

# 10 The Relevance of Ethnicity, Class, and Gender in Children's Peer Negotiations

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While considerable attention has been paid to children's skills in cognitive domains such as math and literacy in classroom settings, far less is known about children's informal social learning across peer-controlled settings. In the midst of interaction with their peers children develop their notions about ethnicity, social class, and gender-appropriate behavior, as well as their understandings of a moral self, while they play or work together and sanction those who violate group norms. This chapter reviews work on peer negotiation during children's spontaneous play which is concerned with issues of language and gender.

## 1 Differentiating Everyday Conflict from Aggression

Developmental psychologist Shantz (1983: 501) has argued that "the way to reveal explicit and tacit social knowledge and reasoning is to observe social interaction, that is, the child not as knower *about* the social world but as an actor *in* it." This demands the use of naturally occurring data, as neither experimental paradigms nor interview data provide adequate analogues of actual social interactions. While we know something about the features and functions of children's disputes in naturalistic (Maynard 1985a, 1985b; Corsaro and Rizzo 1990; Boggs 1978; Genishi and di Paolo 1982), as well as laboratory settings (Brenneis and Lein 1977; Eisenberg and Garvey 1981), we actually know very little about how conflicts contribute to the development of more enduring social relationships among children (see Rizzo 1992: 94).

While much attention has been paid in linguistic anthropology to studies of politeness phenomena (Brown and Levinson 1978), far less is known about the

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structure of disagreement or oppositional sequences. This may be because conflict is negatively valued and it is often viewed by feminist researchers as alternative to the cooperative interaction which is argued to typify female interaction. Social conflicts (Maynard 1985b; Rizzo 1992: 93) or adversative episodes (Eisenberg and Garvey 1981) are sequences in which one person opposes another's actions or statements (see Grimshaw 1990). Conflict sequences are important to investigate in that, as developmental psychologists have argued, conflict constitutes "an essential impetus to change, adaptation, and development" (Shantz 1987: 284). Routinely, conflict is equated with aggression (Shantz 1987: 284), defined as "acts done with the intention to harm another person, oneself, or an object" (Bjorkqvist and Niemela 1992: 4).

Early psychological studies on sex differences by Maccoby and Jacklin (1974) maintained that aggression was one of the clearest ways in which males and females were differentiated. More recent studies have been careful to specify alternative forms that aggressive behavior takes, and such sweeping generalizations are now less common. Bjorkqvist, Osterman, and Kaukiainen (1992), for example, distinguish three forms of aggressive behavior: direct physical, direct verbal, and indirect aggression. Indirect aggression is defined as "a kind of social manipulation: the aggressor manipulates others to attack the victim, or, by other means, makes use of the social structure in order to harm the target person, without being personally involved in attack" (ibid.: 52). Bjorkqvist et al. (1992: 55) in their study of Finnish children find that while boys are more physically aggressive than girls, boys and girls differ little in the use of verbal aggression. Lagerspetz, Bjorkqvist, and Peltonen (1988) were among the first to suggest that harm delivered circuitously, rather than in a face-to-face encounter, occurs more among girls than boys.

This chapter reviews current debates in language and gender research which focus on children's negotiation. I first examine the notion of "Separate Worlds" of males and females, an idea which has dominated much of the popular literature on gender differences in language. I critique the ideas of (1) the universality of gender segregation, and (2) essentialized views of male and female language practices which neglect considerations of context, ethnicity, or social class. A second section examines ethnographically based studies of the interactive practices which children of different social class and age groups use to construct gendered social relationships in and across girls' and boys' groups. Special attention is given to the nature of disputes, the forms of accounts, and the forms of speech actions used to construct difference and relative rank. A third section examines studies which focus on how the presentation of self, expressed through forms of character contests, is related to notions of identity within diverse ethnic groups. This section examines particular types of sequencing strategies which are employed in disputes and demonstrates how the inclusion of texts of actual sequences of interaction afford the possibility of cross-cultural comparison. A final section looks at political processes and forms of exclusion in girls' groups, noting that forms of ostracism are central to girls' social organization.

## 2 The Separate Worlds Hypothesis and Its Challengers

The dichotomous views of male and female personality Maccoby put forward in the 1970s were revitalized in anthropologists Maltz and Borker's (1982) *Separate Worlds Hypothesis* (see Kyrtzsis 2001a). Maltz and Borker proposed that the gender segregation that girls and boys experience results not only in differing activities which are the focus of their worlds, but also alternative ways of speaking. Girls' collaborative talk contrasts with boys' competitive talk. Maltz and Borker's hypothesis was based on selective readings of fieldwork, including my own work on African American children's interactive patterns (Goodwin 1980) and Harding's (1975) studies of gender role segregation in the Near East and Mediterranean. Henley's (1995: 361) observation that "much writing on the topic of language and gender is founded on the assumptions of White/Anglo (upper) middle-class experience" is relevant when considering the paradigm which generated research on language and gender for more than two decades.

