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*Hervé Varenne*

## Jocks and Freaks: The Symbolic Structure of the Expression of Social Interaction Among American Senior High School Students



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### **The Author**

Hervé Varenne, born and raised in France, is associate professor of education at Teachers College, Columbia University. He received his doctorate from the Department of Anthropology at the University of Chicago in 1972. There he was strongly encouraged by Milton Singer and David Schneider to follow his inclination and do extensive field work in the United States on those groups and situations where one might expect to see American culture realized.

Varenne has done field work in a Midwestern town, in a suburban high school, and on a middle-class urban family. The results of his first investigation have been published in *Americans Together: Structured Diversity in a Midwestern Town* (Teachers College Press, 1977) and in several articles. He has published articles on his work in the high school and he is now completing a full-length monograph on it. More recently he has been working with Clifford Hill, a sociolinguist, on a book in which they analyze a familial conversation. Varenne says of himself:

"Friends with whom I was initiated into professional anthropology at the University of Chicago told me later that I was then in total culture shock. Indeed I should have been, since I was living for the first time in the United States by myself. For the first time I was outside my family's fold. I could barely speak English and my writing was not much better. But I did not quite know yet that there was such a thing as culture shock and, to this day, I am not certain that it is an appropriate term to describe what happened to me then. One thing that did happen was that I got hooked into cultural anthropology (I had come to Chicago for its archaeology program) and I found 'symbolic' approaches most congenial, particularly those where the Durkheimian/Saussurian/structuralist tradition dominated, as against the Weberian/phenomenological tradition. Another thing that happened that first year in Chicago was that, in my search for real-life material which I could use to confront the theories I was learning to discuss, I turned regularly to details of the American life I was also discovering. Milton Singer encouraged this curiosity. He convinced some of the more reticent of his colleagues that it was time for 'foreign' anthropologists to do to Americans what Americans had been doing to others and that there might be validity to my contention that there was such a thing as 'American culture' (and that such a thing could be found in downstate Illinois, an even more controversial assumption of mine!).

"How this work, eventually published in my first book, *Ameri-*

*cans Together*, led me to the ethnography of schooling is a matter for which I cannot claim much more responsibility than I can claim for having become a cultural anthropologist (I still find it hard to adopt the voluntaristic stance so common in American biographies). I happened to be looking for a job when the Department of Family and Community Education at Teachers College was looking for an anthropologist. I was invited to teach in the department and to participate in the project on the social organization of schools for which Professors Francis Ianni and Hope Leichter had received a grant.

"Quite a lot could have happened that would have taken me upon different roads. But, in my years at Teachers College, I have come to realize that schools are in fact good places to check and refine the theories that were developed after encounters with the very alien. They are very good places because they are environments relatively limited in size which can still be explored holistically. More important, they are 'focused' institutions and as such can help the anthropologists to concentrate on and deal more systematically with a set of data, since many sources of variation are controlled. But mostly schools can provide anthropologists with situations where they can test the generalizations they have been making about human beings. Fifty years ago Margaret Mead went to Samoa to test psychological generalizations. In these years we have done much more than test other disciplines' theories. We have developed our own, and are very willing to phrase them in general, universalistic terms. We must now come back home and see how the shoe fits—for the good of the discipline and for the good also of the people to whom we belong, our own."

### This Chapter

Cliques are the building blocks in the literature on informal social organization in schools. Previous writings of note have described cliques as concrete entities with members and identifiable boundary markers such as dress, grooming, and mannerisms. In this chapter Hervé Varenne provides quite a different analysis. He acknowledges that if he had proceeded to the analysis armed with the concepts of social organization other researchers have used he would probably have come out about where they have. The kind of evidence they used to establish cliques is, Varennes believes, present among and exhibited by the Sheffield High School students he and his coworkers observed and interviewed.

But Varenne does not use the concepts other workers have used. He follows a line of inquiry and interpretation that connects to Lévi-Strauss and symbolic analysis. Though he "sees" differ-

ences in dress and casual groupings about the school, he attends to what students say about each other, that is, the symbols, particularly in self-other references using personal pronouns. This kind of attention produces for him, and for us, his readers, quite a different picture of school social "organization"—a fluid and ambiguous one in which social assignments of oneself or others are treated with considerable ambivalence and ambiguity.

I leave it to the reader to discover what Varenne is saying and how he says it. Of greatest importance to us is that the theoretical model used by Varenne leads him to a very different interpretation of social "reality" than he would have evolved, reacting to the same phenomena, if he had utilized conventional concepts of social structure and organization. This demonstrates a point that is essential to the whole ethnographic enterprise as it is presented in this volume. "Ethnography" does not stand by itself as an independent data-producing procedure. What the ethnographer discovers is determined not only by how he or she proceeds to observe and interrogate, but also by what is observed and interrogated about. The *what* more than the *how* is determined by the model of relationships and meanings held by the investigator in his or her brain. Without this model of meanings and relationships the ethnographer is a mindless machine going nowhere.

### Introduction

One of the few matters on which there seems to be an essential consensus in the sociology of American high schools concerns the organization of the student body into cliques. The "discovery" can be traced at least as far back as the first ethnographics of high schools (Hollingshead 1949, Gordon 1957, Coleman 1961). They made much of the fact that students in these schools did not socialize randomly with each other but that there were definite patterns which the students themselves somehow perceived in that they could talk about

them. Student bodies were found to be divided into "cliques" which seemed rather easy to describe in their sociological substance. These cliques could be labeled. Students could be assigned to them on the basis of supposedly objective tests. And the groups made up from these tests could then serve as stable variables on which complex statistical procedures could rest.

Since the pioneering studies, a clique analysis has been a common-sense matter that has ceased to be considered problematic (Henry 1963, Cusik 1973, Palonsky 1975, Clement and Harding 1978). There is evidence of some histor-

ical and geographical variation in the labels of the cliques, the ensemble of symbols which are used to mark the distinctiveness of the clique, or the exact placement of the boundaries. People also mention the possibility of variation in the "strength" of the cliques in a particular school. But many matters have remained stable over the past 30 years for which we have somewhat comparable information: everywhere, it seems, students who are active in sports are identified as a separate category of some sort. So are the students who are good scholars, the students who protest the system in a publicly defiant manner, the students whose parents are prominent in the town, and those who are the children of the poorest people. In multiethnic or multiracial districts the situation can become even more complicated, but the main lines are still there.

