ABSTRACT

JEREMY AKIN
Demystifying the Conflict Culture: Understanding the Effects of Zero Tolerance on Students in a Georgia Public School System
Under the Direction of DR. LARRY NACKERUD

The students impacted by exclusionary discipline policies comprise a consistently large population among Chippling County Public Schools in Staycomb, Georgia. Since the 2005-2006 school year, fighting has remained a leading cause for suspensions and expulsions (District Accountabilty System, 2009). During this time, the average number of suspensions each suspended student received has gradually increased, reaching an all-time high of 2.6 suspensions per capita in 2008-09 (Youth Futures Authority). These realities raise questions as to the long-term effects of the school system's current application of zero tolerance, a 'get-tough' approach to discipline that was originally intended to make schools safe from weapons and drugs but has since been expanded to punish more minor offenses. Through interviews and surveys of students, parents, and faculty affiliated with a disciplinary alternative education program, this study conducted between January and March 2010 sheds light on the following questions: What are the root causes of the "conflict culture"—defined as the social code which says fighting is the only viable way to resolve conflicts? How might these issues be effectively addressed? Furthermore, is a reliance on punitive discipline adequate for addressing Chippling County's high levels of student fighting? Results from interviews and surveys have been analyzed via descriptive and correlational statistics. Research findings reported in Chapter 4 and discussed in Chapter 5 will be made available to system administrators and will inform the curriculum of a peer mediation program in which students at local schools mediate real-life conflicts involving their classmates.

INDEX WORDS: Fighting, School Discipline, Suspension, Zero Tolerance, Code of Street, Delinquency, Alternative Schools

DEMYSTIFYING THE CONFLICT CULTURE:

UNDERSTANDING THE EFFECTS OF ZERO TOLERANCE ON STUDENTS IN A GEORGIA PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM

by

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INTRODUCTION

Conflating Discipline with Punishment?

At first glance, Staycomb's Radick Alternative Learning Center resembles an incarceration facility with construction paper on the walls. The students one sees being searched every morning before class have either been suspended for a semester or longer, or have criminal records and probation officers. To the school system at large, this population embodies the societal fears of juvenile delinquency reinforced by violent true stories on the nightly news. These are the "problem students," grades K through 12. Yet to Coach Tim Horton and his colleagues at the Radick Center, these are kids worth mentioning in the Hall of Fame. The section that follows provides a snapshot of an ordinary day at the Radick Center during which the students' authentic desire to be acknowledged both impressed the researcher and informed the course of this study.

It was just before dismissal on a Thursday afternoon. Bus riders were waiting to be called, and Coach Norton was showing me a bulletin board he had assembled on the gym wall displaying twenty-something sheets of colored paper boasting superlatives for various physical fitness activities. Under each heading was a short list of record-holding names. Intrigued by the one labeled "medicine ball throw," I casually commented on how impressed I was that someone could perform so many repetitions with such a heavy object. Coach agreed, and instantly a small crowd of students joined us in front of the Fitness Hall of Fame and began excitedly regaling the

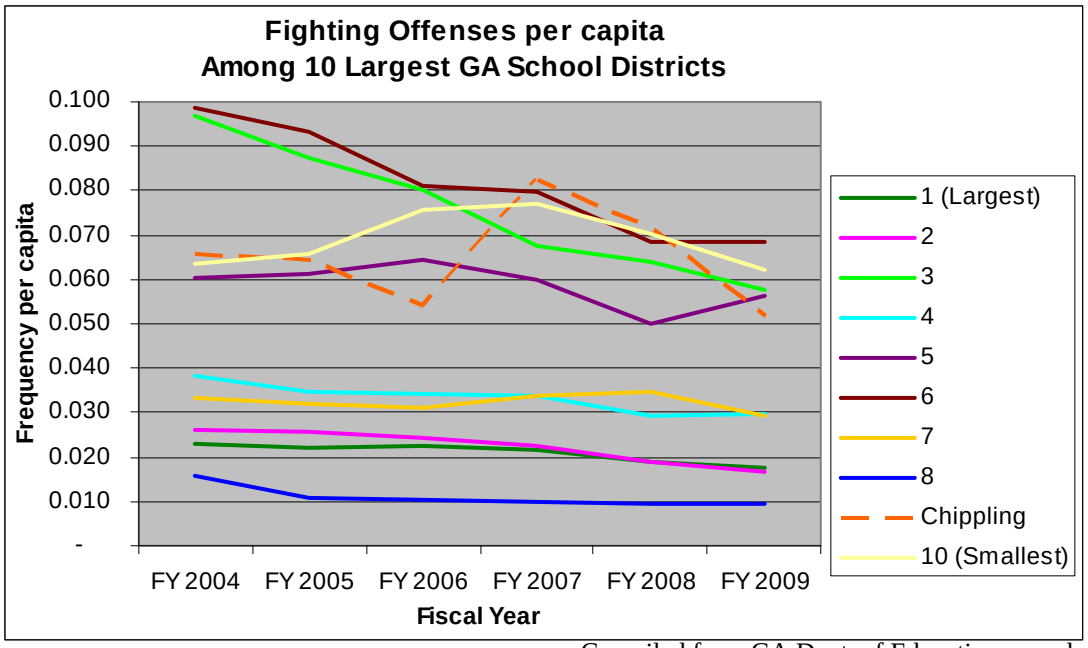
school-wide records they had broken. Rodney explained how he could now keep the punching bag going for a solid one minute 38 seconds. The leading point-scorer in boy's basketball used to be Marcus, but now it was D'ondre. And Shawnte was, by far, the fastest runner among the eighth grade girls.[1]

The three-dimensionality of these kids struck me. It was as if their desire to be recognized and valued momentarily surged out from under the low ceiling that bad choices, stigma, and lack of opportunity had built for them, to reveal some of the real stuff underneath. I remembered my own days as a student at the very same schools from which some of these students hailed. *When did discipline become all about punishment?*

Fighting has remained a leading cause of student suspensions in Chippling County since at least the 2005-06 school year.[2] The ninth largest school system in the state of Georgia, Chippling County Public Schools has consistently ranked among the top five since 2004 in terms of fights-per-capita when compared with the state's 10 largest systems.[3] As **Figure 1.1** indicates, Chippling County ranked number one among this group in fights per capita in 2007. Each year, physical fighting results in hundreds of arrests, thousands of suspensions, and countless physical, mental, and emotional costs for students, faculty, and parents throughout the school system. Just as teachers cannot teach while they are busy writing referrals or breaking up fights, a student's learning is impeded by chronic disruptions and threats to his or her personal safety. Moreover, high rates of violence and disciplinary action reflect poorly on the district as a

[1] Pseudonyms are used here and throughout this paper to protect the identities of students, parents, and faculty.
[2] Miller-Fields (2008); District Accountability System (2009).
[3] See **Appendix A**: Fighting Offenses per capita Among 10 Largest GA School Systems

whole and are associated with a variety of social ills including crime, low graduation rates, and the lack of an educated local workforce to attract investment.[4]



Compiled from GA Dept. of Education records

Figure 1.1

Parents, teachers, and administrators alike share a common disdain for anything that would stand between a child and the opportunity to take hold of his or her full potential through a quality education. Since the system's adoption of the zero tolerance approach to school discipline in early 2007, however, keenly high levels of out-of-school suspension and expulsion have become a salient concern in the Staycomb context. Enrollment at Staycomb's disciplinary alternative program, the Radick Alternative Learning Center, is strongly indicative of this reality. This program, which admits suspended[5] and expelled students for a certain length of time (usually about half a year to a full school year) depending on the severity of the offense, increased in size from 190 to 340 students (by 78 percent) over a span of just four months during

[4] The graduation rate in Chippling County has remained around 65% since 2005-06 (SYFA 2006, 2008).
[5] Unless otherwise noted, the term "suspension" when used by itself refers to out-of-school suspension (OSS).

the initial wave of zero tolerance.[6] This startling fact, mentioned in a *Staycomb Gazette* article, first brought to the researcher's attention the magnitude and urgency of the situation in Staycomb, and prompted a two year-long investigation into the issue. In the summer of 2008, the researcher worked with the Executive Director of the Staycomb Mediation Center to train several students at this alternative school to be peer mediators. During this time, the researcher became familiar with students' personal backgrounds and their perspectives surrounding conflict, dispute resolution, and discipline policy. This experience inspired the subsequent pursuit of related insights from parents, scholarly literature, community leaders, faculty, and administrators.