The *Separate Worlds Hypothesis*, buttressed by work by Gilligan (1982) and Leaper (1978), has subsequently been reified by psychologists. Leaper (1994: 68) in a review article on gender segregation has proposed that "to the extent that girls and boys emphasize different patterns of social interaction and activities in their respective peer groups, different norms for social behavior may be expected to emerge." Leaper maintains that girls' sex-typed activities help to foster nurturance and affection, as well as forms of "social sensitivity," whereas boys' physically aggressive forms of play emphasize overt competition and dominance. This argument draws on cross-cultural work by psychological anthropologists Whiting and Edwards (1988: 81), who posited that "the emergence of same-sex preferences in childhood is a cross cultural universal and robust phenomenon" and resonates with the work of Maccoby (1990, 1998) who has consistently argued that "segregated play groups constitute powerful socialization environments in which children acquire distinctive interaction skills that are adapted to same-sex partners" (Maccoby 1990: 516).

### 2.1 Challenging notions of gender segregation

Ethnographically based research on language in interaction has recently challenged the *Separate Worlds Hypothesis* with respect to (1) the universality of gender segregation, and (2) polarizations of gendered norms of social interaction and communication. Specifically, a number of researchers have analyzed how considerations of ethnicity, social class, and context are critical in the examination of gendered talk-in-interaction among children.

Forms of gender segregation affecting norms of interaction have been described for preschool children in Japan (Nakamura 2001), Norway (Berentzen

1984), Australia (Danby and Baker 1998), and the USA (Best 1983; Kyratzis and Guo 1996; Sheldon 1993). However, Thorne (1993), Goodwin (1990), Cook-Gumperz and Szymanski (2001), and Streeck (1986) caution that boys and girls are not always segregated. In a study of interaction on playgrounds in the American Midwest and California among largely White working-class schools fourth and fifth graders, Thorne (1993) found that boys and girls established "with-then-apart" social arrangements. Gender boundaries could become heightened during team handball when boys made the game competitive, through slamming the ball hard; however, at other points (for example while eating) boundaries between the gender groups were not salient.

Goodwin (1990) found that working-class African American girls ages four to thirteen in a Philadelphia neighborhood would exclude boys during more serious "he-said-she-said" disputes, when girls were ostracizing members of their group. Generally, however, girls and boys were frequently in each other's co-presence and engaged in playful cross-sex verbal disputes. Joking and teasing between girls and boys was also common among the working-class White Midwestern middle school adolescents Eder (1990, 1993, 1995) studied. Schofield (1982) and Corsaro (1997) argue that African American girls are generally more assertive and independent in their relations with one another and with boys than are upper-middle-class White girls. Gender segregation in White middle-class groups (Schofield 1981, 1982; Best 1983) prevents the development of friendships where playful conflictual types of exchanges might occur, perhaps due to "boys' and girls' notions of each other as possible romantic and sexual partners" (Schofield 1981: 72). Corsaro (1997: 150) also found age to be an important variable when considering gender segregation. More gender segregation occurs among older children (five- to six-year-olds) than among children three to five years of age. In general, White upper-middle-class children in America experience more gender segregation than African American or Italian children, regardless of age.

## 2.2 *Challenges addressing issues of context, ethnicity, and social class*

The universality of the Separate Worlds Hypothesis has been challenged by numerous studies which consider the variability of language practices across contexts. My own studies of African American working-class children (Goodwin 1990), bilingual Spanish/English speakers (Goodwin 1998), and children of diverse ethnicities at a progressive school (Goodwin 2001) refute the notion that females are non-competitive, or passive by comparison with boys (Adler, Kless, and Adler 1992: 170). Within their same-sex groups African American girls orchestrate task activities such as making rings, using directives (actions which get another to do something) which are mitigated. However, when they care for younger children, are reprimanding those who commit infractions, or play the role of mother during games of "house," girls demonstrate the ability

to use bald imperatives which are equally as aggravated in form as those the boys use during task activities. In cross-sex disputes, as well, girls use bald on-record counter forms which are similar to those of males; girls are quite skilled in ritual insult and can outmaneuver boys in extended disputes.

Goodwin's (2001) study of girls' and boys' uses of directives during the game of jump-rope at a progressive elementary school attended by children of mixed ethnicities and social classes shows that the grammatical form of directives varies with levels of expertise in the activity of jumping rather than gender. This contrasts with research which has found the form of directives to be closely correlated to gender (Sachs 1987). When boys at the progressive school were unfamiliar with jump-rope, they were excluded from the game, and girls issued aggravated directives (Labov and Fanshel 1977: 84) to them; when, a month later, with practice boys became accomplished jumpers, they made use of the same imperative forms the girls used. Streeck (1986), studying ethnically mixed working-class elementary school children in the classroom, found that while boys competed with girls and worked to exclude girls during work tasks, within non-task-specific settings, such forms of competition did not occur.