The initial work was produced under the influence of theories of social structure which have greatly evolved since. This evolution, and new thinking about the organization of human relationships, has not yet been systematically represented in the literature. It is time for a new look. I do not believe, however, in the utility of radical reinterpretations. Coleman and the others did not manufacture their original experiences. They certainly saw something, and I can say immediately that I had experiences in Sheffield High School that I believe to be essentially the same ones as those which Hollingshead, Gordon, Coleman, et al., and their teams lived through when they conducted their own fieldwork. The students performed something in front of them, they told them certain things, and, later, when

the original experiences were solidified into survey questions, the students could still answer questions about who were their best friends, whom they admired, whom they in fact spent time with, and so on. Given all the evidence of the difficulties anthropologists confront when they try to give questionnaires devised *a priori* to people who have a different culture from those who drafted the questionnaire, the very fact that students could answer suggests that the questionnaires were tapping something that had validity in the students' own experience.

My discussion will be based on fieldwork which two students and I conducted in a suburban high school in 1972–1973. Very soon we did discover the cliques which we fully expected we would find. But as the year passed the fluidity and fuzziness of the phenomenon imposed itself as something which could not be dismissed. This led me to question the process of discovery and to look more carefully at the experiences we had in the field which led us sometimes to see and sometimes not to see the cliques. I am talking here, not simply of a return to the data, but of a return to the ever more fundamental moments when the data were generated.

What was happening at these moments? Students were *talking*. Almost never did we "purely" observe. We always listened, and we conducted extensive interviews. Thus, all of our data were mediated by symbolic processes. And even when we "just observed," our data collection method was field notes, that is, *written* reports. In all this we followed the sociological and anthropological tradition. The data we generated were of the same type as those

used by all researchers in schools from Hollingshead onward. Indeed, there is no reason why we should not collect such data, since talk was a fundamental part of the total experience our informants had of themselves. There never were "pure" encounters between social groups in the school; all encounters possessed a symbolic element which participated in constituting the situation. Someone interested in purely social organizational processes might thus have been led to heed Harris' advice (1964) and move away altogether from talk. Such a purely ethnological study might in fact be extremely interesting and yield new insights. My goal here is different. What I want to understand is the exact source of the perception that observers (including the participants) have that cliques sometimes are there and sometimes are not there. What is it, in the symbolic encounters, that suggests the presence of cliques and then dissipates the image as the wind sweeps away a fog?

### Sheffield and Its High School

First, a few ethnographic details must be set down. They form the immediate situation of the students, their environment—what is often called their "context," though I would like to reserve this word for a more technical use. It is within this environment that they operate. This environment also offers the props which they need to stage their dramatic performances.

The town of Sheffield has only one high school, the one I studied. It is a geographically small suburb (2.3

square miles) in the massive Northeastern suburban belt. In 1972–1973, when the fieldwork was conducted, about 10,000 people lived there. Only three of these were black. The average family income was close to \$18,000. Only 2 percent of all families had incomes lower than the poverty level. Sheffield was built as a suburb in the 1920s and 1930s and thus had lost the raw quality of more recent suburbs. In terms of class and ethnicity, at least, it is certain that Sheffield stands at an extreme of homogeneity rather rare in the United States. But this, in fact, makes all the evidence of the presence of group segmentation even more fascinating. There were five major religious denominations: Presbyterian, Methodist, Congregational, Episcopal, and Roman Catholic. There were many clubs. There were Republicans and Democrats.

These groupings did not have a direct role in the students' life in the school, to the extent, at least, that little mention was made of them. In school other things were mentioned. To understand these, a few more things need be said. There were about 700 students in the school, a fourth of these seniors. The overall organization of their daily routine was directed by the adults who determined the classes they had to take, the periods during which they could have lunch, and so on. The adults also directed the students in less explicit ways through their own lifestyle choices. There were teachers who were conservative and others who were liberal. There were teachers who were glad to talk about sports at length and others who refused to discuss the topic. Finally, the adults gave the students a complex building which, surprisingly

for a modern construction, offered various types of spaces that various groups could call their own. For example, there were the many tables in the cafeteria, there were nearly a dozen small and only intermittently occupied offices in the library, there were the guidance office and the nurses' office. There were the bathrooms, isolated stairway landings, the backstage area in the auditorium. There were hidden spots on the grounds—behind bushes, in a drainage ditch. All these spaces had “formal” functions, but their character and the frequency of their intended uses were such that they could be put to alternative uses.

I do not have to stress that there is much variation in the force of the inherent constraints in any of these situations on the ability of the students to manipulate them. Students could try to shift lunch period, to drop a class in favor of another one. But their range was severely limited in these matters. They could do more with the variation in the adults' lifestyle choices. But they were still limited here, both by the need for reciprocity on the part of the teacher and by the fact that the teacher remained a teacher in a structurally different position from theirs. The building, on the other hand, was a shell that allowed an extended range of symbolic discriminations.

This is worth developing. What I have just said about the building also applies to the social organization of any space within the building. Take the cafeteria, a large hall that could seat about 200 students around tables of 10. These tables could be arranged in two basic ways, either as islands or in rows. In both cases the effective range for easy

face-to-face communication was severely limited. Beyond the 10 students who could sit around a single table, relaxed conversation became difficult, if only because one had to raise one's voice beyond propriety or even physical feasibility because of the noise level during lunch periods. This is important since, as we shall see, the easiest rule of thumb for recognizing the existence of a clique is: “The people who sit together regularly for lunch are a clique.” I suspect that this is indeed the rule which the students themselves followed. Outside of the lunch periods the same students might also congregate, though they were less restricted. Little groups could be found in various nooks and corners of the building, and soon the space they regularly occupied became somehow identified with them. In the same manner there was a strong tendency for the same groups to sit at the same tables each lunch.

During the times when they were not required to be in a class, the students thus continually had to make decisions about where to go or where to sit. By ordinary right they could be in only three places: the “commons” (outside of lunch periods the cafeteria room was available under this name for students who did not want to study during the free periods in their daily schedule), the library, or a study hall. By extraordinary right, most often by virtue of membership in some special “club,” students could be found in the private offices in the back of the library, in the coordinators' office, in the room where the audiovisual equipment was kept, in the guidance office, in the central office, in the nurses' office, or even in certain classrooms as teachers' aides. By

self-proclaimed right, students might also be found in the bathrooms for very long periods of time not solely dedicated to the satisfaction of biological functions or on the stairway landing from which the roof could be reached, in the band room or the auditorium, on outside steps at the most remote back door of the building, in the bushes further away from the school, and even not in school at all.

