gender classification and the pay, status, authority, and treatment that people enjoy—that creates psychological wages (Du Bois 2004) and oppositional cultures in the first place (Carter 2005; Tyson 2006; Tyson, Darity, and Castellino 2005; Willis 1977), making GW and BW more overtly black spaces will allow the kids to develop a range of identities that incorporate their blackness rather than reject it. That does not preclude white staff from working there or white kids from attending. They could also benefit from more Afrocentric programming.

It is also essential that the direct-care staff redefine what it means to be a girl or a boy. As they stand, the life-skills and prevention programs reinforce boys’ superordination and girls’ subordination by transforming boys into dominating rational actors with little responsibility but for themselves. Girls are left responsible for achieving in school, caretaking, and emotion work. Furthermore, centering boys’ identities around breadwinning when the corresponding opportunity structure (in Sherburne’s schools and due to the criminal justice system, in particular) does not support it is setting the boys up for failure. If they fail to become those breadwinners, in turn, they will be left to reclaim their manhood in other, more destructive ways. They may even resort to the most problematic street culture tactics that KW is trying to prevent in the first place. The life-skills and prevention programs, thus, need to be reframed either at the curricular level or by the staff who implement them. New definitions should emphasize the importance of leadership and entrepreneurial skills for boys and girls alike, for example. Intimacy and

relationships ought to be dealt with more complexly as well, including discussions of sexual desire and shared responsibility for carework. Girls and boys need accurate information about what sex and pregnancy are and how they work. They also need to discuss healthy ways to express sexual desire, as well as ways to prevent pregnancy. These strategies would hold egalitarianism and power sharing up as ideals and core characteristics of mature, healthy heterosexual relationships.

One of the biggest challenges to Kidworks over the past few years that will continue within the next several is the growing Latino community within Sherburne. Latino immigration has skyrocketed within Sherburne and the surrounding communities. In response, Kidworks administrators and the board have expanded services to this group. They first tried targeted outreach to incorporate Latinos into existing Sherburne programs by promoting its programs in Latino neighborhoods, at cultural events, and among social service agencies. They hired a bilingual Mexican immigrant to head up the effort. This approach brought only limited success for several reasons: the outreach coordinator worked only part-time and had few resources, Latino families were largely unfamiliar with childcare organizations and preferred family-driven care, and KW had few benefits to offer. KW started soccer programs over the weekends that increased interest and then opened another facility inside a Latino neighborhood. The creation of a Latino-centered site has been much more successful, just as this research and studies on immigrant groups would predict. KW should continue this effort by providing programs and facilities that meet the needs of the target group. There is also a growing population of low-income African refugees and immigrants, as well as some Asians who have after-school childcare needs that KW could work to address. This would require a concerted effort to tap into the networks of these immigrant groups and to learn what services would meet their needs.

Finally, I end with the issue of the availability of economic opportunities within Sherburne and the work that Kidworks can do to improve them. While these opportunities per se have not been the focus of this study, cultural capital displays can only bring access to opportunities that already exist. One way that the board could create job opportunities would be to set aside positions within their companies for KW young people. They could also use their social ties to other business owners to do the same.

These positions could range from internships during high school (or systematic job shadowing or mentoring programs for younger kids) to full-time positions for Board Scholars or other young people who successfully advance through KW's programs and through college. Just as Kidworks creates a competition among donors, it could create a competition between businesses to sponsor or apprentice young people. The Board Scholars program already provides a foundation to build upon.

By incorporating these strategies, Boyworks and Girlworks can move a few steps closer to fulfilling the promise intended in its mission.

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