Kyratzis and Guo (1996, 2001) studied cross-cultural differences in language behavior of preschoolers in Mainland China and the USA. They found that during same-sex interaction in the USA boys are more assertive than girls; the reverse is true in China. Context is important in examining who is more assertive in cross-sex conflict: while Chinese girls dominate contexts dealing with courtship, boys are dominant in contexts where work is the theme. While American girls used mitigated strategies in opposing others, both American boys and Chinese girls used bald (unmitigated) forms. Both American and Chinese girls used direct as well as third-party censures of co-present girls, rhetorical mocking questions, aggravated commands, threats, and physical force. Guo (2000) found that five-year-old Mandarin-speaking girls in a university-affiliated preschool in Beijing order boys around when issues of social status or morality are at stake, though not with respect to exchanges involving technical, problem-solving issues. In this domain boys become aggressive and controlling with playmates. Both the studies of Guo (2000) and Streeck (1986) have important implications for the organization of small groups in classrooms, as they demonstrate that within task-specific settings boys may dominate and not allow girls full participation in the activity.

Children make use of a repertoire of voices. Nakamura (2001) shows that while Japanese girls use language to create and maintain positions of closeness and equality, they can also use language to make assertive moves – negotiating roles, establishing the physical setting, and defining appropriate role behavior. Nakamura's depiction of male and female roles in a Japanese preschool has several parallels with Farris's (1991, 2000) descriptions of language use among Taiwanese preschoolers. Farris argues that boys "create a childish masculine ethos that centers on action, competition, and aggression, and that is organized and expressed discursively through loud, terse, direct forms of speech" (1991:

204). By way of contrast, Taiwanese girls attempt to maintain an ethos of "quasi-familial social relations . . . organized and expressed discursively through coy, affected, and indirect forms of speech." In comparison with Japanese female preschoolers, however, Taiwanese girls can be quite assertive; they talk pejoratively about other people in the third person *in the presence of the target*, making use of a particular style (*sojiao*), which involves gross body movements, pouting, ambiguous lexical items, and expressive particles (ibid.: 208). Such forms might be considered instances of overt verbal aggression.

The notion of "quasi-familial social relations" discussed by Farris (1991) for Taiwanese children has parallels with the structuring of social roles among peers in a California third grade bilingual classroom described by Cook-Gumperz and Szymanski (2001). An organization of groups in terms of families was initiated by the teacher, and children themselves oriented toward ideas of quasi-family. Girls took the lead in orchestrating group activities, such as coordinating the activity of correcting answers for the group, or playing the role of "big sisters." They acted as "cultural brokers" (Vasquez, Pease-Alvarez, and Shannon 1994) who were responsible for "organizing and translating the needs and requirements of family to and from the outside world" (Cook-Gumperz and Szymanski 2001: 127). Children moved fluidly in and out of familial-based and gender-based groups; their social organization resembled the pattern of "with-them-apart" described by Thorne (1986) rather than the gender-segregated groups described by the Separate Worlds Hypothesis.

### 3 Constructing Gender Identity Within Boys' and Girls' Groups

Despite the fact that simple polarized depictions of gender groups cannot be established, there are differences in the criteria each gender uses for making distinctions among group members as well as procedures for achieving social organization. Close analysis of the interactive linguistic processes through which masculinity is displayed and constructed is afforded by several studies of young children. In a classic study of gender differences in the construction of social order, social anthropologist Sigurd Berentzen (1984: 17) analyzes how Norwegian preschool boys ages five to seven were constantly involved in direct comparison of one another's performances, particularly with regard to objects. Boys established their rank order through competitions such as running or wrestling; girls attached meaning to their social relationships and each other and the alliances they can enter into. While among the boys self-congratulation was common, it was sanctioned in girls' groups. A girl who was thought to "act so smart all the time" by bragging about the praise she had received from a teacher was eventually ostracized. Girls' "cultural premises and criteria of rank lead to their constantly denying each other's rank" (ibid.: 108). Patterns of fluid rather than fixed hierarchically ranked social groups were also found

by Corsaro (1994) for both girls as well as boys in American and Italian preschools, where attempts at leadership were continually challenged and overturned. Girls in particular resisted being in the position of putting oneself above another (Corsaro 1994: 18–20).