### The Discovery of the Cliques

One member of my team was a Jewish woman who attended Protestant schools in New York City. Another was a WASP-ish man raised in central Pennsylvania, where he attended the public schools. All of us saw the movie *American Graffiti* while conducting the fieldwork. As for me, a Frenchman who had only been in the States for five years, I had just finished writing a dissertation on my experiences in clique-like groups in a Midwestern town. It did not take us more than a few days to “discover” that there were indeed cliques in Sheffield, to identify the main members of the various cliques, and to adopt, in our field notes, the labels which then seemed totally appropriate. We talked of the “jocks” and the “freaks” with great ease. There was no culture shock. It was only later, as we started interviewing and as we began to know the school better, that we realized that things were in fact more complicated.

In field notes written by one of us, the initial process can be followed in a very revealing way. The first day, he simply reports that he sat with several

groups of “seniors”—as he put it—some of whom told him that they were on the football or hockey teams. Over the course of the day he talked with four groups of students. Given that presence in the cafeteria was predicated on scheduling, it couldn't be ascertained whether these groups were more than ad hoc transient phenomena. The following day things became “clearer.” The fieldworker recognized students and named them in his notes. Of the first group, he writes, “These boys were the freaks.” While talking of another group, he writes that “they” (no reference to a name) “had seen Patricia [the other fieldworker] in the area for the lungs.” These notes were written at the end of the day after several hours of interaction with the students and particularly after a long conversation with a student who

introduced me to the idea of the lungs, namely, a group referred to as the long hair or freaks. They got their nickname from a Jethro Tull album called “Aqualung” where a freak appears with an aqualung on the front cover. I was informed that the lungs were responsible for wrecking the school lounge and that you could tell a lung, not only by their long hair, but by the fact that they wore flannel shirts and jeans. I noticed that Chris Borden, a first-string football player, was wearing a flannel shirt and jeans, but he was not sitting with the lungs. [T1]

When he wrote of the first group of students he met that day, he said that they were “freaks.” There is in fact no evidence that this observation was a logical deduction from his observation of a pattern of behavior. Later, in fact, he is careful to note that at least one football

player was dressed the way the freaks are supposed to dress. Nor is there any evidence that it is the "freaks" who suggested to him their own identification. What seems to have happened that day was that many students told him that another group of students, those with whom he and the other field worker had been seen earlier, were freaks. Later in the field notes, the other groups was labeled "jock." But it is a label *which they too do not seem to have volunteered*. What they had volunteered was the name of the other groups.

This is a general point. All the students we talked to could and generally were also willing to talk about cliques in the school. They could disagree among themselves about certain aspects of the actual organization. They could discuss whether a person was or was not a member of a clique, and whether cliques were stronger or weaker than they used to be or than they were in other schools they knew. But they did understand each other enough to continue such conversations and to be able to answer our inquiries. It would be easy for me to accumulate examples. "Jocks and freaks" was one of the subjects which students were most willing to talk to us about. We have many pages of interview transcript on the topic. However, this predominance was partially a fabrication of our interest and of the essential safety of the topic. There was little emotional involvement and no reluctance. The other two topics that interested us and about which we got less and less were the relationship of the students with their teachers and male-female relationships. We tried to make all interviewees talk about the latter topic. Almost all refused, more or less directly.

I would thus not try to evaluate how "important" cliques were in the school. Various students had various opinions on this topic; the same individual sometimes told us different things at different points in the interview. It remains that the clique experience was a favorite topic. All students could provide broad sketches. Some—perhaps more observant or more imaginative—could describe very complex and slightly fantastic pictures. There was much disagreement about the details of these pictures. The membership lists varied from student to student. But there was enough agreement for the broad sweep of the pictures to be recognizable as somehow representing Sheffield.

I mentioned earlier that there is no evidence, in our field notes, that students ever volunteered *their own* identification.<sup>1</sup> They identified other students. These other students eventually identified them, and it is only through this process of triangulation that we, as observers, could come to a conclusion as to "who" the first students were. It is not that students did not know how they were identified by other students. Most of the students we talked to were very sophisticated, and they would discuss in great detail their own situation. Let us listen to Maureen Travers:

Maureen Travers said that people have certain interests and so they hang around with each other. She said therefore people with similar interests hang around together. She said, however, that this does not really divide people. She said that when she sees jocks and freaks drinking and smoking together at parties, she knows that the so-called division is a fallacy. In school, she said the jocks and freaks segregate themselves because they are pursuing different in-

terests and therefore would not tend to be in the same place at the same time. Outside of school, however, the jocks and freaks are together. She then noted that all of the people in Sheffield have a lot in common because they are all from the same type of families and the same background. [T2]

In another situation she specifically denied that she and her "loose group of friends" labeled themselves anything. She then told George Singer, one of these friends, that other people knew him as jock (probably because of his habit of wearing a suit and tie to school and because he had applied to West Point). On another occasion *he* had told us that he was "nothing." He was also seen regularly with the student government president and his friends, who were known by some as "freaks" and who regularly expressed ultraliberal political sentiments. As least one student did in fact list him with the freaks.

Things were actually even more complex. There were students who were so universally known that they could not escape the label. Students in the corridor would whisper "jock" when they walked by. They would read graffiti in the bathrooms about how they should cut their hair and get clean. The star of the basketball team, Paul Taft, was in this position. He was undoubtedly a gifted athlete. He was the first student in the high school's history to have scored more than 1000 points during his career. Also in this position was Abe Stevenson, whose hair fell below his shoulders, who came to school only in dubiously clean jeans, and who constantly talked of bucking the authorities. Paul Taft was *the* jock for anybody but himself and his closest friends. Abe Stevenson was *the* freak

for anybody but, again, himself and his closest friends. Abe Stevenson told us that he was "a loner" who stayed mostly "by himself" and that he was in fact "a jock at heart." Paul Taft told us the same things, in reverse:

But those people that want to get away from it, those that are, you know, use *the* system with a derogatory tone in their voice, are the ones that are the freaks, the radicals, the outsiders. I don't look at them as outsiders because I am part of that myself. I think a lot of the freaks . . . [T3]

All this indicates that several things are going on at the same time. All the students act. All of them have friends (except for a very few true loners). All can talk about cliques. It is these phenomena that lead observers to talk about cliques and then reify them for analytic manipulation. My question is: Do these phenomena justify that step?