To assess the importance of suspension and zero tolerance in the Staycomb context, it is important to understand how Chippling County Public Schools compare to those across the state. **Figure 1.2** compares Chippling County's out-of-school suspension per capita rate to that of the 10 largest Georgia school systems. Since Chippling has the ninth largest enrollment size in this group, one might therefore expect Chippling to center around the ninth-place rank in terms of suspensions per capita. Unfortunately, however, this is not the case: from 2004 to 2009, Chippling has consistently remained in the topmost tier, *both before and after the system's implementation of zero tolerance*. This observation is interesting because it shows that Chippling's high use of exclusionary discipline cannot be attributed to zero tolerance policy itself; rather, zero tolerance must be viewed as a phenomenon arising from an already established policy disposition.[7]

[6] Few (2008)
[7] Lyons and Drew (2006)

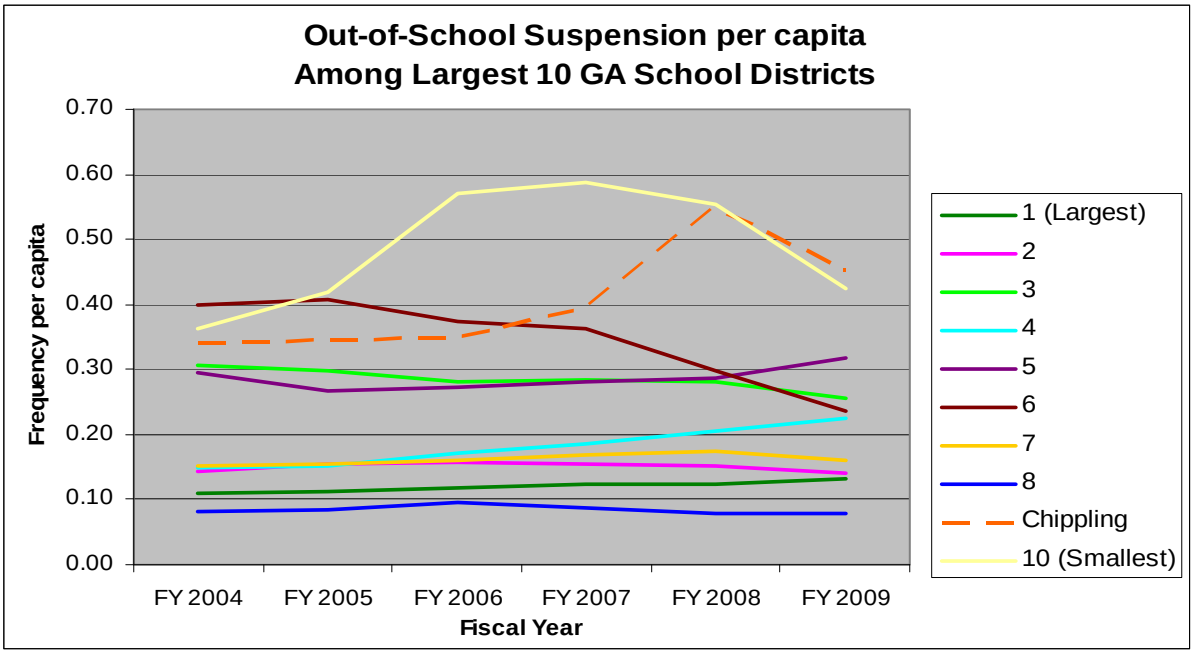


Figure 1.2

Compiled from GA Dept. of Education records

The sharp increase between 2007 and 2008 coincides with the school system's first full year in the implementation of the new 'get tough' policy. Yet even after a significant decrease between 2008 and 2009, Chippling is left ranked first among the 10 largest Georgia school systems for out-of-school suspensions per capita in 2009.

Because these aggregate numbers do not permit an analysis of recidivism trends among unduplicated students, it is also useful to look at the average number of times a typical out-of-school suspension student in Chippling was suspended. Data from the Youth Futures Authority reveals that this number has steadily increased to a disconcerting average of 2.6 times in 2008-09.[8] This relatively large rate of repeat offending raises questions as to the viability of out-of-school suspension as an effective deterrent for disruptive behavior in the Staycomb context. Nevertheless, Chippling County Schools ranked third in the state of Georgia in the amount of

[8] Staycomb Youth Futures (2010). Compiled using Chippling County School System data. (See **Appendix A**)

total suspensions and fourth in permanent expulsions in 2008 across all public school systems in Georgia.[9] This fact becomes even more compelling when taken alongside the fact that, of all the 159 counties in Georgia in 2007, Chippling had the 5th highest number of total juvenile prison commitments.[10]

Empirical evidence—both in local statistics and national research studies—shows that exclusionary discipline affects certain groups differently. For instance, 50.7 percent of all 9th graders in Staycomb were suspended in the 2007-08 school year, compared to 30 percent of all 7th graders and 11.5 percent of 5th graders.[11] Moreover, when accounting for race and gender, 54.1 percent of black 9th grade males were suspended in 2008-09, while this number was only 28.0 percent for white 9th grade males.[12] In addition to the higher representation of male, minority, and low socio-economic status students in national out-of-school suspension numbers,[13] national studies also show significant links between the heavy use of exclusionary discipline and patterns of racial disproportion in juvenile prisons.[14] Scholars also cite the reality that suspension often disproportionately impacts academically and behaviorally challenged students.[15] Since these students tend to already exhibit poor academic performance, they cannot afford to be away from the classroom. The discouraging cycle of disruption, suspension, and failure which often results can culminate in a student dropping out or being expelled.[16] When

[9] GA Dept. of Education (2008)
[10] SYFA (2007), pg. 45. Community Profile, citing the Juvenile Court.
[11] SYFA (2008), pg. 16-17. Data Compiled from SYFA (2006, 2007, 2008) and the Department of Juvenile Justice, with special thanks to K. Lord and T. Holmes of SYFA
[12] Ibid.
[13] Skiba et al. (2002); Kupchik and Ellis (2008)
[14] Nicholson-Crotty et al. (2009)
[15] Breunlin et al. (2002)
[16] De Ridder (1991)

students are punished repeatedly for their violent ways of handling disputes without being taught constructive alternatives for management of tense situations, this cycle is exacerbated.

This study is intended to shed fresh light into how conditions can be improved in Chippling County, the home of the researcher. It is in no way intended to deplore the sincere efforts of those in the public school system who tirelessly and creatively work for the edification of all its 34,000 students. Rather, on the contrary: by assessing what students, faculty, and parents are thinking about the culture of fighting in Staycomb public schools, policymakers may be further inspired to cultivate student discipline with relevance, clarity, and intentionality.