Berentzen's observations resonate with a number of other studies. Danby (1998) and Danby and Baker (1998, 2000) examined the procedures Australian inner-city boys aged three to five used to build their social organization in the context of playing with blocks in a preschool classroom. Australian boys assert their masculinity through threats of inflicting personal injury ("smashing" down the block construction and "bashing" one of the boys) and introducing themes of terror and violence: for example, a robot shark crocodile monster who will attack and eat one of the boys, or a big dinosaur who will spit and kill someone. Because Danby and Baker provide close transcriptions of naturally occurring talk, comparisons with group processes in other studies are possible. During the boys' play coalitions of two against one are created; through subtle shifts in reference, using the third-person pronoun, boys can position themselves as talking negatively about a third party in his presence. Such negotiations within shifting coalitions are not unlike those described by Goodwin (1990) and Berentzen (1984) for girls' groups.

Best (1983), a reading teacher turned ethnographer, discusses how White upper-middle-class elementary school boys (6–8 years of age) in a school in the Central Atlantic region of the United States negotiate rank with respect to perceived toughness, often through bragging. Studying children over a four-year period, Best (1983: 4) found that a "second curriculum" of the school taught young girls to be helpful and nurturant and young boys to distance themselves from girls and look down on them; an ethos of machismo prohibited any recognition of or friendship with girls. By the third grade boys created a clique where they shared secrets and used nicknames, while excluding boys who they considered "sissies."

Sheldon (1997: 232), studying socially advantaged children in a Midwestern US preschool, located patterns of verbal and physical assertiveness in boys' social organization, finding that "insistence and brute force can be acceptable strategies for trying to get what one wants" (see also Davies 1989; Dyson 1994). Boys make use of refusals, physical intimidation (chasing, blocking), threats, and physical force, and actively attempt to escalate and extend conflict, without employing strategies that might jointly negotiate a resolution. Consistent with Berentzen's observations, boys were concerned with control of various objects (fighting for who got to push buttons or talk on the telephone). By way of contrast, girls used a feminine conflict style, "double-voice discourse," which overlays mitigation, effectively softening the force of dispute utterances (Sheldon 1996: 58). Sheldon describes the resources used to navigate disputes as both cooperative as well as competitive. The girls she studied "possess verbal negotiation skills that enable them to confront without being very confrontational; to clarify without backing down; and to use mitigators, indirectness, and even subterfuge to soften the blow while promoting their own wishes" (Sheldon 1996: 61).

Studies of accounts and countermoves during play reveal various degrees of mitigation across groups. Within the pretend play of educationally and socially advantaged White middle-class preschool children both Sheldon (1996) and Barnes and Vangelisti (1995) found interesting uses of framing during disputes. Rather than using the boys' strategy of physical force, highly aggravated talk, or insistence, girls would negotiate or verbally persuade the other for what she wanted. Four-year-old girls displayed an appreciation for the other's needs while trying to get what they wanted from their co-participants (Sheldon 1997). In a conflict exchange during pretend play, girls will often animate a voice other than their own to distance themselves from the direct and confrontational position they are taking up with respect to a present participant. For example, in the midst of a dispute in which a girl is being ostracized, she might protest how others are treating her by animating a toy person in a falsetto voice, saying "Okay, I won't be your brother any *more!*" (Sheldon 1996: 66). Sheldon argues that the "double-voice" dispute strategy of the girls is oppositional rather than passive and contradicts cultural stereotypes of girls.

Sheldon (1996) argues that the forms of justifications she locates in girls' conflict talk have close parallels with the accounts used by White middle-class California preschool girls described by Kyratzis (1992: 327). Kyratzis states that the accounts in girls' disputes "justify the fit of their control move [e.g., directives, plans] to the overall theme or topic . . . in terms of a group goal" (ibid.). Multi-layered accounts also occur in older girls' groups. Hughes, in her research among fourth and fifth grade middle- and upper-middle-class girls playing foursquare in a suburban Philadelphia Quaker school (Hughes 1988, 1991, 1993, 1995), studied the accounts that girls used during the game. When a girl got a friend out she would accompany the move with utterances such as "Sally, I'll get you in!" Though the structure of the game is perceived as competition between individual players, girls cooperate within an implicit informal team structure of friends. As Hughes (1993: 142) argues: "Girls use the rhetoric of 'niceness' and 'friends' to construct and manage competition within a complex group structure, not to avoid it."

Themes of verbal and physical aggression in boys' interaction and indirect aggression among girls are also discussed in the work of Amy Kyratzis on preschoolers' negotiation. Kyratzis (2001b) studied the "emotion talk" of a friendship group of middle-class boys in a university-based preschool where two thirds of the children were Anglo-American and one third were of diverse cultural backgrounds (including Mexican American, African American, and Asian American). Kyratzis found that boys made use of physical acts of aggression ("kick him in the butt"; "smash this girl!") and verbal aggression (put-downs and insults) while assuming an aggressive stance. Kyratzis demonstrates how alignment toward particular gendered notions about the display of emotions (particularly fear) and behavior is not static but rather can change over time, depending on context and social network.