## The Social Function of Clique Identification

Before we move on, I would like to provide other types of ethnographic detail to illustrate how clique identification was used in actual interaction. What I have talked about until now has been based essentially on *reflections* of the informants on their situation. What do they in fact do? I mentioned earlier the definite tendency of students not to interact randomly. Some students *were* always seen together, certain spaces *were* known as the private turf of a particular clique. For a few months in the fall, for example, the guidance office became an informal "jock" lounge until the adults intervened after complaints

by other students that they could not get to talk to the guidance personnel. A few girls continually complained that they could not use the bathroom because of the atmosphere certain students created there. Even though we did not, in fact, chart networks as Coleman might have done, I have a sense that similar methods would have yielded comparable results.

Other aspects of the situation must also be mentioned, for they will mitigate the impression of rigidity which the summary picture I just presented might suggest. A clique was never an immediately apprehensible reality. Cliques never walked down corridors like phalanxes. They did not have a sanctioned distinctiveness. All the diacritic marks which students did use to differentiate between the cliques (the length of the hair, dress, bodily stance, speech style, expressed attitudes, etc.) could be used by people who did not belong to the clique which was normally symbolized by a particular pattern of these markers. They might sometimes even be used by members of the opposite cliques: all male students, for example, whatever their clique affiliation, were photographed in a suit and tie for the pictures that appeared in the yearbook. This means that mistakes could be made about the identification of certain students (Jack Saario, who saw himself as "the last freak," was seen as a member of the "brain trust" by Roy Carter, and was not seen often with either of the two friendship groups with a highly freakish appearance). It also means that students could deny their most obvious clique identification by emphasizing the fact that particular markers generally associated with an-

other clique in fact applied to them. Thus Taft could justify his self-identification with the freaks on the basis of the facts that he liked the hardest, most advanced rock music and had very liberal political views.

Cliques did have a certain political reality. The distribution of the turf was not a mechanical affair. Certain spaces were preferred, and conflicts could develop over the control of such spaces. I will now present a particularly vivid case in which certain students (students who would have been identified by others as the female counterparts of the jocks, "the most cliquish group in the school" as many other students told us, a "nice, open informal group of friends" as the girls themselves told us) struggled for the creation of something which they labeled, very significantly, a *senior lounge*.

When we first arrived in the school, one of the first things we were told (see T1) was that the "lounge" had destroyed the "senior lounge" that had been set up the year before in a hallway with a few second-hand couches and chairs from the teachers' lounge, which had been renovated. At the end of the year things were in a state of disarray, the furniture was "destroyed," and the administration cleared the space; the following year "the seniors had no place to go," as some of them complained. The people who complained were not numerous but were very visible. They raised the issue at most of the student council meetings and at the "senior luncheons" (when the principal talked informally over lunch with a group of seniors). The administration was noncommittal. The girls who were at the forefront of the protest were the

same girls who said that it would be "bad news" if freaks lingered in the guidance office, which, during the first part of the year, was used by them as an informal gathering place (until they were ejected by the guidance staff). By implication they had stated that they were *not freaks*. But what was it that they presented themselves as, positively?

Let us look at extracts from a very controlled text (an article in the school paper by a student named Morrison) where stylistic stereotypification could be maintained to the highest degree:

... For three years the seniors had a lounge of their own. . . . In the three years since its inception, the senior lounge has been a tremendous catastrophe. Many will disagree . . . less than ten percent of the seniors have used the lounge. . . . [T4]

To talk about jocks and freaks in such a setting would have been totally unacceptable. Morrison had to elevate his style in certain systemic ways. How did he do this? What he did was to construct two groups: "the seniors" and "ten percent of the seniors." The first group is a total universe where no further divisions are suggested except for one, the "ten percent" who have seceded by adopting a mode of behavior antithetical to the mass's interest, something which justifies an attempt at rejection and punitive control on the part of the policing authorities.

Given what everybody knew about the school, this constructed social structure might appear totally fantastic. This particular way of dealing with the incident hid as much of the reality of the school as it made manifest. The article,

like most statements by the proponents of the lounge, was politically manipulative, and we could talk of "false consciousness" in a quasi-Marxist sense. The jock girls were not really interested in a "senior" lounge, as they would always put it, using the universalistic label as their positive identity, but a *jock lounge* which, as we were once told, freaks would be forbidden to enter. I also suspect that what happened the year before was not that the freaks "destroyed" the lounge but that they appropriated it to themselves and made it freak-like, which made it unacceptable for the jocks (and also for the school administration, since the lounge was located in a place where it was the first thing seen by parents—the most vocal of whom were rather conservative—when visiting the school). However, and this is a major theme of my whole study, the socio-psychological "reality" of the senior lounge as it was raised by the jocks did not determine the way jock speakers expressed their political needs. They did not say, "We want a jock lounge!"

### The Reality of the Cliques

The picture I just painted is almost stereotypical. Sheffield might be considered a somewhat atypical town because of its suburban homogeneity, and it is not impossible that the ambivalence of the students towards cliquish behavior may have been the result of their perception of the relative arbitrariness of their groupings. In a multiethnic setting cliques might be seen as more directly reflecting broader social realities, and one might expect the students to be

less ambivalent. But most of the literature on high school cliques was built from observations made in small and suburban towns. Furthermore, there is indication that people like Coleman or Henry did have evidence of ambivalence. Of the two students Henry quotes at length (1963:185–190, 249–257), one does talk of “our gang,” while the other one systematically distances himself. Henry sees the difference as a difference in personality structure and adaptation to an alienating world, but there is little data on which to base a decision. As for Coleman, in the two examples he gives of students talking about cliques, there is explicit denial of the *personal* relevance of the cliques:

To be sure, when students were asked [what does it take to be in the leading crowd in the school], some, particularly in the smallest school, did object to the idea that there was a leading crowd. Yet this kind of objection is in large part answered by [a boy] . . . in a group interview. A friend of his denied that there was any leading crowd at all in the school, and he responded: “You don’t see it because you’re in it.” [1961:34]

And the student he quotes as giving a “vivid picture of how such crowds function” began with the following:

You mean like cliques? Well there are about two cliques. There’s me. . . . I’m in it, but as far as I am concerned, I’m not concerned about being in it. . . . I just go along with them. [1961:36]

The researchers until now have discounted this ambivalence and chalked it up to ignorance, psychological resistance, or various forms of false con-

sciousness, i.e., to a “myth” against which they offered a picture of a “reality.” They talked of “informal” structures not recognized by the school but still quite real. And since this form of social structural analysis demanded that groups be actual events of some persistence, they constructed the lists which the school did not keep. They counted the cliques, determined their size, and compared them in terms of a whole set of variables, from father’s occupation to amount of drinking or college plans (Coleman 1961: chap. VII). All evidence of overlap, fuzziness of boundaries, or ties between cliques was considered a matter suggesting caution in the process of ascribing membership. But it remained a secondary methodological issue.