Any plan to sustainably reduce the number of exclusionary discipline referrals—the symptom—must therefore target the roots of school fights. But how does this happen? An important foundational step is to vigorously work to understand the social norms behind student conflict. This is precisely why this study—featuring surveys of 44 students, 7 parents, 22 faculty, and interviews of 3 students and 7 faculty and administrators—was conducted between January and March 2010.

The goals of the study were thus to:

1. ***Understand*** **the conflict culture at the Radick Center, thereby gleaning a cross-section of the dynamics at schools across the system;**
2. ***Assess*** **the potential role of conflict resolution and peer mediation training in the disciplinary process; and**
3. ***Examine*** **the impact of "get tough" zero tolerance policies on this culture.**

The main research questions were:

1. **What are the significant enabling factors associated with the "conflict culture"—defined as the social code which says fighting is the only viable way to solve conflicts?**

2. **How might these factors be effectively addressed?**

3. **Is a reliance on punitive discipline adequate to address Chippling County's high levels of student fighting?**

Pilot programs led by the Stacomb Mediation Center at four local public elementary, middle, and high schools in Chippling County have shown that peer mediation training can provide a valuable opportunity for students to personally rethink violence and explore better alternatives to fighting in order to resolve conflicts. The results of this study will therefore be used to inform the curriculum and implementation of a new peer mediation program sponsored by the Mediation Center, begun in seven area high schools during the 2009-2010 school year. By hearing from the students themselves about the culture behind their conflicts, teachers and school administrators may also be better informed and prepared to approach discipline problems in practical ways that are more constructive and less likely to foster recidivism and school-to-prison trajectories.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This literature review provides a conceptual backdrop for my own investigation into the student culture at the Georgia disciplinary alternative school in which this study takes place. The chapter begins with an introductory assessment of the trends and conditions associated with student fighting. It is then divided into two main sections corresponding to the core issues of this research: 1) theories about the causes of violent delinquency; and 2) scholarly arguments regarding exclusionary discipline practices in public schools. In the first of these, three prominent delinquency theories—social learning, control, and labeling theories—are presented, with an emphasis on the key concepts, historical developments, and principal critiques of each. Elijah Anderson's (1999) "code of the street" thesis is also discussed here, as it offers a unique cultural insight that formal criminological theory is unable to provide. The second section opens with an overview of disciplinary alternative education in the United States and Georgia in particular. I then trace the history of zero tolerance policies and explore different scholarly opinions as to the validity of this disciplinary approach. The chapter concludes with a reflective analysis highlighting points that have profound implications for this study.

Scholarly literature was collected using the Galileo database at the University of Georgia and online databases such as Social Work abstracts, CSA Illumina, and ERIC. I focused specifically on seminal theoretical works and well-cited articles from peer reviewed journals in the fields of sociology, education, and criminology such as the *Journal of Educational Research*,

Social Problems, *Law & Society Review*, *American Sociological Review*, *Youth & Society*, *Criminology*, and *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*.

On the Nature of Fighting Among Adolescents

Before we begin our investigation of the nature and causes of fights among juveniles, it is helpful to define what is meant by the oft-used terms aggression, violence, and fighting. Marcus (2007) establishes a continuum between aggression and violence based on severity and intensity. In this framework, both aggression and violence are defined as behaviors intended to harm another, but the term violence is reserved for instances of actual injury or risk of injury to a victim. These behaviors are distinctly different from other antisocial and delinquent acts—ie, stealing, vandalism, and substance abuse—for two reasons: 1) they are interpersonal by nature, and 2) they are intended to harm another.[17] Although intentionality can be difficult to assess and possesses a "fuzzy set"[18] of identifiable standards, it is fundamental to the disciplinary response of teachers, parents, and other observers in the case of everyday youth aggression because discerning the motivations of participants may often determine the disciplinary consequences each receives.[19] For the purposes of this paper, the term fighting will refer to aggression (or violence, if considered severe and/or illegal) between individuals in which at least one participant is bent on subduing or inflicting physical harm upon the other(s).

Confrontations often spark with verbal exchanges—accusations, threats, name-calling, curses—and soon ignite into punch-swinging and hair pulling. Participants may be unarmed except for hands and feet, or may wield weapons such as guns, knives, rocks, or clubs. Most fighting incidents fall into one of four categories: one-on-one, several-on-one, spontaneous

[17] Marcus (2007:10)
[18] Dodge, Coie, & Lyman (2006:722)
[19] Marcus (2007)

groups (that is, in a crowd or an event attended by students, punches thrown between individuals may erupt into a general melee), or gang fights.[20] This last genre is especially insidious because, unlike with other fights, authorities can do little to disband street gangs or prevent them from recruiting new members beyond on-campus security measures.[21]

While there exists no easily-defined recipe for aggressive behavior among adolescents, many scholars have identified common developmental risk factors and predictor pathways for later violence or serious delinquency.[22] The majority of these fall within the categories of individual, family, peer, school, and neighborhood factors.[23] These conditions vary in importance depending on a juvenile's age and include: having committed property crimes or status offenses; having few social ties and low popularity; using alcohol, tobacco, and/or illicit drugs; being male; having minority status; having high rates of criminality and normlessness among peers; having antisocial (violent or criminal) parents.[24] Moreover, the very nature of adolescence as a developmental period of many intense transitions is conducive to heightened mood shifts, strained parental bonds, and increases in risk-taking behavior that may pave the way for aggressive responses to conflict.[25] Certain personality types are also believed to motivate, or reduce the motivation for, an individual to act aggressively in a given context.[26] Interestingly, empathy is considered a risk factor here when it is absent or minimal.[27] Marcus' (2007) integrated model of developmental, personality, and situational risk factors for aggression and

[20] Thomas (2006:72-74)
[21] Thomas (2006:76)
[22] Hurst, King, & Smith (2003); Thomas (2006); Marcus (2007); Loeber, Lacourse, and Homish (2005)
[23] Loeber, Lacourse, and Homish (2005:215)
[24] Lipsey & Derzon (1999)
[25] Arnett (1999); Marcus (2007)
[26] Marcus (2007:56)
[27] Marcus (2007:107)

violence in adolescence includes a thorough cross section of these risk factors. An adapted version of his model appears in **Figure 2.1**.

Using data from the longitudinal Pittsburgh Youth Study, an empirical investigation by Loeber, Lacourse, and Homish (2005) of young urban males suggests a model outlining an individual's progression towards serious violence. According to this developmental pathway, a boy who exhibits bulling behavior early on is at risk of engaging in physical fights later, which eventually puts him at risk for more serious violent behaviors (ie, rape, strong-arm robbery, and homicide) down the road.[28]

Risk Factors for Aggression and Violence in Adolescence

Developmental Influences	**Situational Influences**	**Personality Influences**
Early Risk Factors (< age 12) ▪ General offenses ▪ Substance use ▪ Male gender ▪ Minority race ▪ Antisocial parents ▪ Problem behavior ▪ Low IQ ▪ Poor school attitude/grades ▪ Poor parent-child relationship ▪ Poor social ties *Late Risk Factors (ages 12-14)* ▪ Poor social ties ▪ Antisocial peers ▪ General offenses ▪ Male gender ▪ Antisocial parents ▪ Broken home ▪ Low family S.E.S.	*Provocation* ▪ Hostile attribution bias ▪ Assignment of blame ▪ Verbal ▪ Bully/victim status *Frustration* ▪ Dis-identification with school ▪ Peer rejection *Pain/Discomfort* ▪ Hot temperatures ▪ Shame/Jealousy *Alcohol/Drug Use* ▪ Frequency of use and intoxication ▪ Social context: alone; with peers *Incentives* ▪ Low cost situations ▪ Close relationships ▪ Low supervision *Aggressive Cues* ▪ TV, video violence ▪ Gun possession/ availability	*Sensation-Seeking* ▪ Impulsivity ▪ Thrill- and adventure-seeking ▪ Fight-seeking *Negative Affect* ▪ Poor anger control ▪ Poor anger coping ▪ Depressed mood/ Clinical Depression *Empathy* ▪ Low emotional empathy ▪ Low cognitive empathy *Source***:** Marcus (2007:108)