Kyratzis and Ervin-Tripp (1999) analyzed interaction during shared fantasy among four- through seven-year-old best friend dyads in predominantly

middle-class preschool classrooms of a university-based children's center; the children were 67 per cent Caucasian and 33 per cent Asian, Latino, Middle Eastern, and African American. They found that younger children, especially four-year-old boys, spend their time disputing how to maintain a joint fantasy, arguing over goods and space; girls attend to sustaining the pretend play through the developing of play employment (designing planning in the voice of directors or scriptwriters in a sequence of dramatic actions) and enactment. The preferred activity settings of boys and girls (arguing versus story retelling) makes a difference for the development of the narrative devices of global marking and ideational marking (Kyratzis and Ervin-Tripp 1999: 1322-4); girls develop these markings first because of their greater involvement in sustaining narrative-potential activities. Kyratzis (1999), in another study of creating shared fantasy with the same group of children, found that girls make more extensive use of the medium of storytelling than boys for crafting notions of possible selves. Girls make use of stories to position themselves within a form of social hierarchy (delineating who is inside and outside the group), and to explore notions of ethnic identity. The characters the girls enacted suggested their value of qualities of lovingness, graciousness, and attractiveness. Important figures for the boys to enact were Power Rangers and Smashers; the themes they developed were the powerful smasher and his weak victims.

In my own studies within an African American working-class community I found that boys, ages four to fourteen, like those described by Berentzen (1984), were concerned with comparing themselves in the endless cycle of games, verbal dueling, and narrative and activities they participated in. Conflict was enjoyed and cooperatively sustained over extended rounds of arguments and insults, without summoning adult intervention. The comparisons resulted in a fluid rather than fixed social ranking. Both boys and girls used direct or bald on-record ways of disputing in cross-sex interaction.

From fourth to seventh grade the proportion of boys involved in physical aggression with others increases to two thirds of the conflicts (Cairns and Cairns 1994: 57). Sociologists Adler and Adler (1998), studying peer groups of predominantly White, middle-class US preadolescent children ages eight to twelve (over a seven-year period), report that among boys "displaying traits such as toughness, troublemaking, domination, coolness, and interpersonal bragging and sparring skills" were important for popularity (ibid.: 55). Eder (1995), in her study of 12- to 14-year-old middle- to lower-class Euro-American children from both rural and urban backgrounds in a middle school on the outskirts of a medium-sized Midwestern community, found that boys fought both on and off the playing field to establish relative rank; physical aggression was considered the appropriate way to deal with interpersonal conflicts. Boys conveyed the importance of being tough through joint storytelling and ritual insults. Insulting or humiliating others was an acceptable means of gaining or demonstrating higher status. Weakness or interest in associating with girls was emphasized through calling someone a "squirr" or "wimp" or using terms associated with femininity or homosexuality such as "pussy," "girl," "fag,"



and "queer." In his study of preadolescents in Little League baseball teams Fine (1987: 79) finds that appropriate "moral themes" for behaving properly include displaying appropriate emotions, being tough or fearful when necessary, controlling one's aggression and fears, being a good sport, publicly showing a desire to win, and not betraying the bond of age-mates. Eckert's (1987, 2000) study of "the social order of Belten High" in suburban Detroit found that masculinity, toughness, and power were important for the distinct social groups of "jocks" and "burnouts" alike.

#### 4 Gender and Ethnicity in Children's Disputes

Early work on the pragmatics of politeness examined how adult speakers display deference to their interlocutors (Goffman 1967; Brown and Levinson 1978) and work to minimize disagreement in conversation (Pomerantz 1984; Sacks 1987). However, as argued by Atkinson and Drew (1979), Goodwin (1983), Bilmes (1988), and Kothhoff (1993), within the context of argumentation the preferred next action is disagreement.

Aggravated disagreement is an activity that children work to achieve (Goodwin 1983: 675; Evaldsson and Corsaro 1998). Children engage in "character contests" (Goffman 1967: 237-8) to construct their social identities, form friendships, and reconfigure the social order of the peer group. Conflict and cooperation often exist within the same activities (Goodwin 1990: 84). The African American children I studied in Philadelphia were constantly engaging in playful disputes (Goodwin 1985, 1990). Corsaro (1997), studying "oppositional talk" of a group of Midwestern African American working-class children, found playful and teasing confrontational talk similarly used "to construct social identities, cultivate friendships, and both maintain and transform the social order of their peer group" (Corsaro 1997: 146). In studies of dispute across three groups (Italians, working-class African Americans, and White middle- and upper-class groups) Corsaro (1997) found disputes more serious and emotionally intense for Whites than they were for children of other ethnic groups or social classes. For Italian and African American children oppositional talk provides a way of displaying character (see also Morgan 1999: 37) and affirming affiliation to the norms of peer culture. *Discussionie* or highly stylized and dramatic public debate (Corsaro 1997: 160) constitutes an important form of verbal interaction in both Italian adult and peer culture. *Discussionie* is valued because it provides a way for children to debate things that matter to them "and in the process to develop a shared sense of control over their social world" (Corsaro 1997: 145). *Discussionie* can even take over teacher-directed activities while children sustain talk about a topic of their own choosing.