In fact it is an issue of central theoretical importance, particularly given the data base utilized. As I mentioned earlier, these data were essentially made up of *talk* with the students in various settings and in response to different types of questions. Only a very small number of the observations made were produced independently of the students’ symbolic performances. All of this suggests that it is time to look back at what the informants actually do say with little *a priori* notion of what is relevant, to see whether there is an organization to these statements as statements, that is, as the *symbolic* productions which they inevitably are. The matter of social structural constraints should remain open until the structuring processes of the symbolic productions through which social structure is known are fully understood.

## The Symbolic Production of Cliques

For various reasons, I will mainly look at statements in interviews to outline the symbolic structure of clique and personal identification. The interview situation itself probably led the students to overemphasize the expression of diffidence towards cliques, and I would certainly not rely on the statements we collected in such situations to evaluate the overall “importance” of cliques in the school. Other situations might also require different types of performances from the students, and the following is not intended to be an overall account of all the possible types. The advantage of interviews is that they could be tape recorded and thus provide us with data which have been only minimally translated by the fieldworker.<sup>2</sup> This is of paramount importance for me, since I need the detail<sup>3</sup> of the student performance in order to produce a convincing analysis.

Let us look at Roy Carter’s overall account of the cliques in Sheffield High School:

It shouldn’t be too difficult [to classify students into groups]. Cliques are some of the most obvious things in the school. There’s the, well, let’s see. . . .

[Follows a consideration of various cliques and various students who “transcend the line drawn by cliques.”]

Some other people might classify say, William Gregory, myself, Jack Saario, and a few others as Miss Kennedy says the “brain trust,” which I prefer not to think of because whether it’s true or not I like to think of myself as getting along

well with most other groups in the school.

Q: Who belongs to that?

C: Well, in other people’s eyes . . . [T5]

Carter at the same time affirms and denies the existence of cliques and helps us to specify a basic opposition in the rhetoric he uses:

I like to think of myself . . .

In other people’s eyes . . .

A distinction has been made: “I” “get along” “with most other groups.” “/Some others/” might classify “/list of names/”<sup>4</sup> as “the ‘brain trust’.” *I, friendship, and most go together, as against some others, clique label.* The distinction is not accompanied, in this instance, with a definite statement of evaluation of the fact that “some” saw Carter as a member of a clique. We did collect statements which implied much more directly that to talk of cliques is to talk of something that is bad and reflects negatively either on the school or on those who behave in terms of clique membership. But this value judgment is not what is of interest to us directly. Whether they liked cliques or not (in fact, nobody ever told us that cliques were a good thing), all students could talk about cliques. Carter did not hesitate to assert that there were cliques in the school. What is important is that, in his speech and, as we shall see, in the speech of all students, cliques are associated with “others” or “they,” and never with “I.”

It would be an error, however, to think that “they” forms are only used in relation to people who are objectively not the members of one’s group of

friends. "They" can be people who both the student and the interviewer know very well are the best friends of that student. To talk of "them" is a symbolic resource with which speakers can do whatever they wish. Their social situation does not determine them. Let us look at another text.

In T6 Paul Taft had been asked by the fieldworker to talk about "cliques" (the word was suggested by the fieldworker), "what the different groups are like," "the names people apply." Taft, in the way I have documented, agrees to talk about the subject ("the most obvious cliques are the athletes and the freaks"), rejects the initiation of the division of the outsiders ("there are certain rules that are set up for [the athletes] by, most likely, the freaks"), when pushed starts describing the "stereotype" (sic) of the freak and then starts insisting that he himself does or has done what freaks only are supposed to do (wear dirty jeans, smoke pot, like hard rock, etc.)—"many of the things they do are things I do, you know." Until then, all the "they's," like the one in the last sentence, refer to "the freaks," or so it seems. This remark is followed by a request for clarification, "Like what? Can you give me an example?" Taft answers:

You know, going to parties. Although myself, I'm not really involved with narcotics of that type. Even though my view on marijuana is one where it really doesn't bother me. People that do it, I could care less. But some kids in the high school, the guys that are involved in athletics, think a kid does pot—he's a real screwball. It doesn't bother me. My feeling of pot really, you know, is liberal. I'd like to see it legalized, because the

penalties that are put on it are really severe to the kids and it really screws them up. So if anyone wants to get high on that, let them. I myself, we go to a party, we drink beer, you know, wine. You know, you go to a concert or something like that, you're going to drink. I shouldn't always be like that, but that's one of the characteristics of it. [T6a]

This is a verbatim, nonedited statement. What is fascinating is the variety of ways Taft has at his disposal to talk about people in a general way. He can talk of "I," "my view," "my feeling," "people," "some kids," "the guys," "a kid," "anyone." In other words, Taft is modulating the system of personal reference that is available to him, and we can ask ourselves whether all these forms are functionally equivalent.<sup>5</sup>

It must be noted first that the variation is not solely grounded in syntactic or referential necessity. Taft is not describing to the fieldworker an event that is occurring concurrently with his speech. The "event" is in fact a sequence of events that have taken place sometime in the past and are irretrievable. Thus there is no "reality testing" of the utterance, no feedback from the situation pointing out the selective nature of Taft's speech. He is not even talking in terms of a specific action to be performed. All this means that we must be very skeptical about the extent to which Taft is referring to historical events. Let us look at the progression "some kids in the high school, the guys that are involved in athletics." The purely referential interpretation of this passage could run something like this: Taft knows that some students (a subgroup of the total student population) disapprove of pot smoking; he also

knows who these students are and thus specifies that they are "the guys in athletics." If this were all there was to this statement, there would be no justification for going further. However, all evidence outside of this passage shows that this interpretation is wrong.

Obviously, Taft is differentiating himself from both "the guys . . . in athletics" and "people that do it." He is neither one of those who "do" pot, nor one of those who disapprove. Nor is he even one of "the guys . . . in athletics," until the last sentence, when he shifts to "we." Later in the interview he makes it clear that the people he includes in "we" are a subset of those involved in "the guys . . . in athletics."

The guys that I hack around with are really close. We've been together a really long time. About four or five guys are really close even though I think the clique encompasses a lot of guys. . . . No one is hung up on any problems. But there are a lot of guys in the cliques who are. . . . They follow everything that was followed before. [T6b]

The element of evaluation is unmistakable: "they" becomes "we" only when "friendship" can be assumed, and friendship has to do with the agreement between the people under consideration on a particular point. Taft disagrees with "a lot of guys," those guys who, in the earlier text, were "the guys . . . in athletics." There has been a shift. After having assumed a distanced stance where he stood outside and described the overall situation, Taft shifts to a description of his personal involvement: from an *I/they* opposition he moves to a *we/a lot* opposition.