Figure 2.1

[28] Loeber, Lacourse, and Homish (2005)

Working backward from data of schoolboys reported having committing homicide, Loeber et al. (2005) deduced several predictive trends—for instance, 93.9% of the homicide offenders had exhibited violent behavior prior to the homicide. Moreover, the following factors were identified as significant predictors of violent behavior: 1) factors evident early in life (ie, "acting out" problem behavior and personality traits such as physical aggression, cruelty, and callous/unemotional behavior); 2) cognitive factors (ie, low school motivation); 3) poor and unstable child rearing factors (ie, physical punishment, having two or more caretaker changes prior to age 10, and poor supervision and communication); 4) delinquent peer behavior; 5) poor academic performance and truancy; 6) demographic factors (such as low family socio-economic status, teenage motherhood); and 7) residence factors (growing up in a disadvantaged neighborhood).

Loeber et al. also observe proximate causes such as weapon availability, gang membership, and drug dealing/use. The more of these risk factors a boy exhibited, the greater the odds he would later engage in serious violence.[29] Yet, because the majority of individuals who display lower-level forms of aggression do not end up perpetrating violent crimes, it is best to think of this developmental trajectory as a funnel or cascade.[30] Thus, individuals who do cross over into the second and third tiers of the developmental sequence (ie, physical fighting and violence) are at significantly greater risk of committing homicide later.[31]

[29] Loeber, Lacourse, and Homish (2005)
[30] Marcus (2007); see also Patterson and Yoerger (1997) for an explanation of the Cascade Model of Secondary Consequences of Antisocial Behavior.
[31] Loeber, Lacourse, and Homish (2005)

On the Prevalence of Fighting Among Adolescents

The Atlanta, Georgia-based Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), a branch of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (USDHHS), quantifies risk factors that threaten the health and safety of the American population, including fighting and violence among adolescents. The CDC's Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance (YRBS) System, which was developed in 1989 to monitor the causes of injury, death, and other social problems among youth in the United States, is comprised of a national survey, 39 state surveys, and 22 local (city or county-level) surveys conducted every two years. The subject populated ranged from students in grades 9-12.

Findings from this longitudinal record provide valuable insight into trends among adolescent fighting and violence both on and off school property. **Figure 2.2** shows the seven survey questions used year after year on the YRBS.

Violence-related questions from the Youth Risk Behavior Survey

Violence Questions:

1. "During the past 30 days, on how many days did you carry a weapon such as a gun, knife, or club?"
2. "During the past 12 months, how many times were you in a physical fight?"
3. "During the past 12 months, how many times were you in a physical fight in which you were treated by a doctor or a nurse?"

School Violence Questions:

1. "During the past 30 days, on how many days did you carry a weapon such as a gun, knife or club on school property?"
2. "During the past 12 months, how many times were you in a physical fight on school property?"
3. "During the past 12 months, how many times has someone threatened or injured you with a weapon such as a gun, knife, or club on school property?"
4. "During the past 30 days, on how many days did you not go to school because you felt you would be unsafe at school or on your way to or from school?"

Figure 2.2 *Source*: Marcus (2007:20)

While the percentage of students who had been in a physical fight (either on or off school grounds) decreased during 1991–2003 (from 42.5% to 33.0%), it increased during 2003–2007 (from 33.0% to 35.5%).[32] Meanwhile, the percentage of students who had been in a physical fight *on school property* decreased during 1993–2001 (from 16.2% to 12.5%) and then did not change significantly during 2001–2007 (from 12.5% to 12.4%).[33]

These aggregate numbers become very interesting when analyzed according to gender, race, and locality. Across the board, fighting on school property was more prevalent among blacks (17.6%) than among Hispanics (15.5%) and whites (10.2%) in 2007.[34] Furthermore, in the year 2007, over 50% of surveyed black males reported having been in at least one physical fight during the previous 12 months, compared to 47.3% of Hispanic males and 41.9% of white males.[35] At the state level, Georgia ranked fourth out of 39 surveyed states in both the percentage of students reporting having been in a physical fight on school property in the last 12 months (13.1%) and in the percentage of students reporting having fought at all during the same time period (34.0%).[36]

Because a subject's survey responses are not verifiable and there is often a high non-response rate among at-risk populations, one tends ever to be skeptical of anonymous self-reported data.[37] Yet a study by Brenner et al. (2002) of the reliability of the YRBS questionnaire found that all seven of the aggression- and violence-related items displayed moderate to substantial agreement when re-administered two weeks later to the same individuals in a random

[32] CDC (2008:32)
[33] CDC (2008:32)
[34] CDC (2008: 51)
[35] CDC (2008: 45).
[36] CDC (2008: 52, 46)
[37] Rutter and Giller (1984)

sample of 4,619 American youths aged 13 to 18.[38] Marcus (2007) also observes that YRBS data can be cross-validated with results from other surveys such as the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health) to reveal similar trends in the prevalence of violent behavior according to grade level. The general trend is that this aggressive behavior increases through elementary and middle school, peaks significantly around 8th and 9th grade, and drops off throughout the rest of high school.[39]

Fighting is one of the leading causes of suspension, expulsion, and placement at disciplinary alternative schools nationwide.[40] According to the National Center for Education Statistics et al. (2009), the largest percentage of schools that reported taking a disciplinary action in 2007–08 (31 percent) did so in response to a physical attack or fight.[41] Moreover, among all districts with alternative schools and/or programs in 2007-08, fighting was the most common offense which could, by itself, merit a student's transfer to an alternative setting.[42]

But why are students in the United States fighting so much? The theories reviewed in the following pages approach this question from a variety of different angles: criminology, sociology, and behavioral psychology. Each emphasizes specific relationships and causal factors which are said to inform of an adolescent's propensity to engage in delinquent behavior. Delinquency theories are useful to the study of student conflict because they provide a context for how and why an individual chooses to respond aggressively to different real or perceived stimuli. As Rutter and Giller (1984:40) explain, "there is substantial and meaningful overlap between aggression and delinquency." Moreover, a basic premise of what one scholar calls the

[38] Marcus (2007: 16), citing Brenner et al. (2002)
[39] Marcus (2007); Thomas (2006)
[40] Dinkes, Kemp, and Baum (2009: 64-67)
[41] Dinkes, Kemp, and Baum (2009: 64-65)
[42] Carter, Lewis, and Tice (2010: 11)

social "invention of delinquency"[43]—the special way society views and treats juvenile delinquents—is the idea that juveniles are immature and in need of guidance and help. Compared to adult criminals, juveniles are said to be treated with more an eye to their rehabilitation and much less on their punishment. However, this differential treatment has not always been the norm: prior to the 1800s, juvenile and adult offenders received basically the same sentences. Since this time, historical social movements regarding the condition of the poor children in urban areas have ushered in new ways of perceiving adolescent crime. Juvenile delinquency is thus, Agnew (2009) suggests, a social construct born of both genuine concern for disadvantaged children and partly because of the upper-class desire to manage the threats to society which these children represent. Fear of this perceived threat has spiked since the increase in media coverage that exaggerates and lacks a balanced perspective regarding juvenile crime.[44] Bernard (1992) observes that some beliefs about juvenile delinquency have remained consistent in American society throughout the past 200 years: notably, the public conception that today's juveniles commit more frequent and more serious crimes than did those of previous generations. This belief, he found, persisted regardless of whether actual rates of juvenile crime remained constant or were decreasing.[45]