While ritual insult is generally associated with African American males (Kochman 1972; Labov 1972) both Eder (1990), studying White girls, and Goodwin (1990), studying African American girls, have found that working-class

girls participate in ritual insult, and develop competitive and self-defense skills. Eder (1990) reports that among working- and lower-class girls ritual insult is used as a form of "wit assessment device" (Goffman 1971: 179). According to Eder (1990: 82), "insulting skills would not only allow these females to assert and defend their rights, but might also contribute to an impression of greater intelligence and wit, since quick and clever responses are often viewed as an indicator of general cleverness and intelligence." When girls enjoyed humorous teasing bouts with boys they mocked the traditional gender role stereotypes of middle-class White girls who are routinely "educated in romance" (Holland and Eisenhart 1990). Eder suggests that ritual insult may be more likely to occur among groups of girls where "toughness" is valued.

In cross-sex disputes as well as during same-sex pretend play African American girls make use of direct assertive argumentative forms, in extended sequences of negotiation with clear displays of status differences. For example, the preadolescent girls I studied playing mothers monitor the actions of participants with utterances such as "Brenda play right. That's why nobody want you for a child!" (Goodwin 1990: 131).

Within cross-sex interaction, playful exchanges such as the following are common (transcription conventions are given at the end of the chapter):

(1) *Billy has been teasing Martha about her hair.*

- Billy: Heh heh!  
 Martha: I don't know what you *laughin* at.  
 Billy: I know what I'm laughin at.  
           Your *head*.  
 Martha: I know I'm laughin at *your* head too.  
 Billy: You know you ain't laughin  
           cuz you ain't laughin.  
 Martha: Ha ha (*mirifliss laughier*)  
 Billy: Ha ha. I got more hair than *you*.  
 Martha: You do not. Why you gotta laugh.  
           You *know* you ain't got more hair than me.

Through forms of tying techniques (Sacks 1992) or format tying (Goodwin 1990: 177) children use phonological, syntactic, and semantic surface structure features of prior turns at talk to produce next turns. They explore in an almost musical way the structuring of utterances they are producing in oppositional discourse. Corsaro and Maynard (1996) found forms of format tying in the disputes of children in a *scuola materna* (Italian preschool) in Bologna, Italy, as well as in three American Midwestern children's groups: (1) predominantly White middle- and upper-middle-class children in a private developmental learning center; (2) African American children of working-class background in a Head Start Center (a pre-school aimed at preparing children for school); and (3) a first grade class of White middle-class children. Corsaro and Maynard (1996: 164) argue that debates constructed through format tying among Italian

children are conducted for "a clear enjoyment of their display of knowledge about the world" while for Head Start children the purpose seemed to be winning, displaying self-building solidarity, and testing emerging friendships. Disputes among the White groups contrast with the highly stylized debates of the Italian and Head Start children in that they are often "more predictable, linear and based on a simple inversion format" (ibid.: 168) (denial-assertion opposition) and, "rather than displaying a variety of related threats or rivalries, the tying technique is monotopical" (ibid.: 171).

My studies of bilingual Spanish/English-speaking working-class elementary school girls (primarily second generation Central Americans and Mexican Americans) show that children intermix playfulness and conflict during games with ease (Goodwin 1998). Within the game of hopscotch, calling fouls and providing counters to such calls are expected next moves. In contrast to adult polite talk in which disagreement is dispreferred, often delayed and minimized through various features of turn design (Sacks 1987; Pomerantz 1984), in adversarial talk (Atkinson and Drew 1979) during children's games, "out" calls occur without doubt or delay (see also Goodwin 1985; Evaldsson and Corsaro 1998).

By way of example, in the following sequence, after Gloria makes a problematic move Carla immediately produces a strong expression of opposition, what Goffman (1978) has called a "response cry," "EY:!" which is immediately followed by a negative person descriptor "CHIRIONA" and then an explanation for why the move is illegal. By using the negative person descriptor *chiriona* meaning "cheater" a judge argues not simply that an infraction has occurred, but that the person who committed the foul is accountable in a very strong way for its occurrence. Following the opposition preface a referee further elaborates a reason for the "out" call.