Throughout, then, Taft uses different forms to refer to the *same* people—

the athletes. At the time of the interview he stands towards them all in the same relationship: they are the absent (from the setting) persons with whom he regularly socializes. And yet these people are successively "we," "they," and "some" or "a lot," depending on the points of reference Taft adopts. They are at the same time:

- clearly marked as a subgroup within the school and as a totality in relation to a certain activity;
- a fuzzy set of subgroups.

Taft can also either put himself out or put himself in.

What all this suggests is that the social situation of Taft (either his overall place in the school or the interview) does not directly motivate his speech. It is probable that the overall situation is, in fact, quite complex, more complex than traditional clique analyses made it, and that he has a certain leeway. Thus, at the end we may still not know whether the athletes are a clique, whether Taft is a member, who disapproves of pot smoking, and what form this disapproval takes. We could not directly reconstruct these things from what Taft said. The forms he used do not have an inherent referential meaning. *What is expressed is the attitude or stance the speaker adopts towards the object of his statement.* This stance is expressed by the actual form used, and we can distinguish between the forms as to the stance implied.<sup>6</sup>

Bobby Christian, the speaker, was, it will be remembered, Taft's best friend.

It was such a war almost going on between the two groups. This year it's in football. I didn't hardly associate with



anyone because we were always busy at football. Now in basketball we see kids in the school and everything. It seems there's an interest rising now because we're doing well and the hockey team is doing well. So people are concerned. Karl Cousin and Gerard Dillon, they were never really interested, but we're friends with them now and they're interested. Like today, for instance, Karl asked me, "When is your next game?" I told him. He said, "Oh, yeah? Congratulations." Last night, Gerard said, "You played a good game." I think it's general, you know, everyone's kind of concerned now. [T7]

There is no collective "they" in this text. Indeed, Christian did not use many of them in the interview we taped with him. What he uses again and again is "we," and in that "we" he includes the football, basketball, and hockey teams. Conversely, when he shifts to the present he does not talk of "the freaks" becoming concerned. He also shifts to using first names, "Karl" and "Gerard," whom everybody would know as the most prominent members of the hard core freaks. Christian knows that they could be so labeled too. But at this moment he treats them as separate individuals. A few exchanges later, the interviewer asked for clarification: "You mean the freak kids rather than the jock kids." Christian agreed but rephrased the statement: "Yes, these were jock kids," i.e., *some* jocks, in the *past*. And still later he explained, "There are still some kids [who don't appreciate sports]."

As a total statement, this text is different from Taft's. Christian seems much more involved in the jock world and less aware of this world as a special, separate world. But the instru-

ments he uses are the same as those Taft uses. Indeed if we examine the exact source of the assumption we might make that Christian is more involved and less introspective, it will be seen that it is not because he says so in so many words but because of the relative predominance of certain rhetorical forms over others (especially /I/, /first names/, and /we/).

I want to stress this to re-emphasize that I am not trying to interpret what Taft or Christian as individual informants "meant" in an abstract, general sense. It is enough for me that they *appear* to mean something different *because they use differently the same meaningful forms*.

Let us pursue our analysis of these forms. I have suggested the broad lines of the distributions to be made. What do they in fact do? I have suggested that the emic unit I will refer to as /they/ is always used to refer to something in which *I* is not made to participate. There are apparent exceptions. In T7 Christian comes very close to saying "the jocks, we . . ." But in fact he does not. He says, "Last year the big thing was Jock and Freak. . . . It was such a war." Cliques were real then, in temporal distance. Walt Mason and Bill Silvestri (the core members of the political freak clique) once had an argument in our presence that illustrates even more clearly this process of distancing. The discussion was about whom they were friends with. It meandered in the usual fashion between "I am a loner," "I am friendly with so many kids," and "So-and-so is my best friend." At some point Mason said, "There are no cliques in the school." Silvestri disagreed: "I have been in a lot of them."

"I *have been*," in the past. He didn't

say "But *we* are a clique," which they were according to any outsider (whether participant in the school or social anthropologist). Structurally this movement is equivalent to Taft's distinguishing between "my four friends" (we) and the other "guys" who are encompassed by the clique (they). The statement is in the present, but some distance has been established, a discontinuity.<sup>7</sup>

The issue, then, is not really one of evaluation. Taft, to focus again on him, may have wished to evaluate fellow athletes and criticize them for being too cliquish, but this is not the source of his ability to make the statement. What he has at his disposal is the ability to establish discontinuities or to assume continuities through the use of syntactic means (pronouns, first names, labels, or the tense system). And it is only because there are no rules prescribing where the discontinuities must be placed in the social world about which he is talking that Taft can then manipulate them to express his evaluation of his acquaintances.

Structurally speaking, the principle at work is that of the extension of identification and the placing of a signifying discontinuity, all *from the point of view of an "I," and from the point of view of the present exchange*. For not only is there variation as to the placing of the discontinuity between two speakers—however close they may be from an organizational point of view—and the rest of the student body, there is also variation from context to context *within the speech of the same speaker*.

It was common, for example, for speakers to shift to an all-encompassing "we" when talking about certain topics. Jack Saario, for example, after giving

us the most personalized statements about cliques, volunteered to talk to us about the bomb threats which had plagued the school the year before.

We never had any trouble like this before, but last year. . . . OK, last year they started with bomb threats. There was a couple of bomb threats. They just phoned in bomb threats and everybody had to go outside and it was a big joke and we had locker searches, etc. etc. [T8]

"We never had any trouble . . . *they* started with bomb threats." No specific referent is marked in the immediate context. The preceding exchanges in the interview had been about Saario's taking an advanced physics course at the local university, and then he volunteered "Maybe I should get into the bomb threats we have had?" Like the author of the newspaper article, he encompasses the whole student body, indeed the whole school, in his statement and subtracts the few responsible. Later in the text, he starts labeling the reaction of "the board of education" to the bomb threats, and all subsequent "they's" refer to it. In both cases Saario does the same thing: he subtracts an ad hoc group from an undifferentiated whole and does not make any specific personal reference within the subtracted group: they are just people on the other side of a symbolically created chasm. It is not that Saario doesn't know that there are actual persons on the other side of the chasm but that, to make explicit this knowledge, he would have to shift his rhetoric and would lose the intended effect.