Theories of Delinquency

Theories regarding causes and factors related to the onset of delinquency represent a valuable host of resources for this study. Each of the four theoretical lenses discussed in this section—social learning, control, labeling, and code of the street—expounds upon assumptions

[43] Agnew (2009:14)
[44] Lawrence (2007)
[45] Lawrence (2007:3), citing Bernard (1992)

and widely held beliefs regarding deviant behavior that underlie everything from parenting techniques, school discipline policies, and police practices. Social learning theory was selected for this review because of its emphasis on peer and parent relationships, which were common themes mentioned in pre-study interviews of students. As one of the leading criminological theories of the 20th and 21st centuries, control theory was chosen for the implications it has for understanding the mindset behind zero tolerance and other punitive approaches student discipline. Labeling theory is discussed for its insight into how the stigma attached to kids at alternative schools often serves as self-fulfilling prophecy. Although not a formalized theory, the code of the street thesis is included in this review because of the realistic cultural perspective it brings to the discussion—a perspective that, researchers suggest, applies to larger geographic and racial contexts than the one originally described.[46]

I. Social Learning Theory

We were all brought up, all we seen is our older brothers and that getting' into trouble and goin' to jail and all that shit…It's our brothers that are a little older, y'know, twenty something years old. They started doing crime. And when you're young, you look up to people. You have a person, everybody has a person they look up to. And he's doing this, he's drinking, he's doing that, he's doing drugs, he's ripping off people. Y'know, he's making good…money, and it looks like he's doin' good, y'know? So bang. Now it's our turn. We're here. What we gonna do when all we seen is fuckin' drugs, alcohol, fighting, this and that, no one going to school?

—Teenage boy in Boston public housing project[47]

Overview and Historical Development. The best-known of the interpersonal theories of delinquency is Social Learning Theory. This school of thought originated from Sutherland's roughly-hewn concept of *differential association,* a proposition he intended to help explain how a person comes to engage in criminal, or delinquent, behavior.[48] The key points of his hypothesis include:

1) Delinquent behavior, like other behavior, is learned.

[46] Stewart and Simons (2006:25)
[47] Quoted in MacLeod (1995:117)
[48] Sutherland (1947: 5-9)

2) Criminal behavior is learned as youths interact with each other, mainly in small, informal group settings.

3) The learning of criminal behavior includes techniques of committing the crime and the specific motives, rationalizations, and attitudes to support criminal behavior.

4) The learning of delinquent behavior stems from collective (group) experiences as well as particular (personal) situations and events.[49]

5) A youth becomes delinquent because of an excess of definitions *favorable* to violation of law over definitions *un*favorable to violation of the law.[50]

In other words, a person comes to act criminally (ie, use violence to solve a conflict) when the balance between counteracting forces (criminal versus non-criminal patterns he/she is exposed to) shifts in favor of committing the act. These 'differential associations', Sutherland (1955) explains, can vary in duration, frequency, priority[51], and intensity. A simple illustration of this concept is the Southern accent. Since a child who grows up in the Deep South has had longer, more frequent, earlier, and closer contact with others who speak with a Southern drawl than with those who do not, the child is more likely to exhibit this pattern of speech.[52]

Although Sutherland expressed some reservations about his theory—especially regarding the sufficiency of differential association to explain delinquent behavior in light of other important factors such as opportunity, intensity of need, and the availability of alternative behaviors[53]—many different scholars have built upon and modified the insights of differential

[49] Ibid.; Shoemaker (2010)
[50] Sutherland (1955: 78)
[51] Important in the sense that patterns learned in childhood may be more engrained than those learned later in life.
[52] Sutherland (1947: 9)
[53] Sutherland (1944)

association.[54] Burgess and Akers (1966) translated Sutherland's original hypothesis into a testable framework that would later become the basis for modern-day Social Learning Theory. By viewing differential association through the balance of influences on behavior, these authors addressed the much-critiqued imprecision of Sutherland's original description of the learning process. Their concept of *differential reinforcement* mirrors Sutherland's differential association hypothesis, but refers more directly to the balance of anticipated rewards and punishments associated with certain behaviors in different settings.[55] Because we as humans tend to repeat behaviors that are reinforced and avoid those that are punished, the theory asserts, we are more likely to engage in delinquency when others have affirmed our delinquency in the past and we anticipate that they will continue to reinforce it in the future.[56] Burgess and Akers' theory introduced important new tenets by drawing on concepts and learning mechanisms of behavioral psychology.[57] They named their revision "differential association-reinforcement"[58] theory, the main propositions of which are:

1) Criminal behavior is learned according to the principles of operant conditioning (ie, imitation and modeling).
2) It is learned both in *nonsocial* situations and through *social* interactions in which the behavior of other persons is reinforcing for criminal behavior.
3) Most of the learning of delinquency occurs in groups which serve as the individual's major sources of reinforcement (for juveniles, this is usually family and friends).

[54] for a more detailed overview, see Shoemaker (2010). See also Burgess & Akers (1966); Akers (1998)
[55] Akers & Jensen (2006)
[56] Agnew (2009)
[57] Akers & Jensen (2003), citing Skinner (1959)
[58] Akers (1998: 12)

4) Criminal behavior is a *function of norms* which are discriminative for criminal behavior, the learning of which takes place when such behavior is more highly reinforced than non-criminal behavior.
5) The strength of criminal behavior is a direct function of the amount, frequency, and probability of its reinforcement.[59]

This framework came to be called "Social Learning Theory" in Akers' *Deviant Behavior: A Social Learning Approach* (1973) and was organized into four testable hypotheses, which posit that an individual is more likely to engage in delinquency when:

1) He/She differentially associates with others who commit, model, and support violations of social and legal norms.
2) The violative behavior is differentially reinforced over behavior in conformity to the norm.
3) He/She is more exposed to and observes more deviant than conforming models.
4) His/Her own learned definitions are favorable toward committing the deviant acts.[60]

Because the intended purpose of this theory is to explain the process by which a person comes to engage in deviant behavior, Social Learning Theory emphasizes specific behavioral learning mechanisms. These primary of these are the processes of *operant conditioning*—the reinforcement of voluntary behavior through positive and negative rewards and punishment—and *stimulus discrimination and generalization*—the environmental and internal stimuli that provide cues or signals that elicit certain behaviors in certain situations.[61] Because these

[59] adapted from Akers (1998: 45)
[60] Akers (1985: 51)
[61] Ibid.

mechanisms are dynamic in nature and allow room for behavioral feedback, social learning theory holds that youths are changeable and can be taught pro-social behavior.[62]

A direct application of this model of differential reinforcement can be found in parenting practices which demonstrate how some youngsters are more likely to be reinforced for delinquency than others.[63] This support for violent attitudes and behavior may be direct—as in a child's observing of a repeatedly reinforced cycle of violence between parents and/or others nearby—or deliberate—as in some cases, where parents shun their children for running away from (or losing) a fight.[64] Reinforcement for delinquency may also be less deliberate and may simply consist of a lack of support for conventional behavior. For instance, when parents ignore a child who displays good manners at a social function or brings home good grades rather than praising him/her, the parents are neglecting to affirm the child's positive behavior. If the child is exposed enough to other delinquency-reinforcing stimuli, his/her behavioral definitions may shift to a ratio favorable to delinquency.[65] Heitmeyer and Anhut (2008) suggest this shift occurs because such children do not learn constructive models for handling negative feelings or situations and thus perceive that physical aggression is their only available option.