- (2) Gloria: ((jumps from square 3 to 2 changing feet)) Problematic Move  
 Carla: EY:!! CHIRIONA!  
 MIRA!  
 Hey! Cheater! Look!  
 TE VENISTES DE AQUI  
 ASI!  
 You came from here like this.  
 ((demonstrating how Gloria jumped  
 changing feet))

Characteristic features of opposition turns in hopscotch include prefaces (response cries or polarity markers), which can be produced with dramatic pitch leaps, a negative person descriptor, and explanations stating the violation, often accompanied by embodied demonstrations. Children's disputes call for an intonation which makes opposition salient; pitch contours on negatives

frequently accentuate rather than mitigate opposition (Goodwin, in press). While Carla's normal voice range is around 300–350 Hz, her pitch leaps to 621 Hz over the syllable /o/ of *chiriona*. In addition "EY:!" is produced with a dramatic bitonal contour and extended vowel duration.

While the forms of opposition turns are similar across a range of groups I have studied (second generation Central American and Mexican bilingual Spanish/English speakers in Los Angeles; an ESL (English as second language) class in Columbia, South Carolina, which includes newly arrived immigrant children from Saudi Arabia, Vietnam, China, Mexico, Puerto Rico, Korea, and Azerbaijan; fifth grade African American children of migrant farmworkers in rural South Carolina; working-class African American children ages four to thirteen in a Philadelphia neighborhood; and a peer group that includes mixed social classes and ethnicities in a progressive Southern California elementary school), the forms of affective stances (Goodwin 1998, 2000b), intonation contours, as well as terms of address, differ across children's groups. Working-class African American girls used terms such as "honey" and "punk" in oppositional same-sex talk; boys used terms such as "stupid," "dummy," "sucker," "big lips," "knucklehead," and "boy" in their same-sex oppositional talk. During the games of the ESL class I videotaped in Columbia, South Carolina, address terms depicting the recipient in a negative way were not used. In the same class, however, terms such as *tramposa* 'cheater', *embustera* 'liar', *chupusera* 'big cheater', *hucovona* 'stinker', and *cabrona* 'bitch', were used with frequency in the "out" calls of fifth grade immigrant Puerto Rican and Mexican girls playing hopscotch together.

In contrast to studies of Latina women which accentuate forms of passivity or an ethos of collectivity (Greenfield and Cocking 1994), I found bilingual Spanish/English speakers in three separate groups involved in vivid assertive talk. Farr's (2000) studies of immigrant women from Michoacan, Mexico, in Chicago also document an assertive style of talking in which females make use of bald, on-record directives that, rather than humbling the speaker, support a stance of independence and toughness. Other sociolinguistic research on Latina women (Galindo 1992, 1994; Galindo and Gonzales Velasquez 1992; Mendoza-Denton 1994, 1996) has challenged stereotypic formulations of Latina women's speech as non-competitive.

By making language choices alternative to those of the Latina girls it is possible to construct actors, events, and social organization in a very different way (Goodwin 1998). White, middle-class Southern girls counter problematic moves in hopscotch with utterances such as "I think that's sort of on the line though" or "Uh – your foot's in the wrong spot" or "You – accidentally jumped on that. But that's okay." Rather than highlighting opposition these girls mitigate their foul calls through hedges such as "I think," "accidentally," and "sort of," and display uncertainty about the accuracy of the call. Absent from the way these girls play the game is any articulation of strong stances or accountability for one's actions.

## 5 Political Processes and Forms of Exclusion in Girls' Groups

Longitudinal studies by psychologists Cairns and Cairns (1994) studying fourth through tenth grade girls find that ostracism resulting from girls' disputes increases with age; from the fourth to the tenth grade the percentage of female/female conflicts involving themes of alienation, ostracism, or character defamation rose from 14 to 56 per cent (Cairns and Cairns 1994: 57). Exclusion has been documented in White middle-class elementary and middle school children's groups (Best 1983; Eder and Hallinan 1978; Adler and Adler 1998). With the exception of work by Eder and Sanford (1986), Goodwin (1982, 1990, 2000a), and Shuman (1986, 1992), little has been done to document the forms of language through which girls actually practice exclusion. Close examination of the language used in girls' disputes within narrative (Kyratzis 2000) and pretend play (Sheldon 1996) reveals that girls as young as four practice forms of exclusion.

African American girls are skillful at orchestrating confrontations between other girls through forms of storytelling they called "instigating" (Goodwin 1982, 1990). Instigating occurs when someone is accused of having talked about another girl in her absence, considered a "capital offense" in African American culture (Morgan 1999: 34). The forms of social manipulation which occur in instigating could be considered a form of "indirect aggression" (Bjorkqvist, Osterman, and Kaukiainen 1992: 53). Instigating entails telling pejorative stories about an absent party with the intent of inciting a present listener, portrayed as someone offended by the absent party, to confront the offending absent party. New alignments of the social order result from instigating – sanctioning the behavior of one of the peer group members, without the instigator herself being a participant in the eventual confrontation. Accusations are always framed as reports learned about through a third absent party, as in "Terry said that you said that I wasn't gonna go around Poplar no more!" The framing of the accusation in this way leaves open the possibility of a denial or a countermove, arguing that the intermediate party was making something up with the intent to start a fight.