The broad use of "we" is an interesting phenomenon, well worth spending some time on. "We" could refer to a

very large universalized group of students versus a small minority, or versus people in a formally defined position other than the one "we" occupy, particularly the administration. "We" could also refer to the whole school, including the administration, versus the outside world, the parents, and the community. But it would again be a mistake to say that the broad meaning of "we" is determined by such social structural matters. Let us look at another interesting instance of manipulation of the we/they segmentation. The speaker is Pat Goldberg, a junior who was running for election as vice-president of the student council. He was being interviewed as to his reasons for running ("It looks good for college and I want to do something for the school") and what he thought could be done:

... I think that this year, we only have like two student council classes ... we have representatives who conduct a class and in the class you'll have a group of students who chose this person to be their representative.... It's really a good way for the student council to know what all the students think. You have to know what the people that you're governing—what they think, how they feel, and what their opinions are. So the student council itself can govern and keep the students happy.... I think it's really important that students know what's going on. [T9]

The situation is again an artificial one from the point of view of the activities being discussed. There are no cues in the immediate environment to give direct referential meaning to Goldberg's speech. The whole meaning must be generated within the text by signifying cues that can help suggest a "real"

world to the audience. It is a process that is myth-bound rather than reality-bound. How did Goldberg conjure this mythical world? The means are the usual ones: "we have representatives"; "a group of students"; "what all the students think"; "the student council"; tell the students "what we're doing." All these essentially pronominal phrases refer to the same sort of "real" people: students. However, Goldberg is allowed to make several distinctions that will evidently reveal themselves to be, on a larger scale, the same as those which were made by the students when they talked about the people nearest to them.

There is first "we," the students as a whole (as in "we have representatives"), and the symmetrical "they" (as in "and keep the students happy"), which refers to the same persons from which *one* person has been subtracted, "I."<sup>8</sup> Somewhere between these two extremes Goldberg placed two boundaries. At one point he talks of "a group of students" (who elect a representative) and of "the student council." The reference is personalized and specified. The student council is also referred to as "we" ("they don't know what we're doing"), signifying that Goldberg is already identifying with the council (as he well may have, since he was running unopposed).

Goldberg's "we" in reference to the student council is not an expression of his being friendly with the people in the council. Goldberg was involved in several clubs that year, but not in the council. As for the council the following year, it did not yet exist. For Goldberg, the council was an abstract entity which he had never experienced. His "we" did not reflect a social experience.

It was a product of Goldberg's symbolic competence: he knew that it was an appropriate construction of a future social reality to place a boundary around an otherwise defined group in which he would sometimes participate.

A complete specification of this symbolic competence would demand much more space than I have at my disposal here. I have published elsewhere a slightly more technical preliminary statement (1978) and I am preparing a full scale analysis (MS). What I have done here should be sufficient, however, to suggest concretely both the process of a symbolic analysis and its product in terms of this particular set of texts.

### Symbolic Structure and Social Reality

One of the fundamental powers of language lies in the ability it gives us to manipulate people, events, and situations which are not present at the moment of the utterance or which, even, do not quite "exist" except as symbolic creations. Language can also be used to describe people, events, and situations which are extremely real in social, political, or economic terms. But it is the same language that does both, and there is no way to mark in an incontrovertible fashion the exact status of an utterance: one is never obliged to state "I made the following up" before telling a tall tale. Indeed, the speaker may not be quite conscious of the fact that it is a tall tale. It would not have been beyond some of our informants to play with the fieldworker when answering questions about cliques. Some descrip-

tions were so long and so detailed in comparison with the other descriptions we got that they may have been a pure invention or simply an artifact of the interview situation. But perhaps these texts were so long and complex because the speakers were playing the game more seriously than other students.

What makes all this even more delicate is the fact that I am myself using language to "describe" a set of situations which are already lost in the rather distant past. To what extent I am indeed "describing" and to what extent I am "creating" is something which, in the social sciences, is extremely difficult to ascertain. All that remains of the fieldwork that has not been retranslated by my own writing processes is the transcription of a few interviews. This very text is a constructed symbolic performance on which I have worked for a very long time. I cannot be quite sure that it works, but whether it does or not depends on my ability to manipulate symbolic means (in this case mostly linguistic) to suggest a world which is not now present.

I brought to you fragments of this world, transcripts from interviews through which we might be able to increase intersubjectivity. While the interviews were certainly generated by the fieldworker's interest, each student did participate. And we can check the extent of this participation by looking at similar data published by other researchers about similar situations. Few social scientists, in fact, do quote at any length the people they observe. But in the few cases when it does happen I believe I recognize my informants. In a study of the process of initiation into a high school sorority, Schwartz and

Merten quote one of their informants (whom they do not identify in terms of membership or nonmembership in the sorority) talking about a girl who "hung around" but didn't belong to the sorority:

... I can think of one girl that was just like that, Barbara; you know she hung around with ABCs.

Q: Who else?

A: Ah, a couple of kids, they were real close... but anyway Barbara hung around with them, and they were all ABCs, and they were real close and always had lunch together and everything, and when it came to being ABCs everybody still knew that Barbara wasn't one. And I think she wanted to be one. She always wanted to be one and I think she tried to convince herself that she was an informal one, but still I don't think anyone else was convinced. [1968:1122]

The situation is different in this high school from what it was in Sheffield, since the dominant female cliques had become formalized as sororities. One could have expected this to lead to the maintenance of absolute boundaries. And yet it seems that a gray area did exist. More importantly, the informant is talking, very regularly from my point of view, of "I," "Barbara," "they." The boundary has been set at the very edge of the "I"; the sorority is "they." Indeed, in the eight passages Schwartz and Merten quoted, only one "we" is used (by a girl recalling how she and, apparently, some of her friends had been recruited). The sorority is *always* "they," even when the speaker is obviously a member of it. Even when the question seems to have included a di-

rect attempt at personalization, the answer could be distanced:

Q: Well, when one becomes inducted into the sorority, are you leaving one category of people and entering another?