More recently, Akers (1998) has expanded on these ideas and posited a Social Structure-Social Learning (SSSL) theory of delinquency. The basic assumption of this model is that social learning is the primary process linking macro-level social structure to micro-level individual behavior. Consequently, Akers argues, differences in the social structure, culture, and locations of individuals and groups in the social system explain variations in crime rates (which are simply

[62] Lawrence (2007: 55)
[63] Agnew (2009); Anderson (1999)
[64] Anderson (1994)
[65] Agnew (2009)

aggregates of individual actions influenced by socially learned definitions).[66] The most important feature of this model is the emphasis placed on *the extent to which an environment is deviance-producing*; that is, how much cultural traditions, norms, social organization, and social control systems provide socialization, learning environments, reinforcement schedules, and opportunities conducive to conformity or deviance. A basic illustration of his integrated Social-Structure Social Learning model is found in **Figure 2.3**.

Basic Version of Akers' SSSL Model

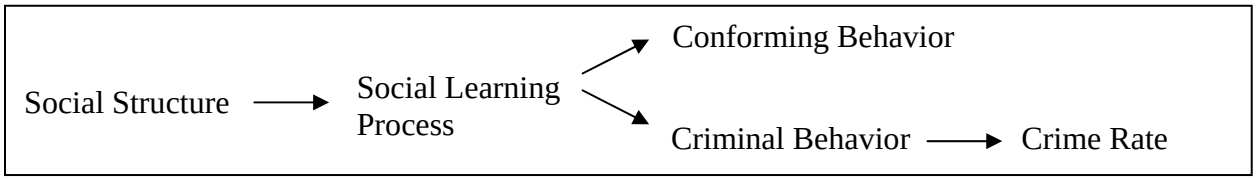


Figure 2.3 *Source*: Akers (1998:327)

Evaluation of the Theory. A great deal of empirical evidence supports Social Learning Theory's hypothesized connection between having delinquent peers and exhibiting delinquent behavior in adolescence.[67] In an investigation of marijuana and alcohol use among adolescents, Akers et al. (1979) isolated the following specific social learning mechanisms by which peer influence is exerted: 1) friends provide positive social reinforcement or punishment for abstinence or use; 2) provide normative definitions of use and abstinence; and 3) to a lesser degree, serve as admired models to imitate (p.644-647). Moreover, this same study found that reinforcements and punishments significantly influence whether young people choose to use or abstain from alcohol and marijuana. A longitudinal analysis of data from the Rochester Youth Development Study by Thornberry et al. (1994) also found that association with delinquent peers has an indirect effect on delinquency, operating through the reinforcing environment of peer

[66] Akers (1998)
[67] Thornberry et al. (1994); Adams (1996); Akers et al. (1979)

networks.[68] Patterson, Dishion, and Yoerger (2000) further discovered that deviant peer association significantly correlates to the development of antisocial behavior. Yet Bernburg and Thorlindsson's (1999) study suggests that exposure to peer delinquency has a greater effect on minor forms of delinquency (such as smoking and alcohol abuse) than on more serious behavior such as illegal activities or violence.

The literature shows a connection between social structure-related factors and the prevalence of violent delinquency and law-breaking norms among adolescents which is consistent with Akers' (1998) Social Structure Social Learning Model. Interestingly, Sutherland (1947:69-75) discussed the importance of elements of social structure (ie, social class) for structuring learning processes.[69] Important here, however, is the fact that most studies of economic adversity and community disadvantage in relation to the onset of delinquency have focused only the impact of structural position on parenting.[70] Some studies find that social structural factors (such as neighborhood, economic opportunity, etc.) and associations with parents and peers indirectly impact juvenile delinquency by influencing the learning of attitudes, beliefs, and motives about law breaking.[71] Heimer (1997) argues that socioeconomic status (SES) affects the violent definitions a child learns from his/her parents in the following way: since low-SES parents are more likely than affluent parents to work at jobs within coercive control structures that encourage obedience, this is transferred to parental discipline techniques in the form of power-assertive strategies such as commands, restrictions, threats, and physical punishment. This emphasis on power-assertive discipline inculcates in youth the idea that force

[68] Thornberry et al. (2003:28)
[69] Matsueda (1988)
[70] Thornberry et al. (2003); see also Sampson and Laub (1993); Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990)
[71] Matsueda (1982); Bruinsma (1992)

and coercion are acceptable ways to resolve problems.[72] Stern, Smith, and Jang (1999) found that structural variables like poverty, life stressors, and isolation negatively affect parental mood, which has a significantly disruptive effect on family processes like discipline, which in turn influences a child's aggressively externalizing of his/her problems. Unskilled parenting practices have also been found to be linked with high-risk contexts for the learning and practice of coercive behaviors.[73] A study by Sampson and Bertusch (1998) also supports the structural hypothesis with its finding that residents of inner-city "ghetto" areas of Chicago displayed high levels of legal cynicism, dissatisfaction with the police, and tolerance of deviance (generally defined). Accordingly, the authors conclude that normative definitions regarding law and delinquency are more strongly rooted in experiences related to neighborhood context rather than an intrinsic racial culture.[74] Stewart and Simons (2006) also found that neighborhood structural conditions (ie, neighborhood violence and neighborhood disadvantage) were predictors of the street code.[75] The formation and presence of these definitions favorable to violation of the law reveal empirical substance for the basis of Akers' SSSL Model.

Critics of Social Learning Theory (SLT) often argue that it fails to explain the empirically observed decrease in physical aggression over time by citing the age-crime curve.[76] This curve is drawn by graphing the violent crime rate over age and depicts a substantial increase in physical violence from early to late adolescence which gives way to a dramatic decrease across adulthood. According to some interpretations of SLT, the learning of more and more aggressive behaviors would result in a snowball effect which contradicts the age-crime curve. Thus, a better

[72] Heimer (1997); Snyder and Patterson (1987)
[73] Wiesner, Capaldi, and Patterson (2003)
[74] Sampson and Bartusch (1998)
[75] Stewart and Simons (2006)
[76] Tremblay and Nagin (2005)

explanation for violent delinquency in adolescence, some critics assert, is the levels of the hormone testosterone which closely mirror this curve throughout adolescence and adulthood. Testosterone also has the ability to explain the gender disparity in delinquency rates[77]: levels of this hormone are 20 times higher in males than in females by the end of adolescence.[78] Archer's (2006) research, however, suggests that hormonal changes alone may not be responsible for increased aggression among boys: rather, physical maturation produced by increased testosterone levels was likely responsible for elevated aggression.[79]

Other opponents of differential association/social learning cite the valid criticism that this theory is both non-falsifiable and empirically difficult to test.[80] The theory, critics argue, needs to specify the content and measurement of definitions favorable to criminal behavior: What exactly do these opinions, beliefs, and attitudes look like, and how can they be operationalized? Akers and Jensen (2006) have proposed a list of testable social learning variables which serve to empirically verify SLT: proportion of delinquent and non-delinquent peers, parental modeling, pro-social and deviant attitudes, media imitation, and informal positive and negative social sanctions (p. 45). Yet even where tautological criticisms are mitigated, the learning process itself cannot completely explain the reproduction of behavior in adolescents.[81] Important factors such as emotional recognition, societal- and self-controls, and reactions by the larger society which influence the version or reproduction of aggressive behavior patterns also must be taken into account.

[77] Van Goozen (2005)
[78] Tremblay and Nagin (2005:87)
[79] Marcus (2007:40)
[80] Matsueda (1988); Shoemaker (2010); Akers (1985:52-54); Hirschi (2002: 15)
[81] Heitmeyer and Anhut (2008:31)

Since they draw from a common, if diverse, body of criminological literature, the next two theories will be discussed only briefly. Still, these theories are significant contributors to criminological research and have important implications for the issues of discipline and stigma explored in this study.