While the confrontations I observed among preadolescent girls were conducted through assertive verbal actions – accusations, counter-accusations, and denials – Morgan (1999: 35) stresses that instigating among older African American girls can lead to physical confrontations. Shuman (1992: 149) investigated similar speech events among African American, White (Polish American and Irish American), and Puerto Rican working-class girls in middle school in inner-city Philadelphia; she found, however, that talking about fights provided a way of avoiding fighting: "the 'fight' consisted entirely of words, reports of what people said to one another, and reported speech consisted primarily of a description of offenses, accusations, and threats" (*ibid.*: 151).

Ethnographic fieldwork permits analysis of the continuum from conflict to aggression in children's verbal interaction. I conducted fieldwork at a Southern California elementary school among a group of girls of various ethnicities who regularly ate lunch and played together, and observed the clique over a three-year period as they passed from fourth to sixth grade. Forms of exclusion were quite evident in the clique with respect to their interactions with a "tagalong" – a person defined in terms of her efforts to affiliate to a particular group without being accepted by the group. Across a range of different speech activities, including storytelling in which the target is described in a derogatory manner, ritual and personal insult, and bald imperatives during recess play (Goodwin 2000a), girls sanction the behavior of the tagalong girl through actions which are totally at odds with the model of cooperative female interaction described in the Separate Worlds Hypothesis.

## 6 Conclusion

Some models of female interaction, based on White middle-class models, have proposed that "male speakers are socialized into a competitive style of discourse, while women are socialized into a more cooperative style of speech" (Coates 1994: 72). Barnes and Vangelisti (1995: 354) argue that the mitigation in female talk expresses female concerns for "affiliation, reciprocity, and efforts to protect others' face." Such pronouncements about differences in male and female fundamental nature gained sway in the early 1980s with the Separate Worlds Hypothesis, built on static models of child socialization propagated by the culture and personality school in anthropology. All too frequently psychological models, positing traits internal to the individual, have colored research on gender differences in language. When instead we take the lead of sociologists studying children and begin by examining actual social processes, including clique formation (Adler and Adler 1996), we find that conflict is as omnipresent in the interaction of females as in that of males. Forms of social exclusion are endemic to girls' groups (Goodwin 2000a). Extended arguments constructed through turns that highlight rather than mitigate disagreement in Latina (Goodwin 1998, 2000b, *in press*), African American (Goodwin 1990; Morgan 1999), and lower- and working-class White girls' groups (Eder 1995), as well as groups of mixed ethnicity (Goodwin 2001), call into question the notion that girls are fundamentally interested in cooperative, face-saving interaction.

What is needed to provide a more accurate picture of male and female interaction patterns? We first need to look beyond middle-class White groups and study the diverse social and ethnic groups which compose our society. Second, as we saw in the discussion of disputes constructed through format tying in the section "Gender and Ethnicity in Children's Disputes," making available transcripts of naturally occurring behavior in disputes rather than accounts of disputes, or descriptions of interactional norms, will render possible



comparisons across groups differing in terms of ethnicity, gender, and social class. When transcripts are provided we can compare types of turn shapes (the use of response cries, polarity markers, and negative person descriptors) as well as principles of sequential organization, such as format tying, which organize disputes. Examining variation in the forms of person descriptors as well as accounts accompanying opposition turns will allow us to discern differences in the ways categorizations of person are performed and reasons are articulated by girls and boys and members of different ethnic groups and social classes. Finally, we need more ethnographically grounded accounts of children's interaction so that we can merge accounts of moment-to-moment interaction with analysis of social structure (Thorne 2001). Longitudinal studies will allow us to see how gendered forms of interaction vary with context and may change over time.

## TRANSCRIPTION CONVENTIONS

Data are transcribed according to a modified version of the system developed by Jefferson and described in Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson (1974: 731-3).

*Bold italics* indicate some form of emphasis.  
**Lengthening:** Colons (:): indicate that the sound immediately preceding has been noticeably lengthened.

**Intonation:** Punctuation symbols are used to mark intonation changes rather than as grammatical symbols. A period indicates a falling contour. A question mark indicates a rising contour. A comma indicates a falling-rising contour.

**Capitals (CAPS)** indicate increased volume.

**Comments:** Double parentheses (()) enclose material that is not part of the talk being transcribed, frequently indicating gesture or body position.

*Italics* are used to distinguish comments in parentheses about non-vocal aspects of the interaction.

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