A: I think the members of the sorority and the pledges think of it that way. [1968:1122]

Such evidence suggests that the interviews I have analyzed are not purely *my* artifacts. Investigators can collect such statements, and I would expect that they could have been collected in many different American high schools and can still be collected there. But this argument does not quite deal with the fundamental issue. I am still writing about something that is not present, in a way that must evoke this reality in a conventional manner. Were I writing a novel, I would probably use some of the same linguistic tools as I have been using here. Look how Updike described Tarbox's "society" in *Couples*:

The people who did throw parties were a decade older and seemed rather coarse and blatant—Dan Mills, the bronzed, limping, and alcoholic owner of the abortive Tarbox boat yard; Eddie Warner, the supervisor of a Mather paint plant, a bullet-headed ex-athlete who could still at beery beach picnics float the ball a mile in the gull-gray dusk; Doc Allen. . . . To Janet they seemed desperate people, ignorant and provincial and loud. Their rumored infidelities struck her as pathetic; their evident heavy drinking disgusted her. . . . The boat-yard crowd, a postwar squirearchy of combat veterans, locally employed and uncollegiate, knew that it was patronized by these younger cooler people and

suffered no regrets when they chose to form a separate set and to leave them alone with their liquor and bridge games and noisy reminiscences of Anzio and Guadalcanal. [1968:115-116]

Updike could be treated as an informant manipulating his own ethno-sociology. But he could also be treated as an extremely perceptive observer of suburban life, an outsider looking in, a sociologist describing. Whether it is Gans (1967) or Vidich and Bensman (1968) describing contemporary towns or Wallace (1978) describing a nineteenth-century manufacturing district, the technique is the same: "I" think this is the way "they" think about it.

This poses a very interesting problem. All sociologists—even those who want to ground their analyses in the "participants' meanings"—write of the people they observed as "they." What we have seen here is that American naive participants (the "natives") use the same term to perform the same descriptive function. However, we have also seen that in everyday speech /they/ does not simply connote "objective description" in any simple sense. /They/ connotes distance, rigidity, lack of personal involvement. It might not be wrong to say that it does connote objectivity, i.e., a stance where human actors are made, or treated as, *objects*. When this stance is taken, cliques appear and are overwhelmingly "present."

But our naive participants can adopt—because the pragmatic grammar of their language allows them to—another stance, where they appear as subjects and treat the people they refer

to as subjects too, as /I/. At such moments, cliques disappear. Fluidity and ambiguity are brought to the fore and distant forms that seemed so solid in the other mode evaporate in a mist of hedges and exceptions.

Sociologists, when they have recognized such processes, have generally considered them irrelevant to their purposes, with the argument that the personal feelings of participants were not a matter of sociological interest. What I would like to say is that this fundamental theoretical stance is methodologically misapplied when, in a setting like American schools, it leads the researcher to consider only certain statements as relevant and then to generalize these statements to the full sociological experience of the observed participants. In two ways, in fact, the /I/ of participants is a matter of sociological interest. First, the very presence of this /I/ is predicated on the unfolding of a sociological process: the development of a set of rules for the social use of linguistic forms, a pragmatic grammar that is specific to a particular social group. Second, there is no way to distinguish within the actual social experience of the students what is motivated by social structural constraints such as informal clique structures and what is motivated by psychological or emotional responses. Students have to interact with each other in terms of both, and both are elements in their social experience.

That we must say that, from the point of view of this experience, cliques are *at the same time* there and not there in a school such as Sheffield is a paradox which we should not resolve too

hastily. At the beginning of this paper, I made a point of emphasizing that from Hollingshead to Clement and Harding, two or three generations of sociologists have undoubtedly "seen" something and that their descriptions are not "in error." What they are is partial, for no good theoretical reason. What has been lacking in the previous research is a focused gaze on the detail of the actual interactions before theo-

retical operations are performed. We do know now that such a gaze is not an easy or natural process. It must be informed by a creative critique of earlier ethnographic and theoretical work. The work of Coleman, et al., was a necessary step in our journey toward more disciplined understanding of social life in schools and elsewhere. And now, to paraphrase Lévi-Strauss, "the orders are to keep marching."

### Notes

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<sup>1</sup> I can, in fact, conceive of many situations when students might symbolically act out the label imposed on them by their social environment. In jokes, horseplay, and perhaps unfocused anger, self-identification in clique terms might be found. Our field notes were not detailed enough about such matters to settle this issue. What we did record were "serious" statements when emotional involvement was relatively low and formal or public statements when rhetorical pressures were quite strong.

<sup>2</sup> In a recent paper, Keenan made a fundamental point which no social scientist should ever forget: never do we work on the actual phenomenon which we are studying. We always work on a transcript of this phenomenon, a linear statement that is the product of rewrite rules, more or less standardized transcription conventions, which produce the text on which we work.

<sup>3</sup> The rewrite rules which transform a field experience into a working text can take many forms and produce many different texts useful for various types of analysis. In this case, I have found it sufficient to transcribe recorded speech at a rather gross level in comparison with recent sociolinguistic standards (e.g., Labov & Fanshel 1977). I did not try to incorporate any paraverbal or nonverbal cues, for example. However, I do not believe I need them to do what I am doing here.

<sup>4</sup> To refer to a paradigm of functionally equivalent surface symbolic forms, I shall employ the / / symbol used in structural linguistics to refer to emic units. (See also note 5.)

<sup>5</sup> The underlying question is an old and difficult one in all the social sciences. It concerns the mechanisms that can be used to ascertain whether two events which share some surface features but do not share others should be considered "the same" or "different" from a certain point of view. In classical structural linguistics, a test of functional significance was evolved: two forms were considered equivalent if it could be shown that, from the point of view of the system studied, the differences between them had no effect; the unit was not changed. It performed the same functions. This functional unit was the original emic unit (as in phoneme) and it is in this sense that I will talk of such units (as against the popular understanding of Pike's emic/etic distinction, which cannot be used in any productive analytic and systematic manner).

<sup>6</sup> To pursue the discussion in more technical terms, what all this means is that the speaker is made the point of reference: when Taft talks of "the guys" we cannot assume whom he is referring to. What we know is how he stands in relation to them on the particular issue. In other words, "the guys" does not mean anything except as it is used by a speaker. This makes the form and equivalent ones a subset of what linguists have called "shifters" (Jakobson 1957, Silverstein 1976). The prototype of such forms is the first-person pronoun "I," which can only be interpreted if we know who is talking but as such only indicates the stance of the speaker. I have argued elsewhere (Varenne 1978) why I believe that certain third-person and nominal forms (e.g., "the guys") should also be considered shifters in American usage, in spite of Benveniste's argument (1966) that they should not be so considered.

<sup>7</sup> From a broad cross-cultural point of view this process could be perceived as another example of what Lévi-Strauss has seen as a fundamental capacity of human "wild" thinking: the mythological transition from continuity to discreteness, of which he gives three examples in his analysis of Myths 1, 2, and 3 in *The Raw and the Cooked* [1969:53-54].

<sup>8</sup> Given what happens later in the text, this "we" is in fact ambiguous: Goldberg may already be thinking of the student council, as he obviously does later.

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