II. Control Theory

Of all passions, that which inclineth men least to break the laws, is fear. Nay, excepting some generous natures, it is the only thing, when there is appearance of profit of pleasure by breaking the laws, that makes men keep them.
—Thomas Hobbes, *LEVIATHAN*[82]

Overview and Historical Development. Along with social learning theory, control theory is the leading explanations of delinquency.[83] But instead of seeking to explain why some people *do* commit delinquent acts, control theory assumes that all people are predisposed to commit delinquent acts and, thus, the real question one should ask is "Why do juveniles *not* commit delinquent acts?" Stated otherwise, "Why do juveniles conform?"[84] From this viewpoint, delinquency requires no special explanation; rather, it is taken for granted, while conformity must be explained. As control theory explains it, people do not engage in delinquency because of the controls or restraints (in the form of perceived bonds or attachment to society) to which they are subject. The variance in levels of control thus explains the different levels in delinquency exhibited among different individuals.[85] When bonds to society (or, for the purposes of this study, school) become weak or broken, the alienation which results supplies a reservoir of socially derived hostility that can account for forms of violent delinquency. Delinquency is thus defined by Hirschi (2002) as "acts, the detection of which is thought to

[82] Quoted by Hirschi (2002:5)
[83] Agnew (2009)
[84] Rutter and Giller (1984); Agnew (2009)
[85] Agnew (2009)

result in punishment of the person committing them by agents of the larger society (p.47)." This framework is illustrated in **Figure 2.4**.

General Model of Control Theory

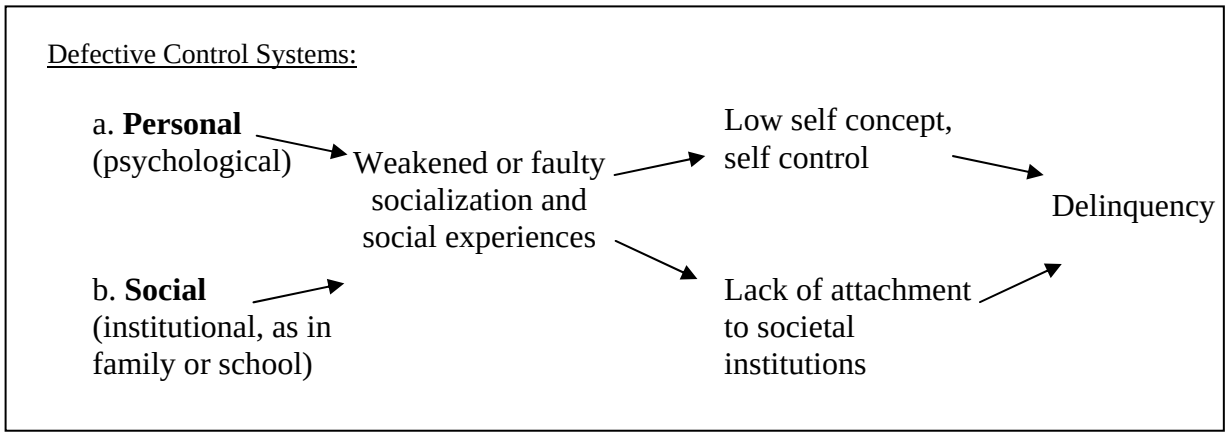


Figure 2.4 *Source*: Shoemaker (2010:211)

The origins of modern control theories stem from Reckless' work on *containment theory*, which holds as its basic assumption that delinquency is a result of poor self-concepts. The idea here is that forces toward delinquency must somehow be contained or controlled if delinquency is to be averted.[86] An example of this is that a child's positive self-concept acts as a buffer against the multifaceted pressures and pulls of delinquency. The drives toward deviant behavior are conceived by Reckless (1967) as four principal layers emanating from the self:

1) *inner/personal pushes*—personal psychological forces such as tensions and frustrations, impulsivity, the need for immediate gratification, feelings of inadequacy;

2) *inner/personal containments*—related to self control;

3) *outer/social containments*—such as institutionalized controls or societal norms; and

4) *outer/social pressures and pulls*—including "adverse living conditions" related to poverty, minority group status, delinquent companions, mass media inducements, etc.

[86] Shoemaker (2010:213)

Reckless associates the inner restraint on delinquent behavior with self-concept, and argues that personal containment is more important for the control of delinquency. The original question of "Why do juveniles *not* commit delinquent acts?" is thus explained by an individual's insulators or buffers, both social and internal.[87]

In 1969, Hirschi published a now classic work of control theory, *Causes of Delinquency*, in which he develops Reckless' original idea of *personal* controls by emphasizing the paramount significance of *social* controls in deterring delinquent behavior. His concept of the *social bond*, or the connection between an individual and the society, consists of four parts: attachment, commitment, involvement, and belief in a conventional value system. The strength of this theory is in the fact that these variables are able to be empirically tested and can be extracted from assessments of a person's delinquent behavior in order to be measured. Consequently, empirical tests of control theory tend to gravitate toward social institutions deemed to be vessels of control, namely religion, family, and the school.[88]

Like social learning, control theory postulates that delinquent behavior is less likely when it is punished and when conformity to social norms is reinforced. However, there is a major difference between the two: in the latter, motivations are assumed constant for everyone since our "animal instincts"[89] would have us all fulfill our wants and desires more easily through delinquent means. Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990) expounded upon these ideas and developed a "general theory of crime" which argues that most, if not all, crime and delinquency results from an underlying condition of low self-control. Interestingly enough, this view draws on learning processes to hypothesize that low self-control is not inborn, but rather *learned* at an early age,

[87] Shoemaker (2010)
[88] see, for instance, Unnever, Colvin, and Cullen (2004); Cochran, Wood, and Arneklev (1994)
[89] Hirschi (2002)

primarily in the family setting. Agnew's (2009:134-140) review of the major types of restraints to delinquency thus includes the following major controls:

1) *direct control*
    - setting rules, monitoring, sanctioning delinquency, and reinforcing conventional behavior;
2) *having a stake in conformity*
    - emotional attachment to conventional others, actual and anticipated investment in conventional activities;
3) *beliefs*
    - extent to which people view delinquency as morally wrong; and
4) *self-control*
    - ability of an individual to restrain themselves from acting on their immediate desires.

Evaluation of the Theory. While there is a preponderance of research evidence in support of certain aspects of control theory,[90] correlations between social bonds and delinquency have been found on multiple occasions to vary in different contexts. For instance, Gardner and Shoemaker (1989) found that social bond variables were significantly indicative of delinquency among rural youth, but not among their urban counterparts. Moreover, an analysis of self-reported data in the Philippines and France show that social bond variables only account for a meager percentage of delinquent conduct among adolescents, while studies in the Netherlands conclude just the opposite, namely, that social bond levels are consistently correlated with delinquency.[91]

The importance of the self control variable is also contested throughout the literature. Yet while some empirical studies conclude that low self control is indeed a primary underlying cause of crime and delinquent behaviors[92], Pratt and Cullen's (2000) longitudinal analysis finds

[90] For an overview of studies in support of control theory, see Shoemaker (2010:209-257) and Gottfredson (2006)
[91] Shoemaker (1994); Hartjen and Priyadarsini (2003); and Junger and Marshall (1997)
[92] Vazsoyni et al. (2001); Felson and Staff (2006)

no support for such a claim. Still others conclude that low self control is one of a list of factors—including poverty, social bonds, delinquent peers, and general strain—which help explain delinquency.[93] Shoemaker (2010) and Agnew (2009) raise a valid question at this point: since levels of self control are, in actuality, anything but constant[94], what accounts for fluctuations in self control? Perhaps, as Adams (1996) suggests, this is where social learning processes and control theory overlap, and where the two point to the need for a more integrated model to better understand the causes of delinquency.

III. Labeling Theory

Sometimes I ain't so sho who's got ere a right to say when a man is crazy and when he ain't. Sometimes I think it ain't none of us pure crazy and ain't none of us pure sane until the balance of us talks him that-a-way. It's like it ain't so much what a fellow does, but it's the way the majority of folks is looking at him when he does it.
—William Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying*[95]

Overview and Historical Development. In contrast to containment theory, which argues that delinquency is a result of poor self-concepts, labeling theory holds that negative self-concepts are the result of having been labeled as a delinquent.[96] Labeling theory draws attention to the reaction to delinquency—both the *official* reactions by the justice system and *informal* reactions by parents, peers, teachers, and society at large—as a primary cause of future delinquency. As Agnew (2009) summarizes, labeling theorists argue that individuals who are labeled "delinquent" are often perceived as 'evil' or 'bad' people. This inauspicious characterization erodes a person's self-concept because it leads others in society to reject and treat them harshly. The "tagging" and treating of a person as though he is defective and delinquent thus creates a self-fulfilling prophecy and sets in motion processes which conspire to

[93] Doherty (2006); McGloin and Shermer (2009)
[94] Burt et al. (2006); Hay and Forrest (2006)
[95] Quoted by Becker (1973)
[96] Shoemaker (2010:212)

shape the individual in the image people have of him.[97] Labeling theorists thus seek not to explain initial acts of delinquency (primary deviance), but to understand the continuation deviant behavior and possibly progressions to more serious crimes (secondary deviance).[98] This process is illustrated in **Figure 2.5**.

Basic Model of Labeling Theory

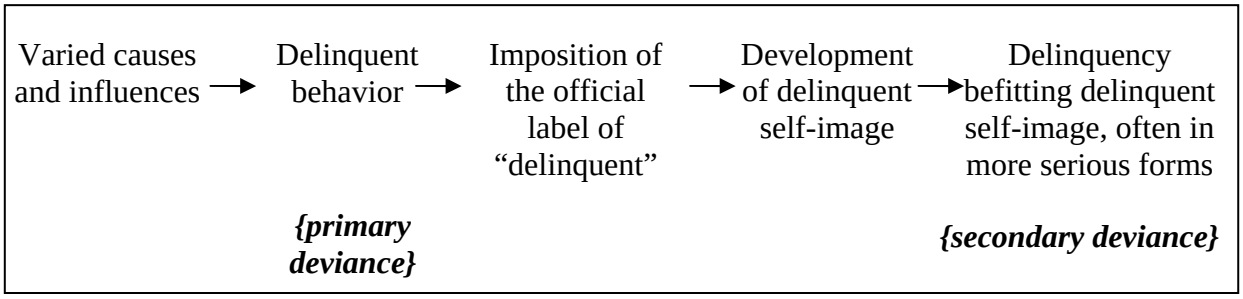


Figure 2.5 *Source*: Shoemaker (2010:260)

Drawing on control, social learning, and strain theories, labeling theory asserts that this imposed identification increases the probability of delinquency because juveniles:

1) Experience a deterioration of social bonds—such as attachment to society and belief in societal norms—because conventional others do not want to associate with them and they find it hard to maintain a stake in society;
2) Experience greater opportunities for social learning of deviant behavior, since now the only people willing to associate with them are delinquents themselves;
3) Experience elevated strain, or stress, since others treat them harshly and they have difficulty achieving their goals; and
4) Eventually come to identify themselves as a delinquent and act accordingly, since that is how others view them and treat them (p.146).

[97] Becker (1973:34)
[98] Agnew (2009), Lemert (1951:75)

The origins of modern labeling theory can be traced back to Tannenbaum's (1938) assertion of the societal labeling process, explained in his book *Crime and the Community*:

> The process of making the criminal is a process of tagging, defining, identifying, segregating, describing, emphasizing, making conscious and self-conscious; it becomes a way of stimulating, suggesting, emphasizing, and evoking the very traits that are complained of. The person becomes the thing he is described as being (p. 19-20).[99]

Lemert (1951) developed this idea with this hypothesis about the central role of social reactions in promoting further delinquency. Lemert uses the analogy of a mathematical fraction to demonstrate how these responses are determined. The top of the fraction, or the numerator, represents the amount of some disapproved conduct in a given place, while the denominator measures the degree of tolerance which the people of that society have toward the behavior in question. When this ratio reaches a certain point (ie 1 to 1), the people in the locality will begin to do something about that behavior. Lemert refers to this as the *tolerance quotient* of a given society (p. 57). Labeling theorists highlight three main types of social responses to delinquency:

1) Harsh/rejecting reaction, whereby others do not simply view the juvenile's behavior as bad, but also the juvenile him/herself as bad. This line of thinking usually leads others to reject offenders because they dislike and/or fear them and treat them in ways that are excessively punitive, disrespectful, abusive, and/or unfair.[100]

2) Failure to respond to delinquent behavior, because either a) the juveniles are never caught, b) others ignore the behavior or only mildly sanction it.

3) "Condemn the delinquency but accept the juvenile" reaction, in which the act itself is disapproved of, but the child is not rejected.

[99] For an historical overview, see Gove (1980) and Shoemaker (2010:259-264)
[100] Sherman (1993)

This last approach is strongly favored in recent literature because it does not reduce a juvenile's social bonds to conventional others, does not increase strain since there is no harsh/rejecting treatment, does not facilitate the social learning of delinquency since he/she is not driven to associate with delinquent peers, and does not lead the child to view him- or her-self as a bad person.[101] Studies suggest that the reality, however, is that many youngsters experience the harsh/rejecting reaction. This occurs particularly when these youth: a) engage in delinquency that conventional others find out about; b) are poor, older, and members of certain minority groups; c) when they are low in control and "hang" around delinquent others.[102]

In recent decades, labeling theory has undergone a few additive changes. Becker (1973) proposes three different types of deviants (that is, delinquents): 1) the *pure* deviant, a known rule-breaker; 2) the *falsely accused* deviant, one whose acts are actually conforming but are perceived by others to be delinquent; and 3) the *secret* deviant, a rule-breaker that goes unnoticed by others as having committed a delinquent act. Becker (1973), Lemert (1974), and Schur (1980) also came to argue for a reconsideration of the theory from an *interactionist* perspective; that is, one that takes into account the ways the behaviors of an individual actor and society impact each other and the situations in which these mutual effects take place.

Evaluation of the Theory. While qualitative data suggests tentative alignment with certain claims of labeling theory, supportive empirical data appears to be few and far between.[103] Meade (1974) asserts that, since "objective behavioral measures (recidivism), either in the form of official records or self-report responses, lack the sensitivity required for valid testing of the labeling process… [t]he labeling perspective necessarily requires subjective data for verification.

[101] Agnew (2009:148-152)
[102] Agnew (2009:156)
[103] Agnew (2009), Shoemaker (2010)

(p. 88)." Yet the qualitative evidence in support of the theory is noteworthy. In a classic study of two gangs of white boys, the Saints and the Roughnecks, Chambliss (1973) called attention to the selective ways in which society defines and sanctions delinquent behavior according to the reputation of the actor. Although both gangs were equally deviant, the upper-middle class, high-achieving, and well-mannered Saints were considered "good boys who just went in for an occasional prank" and went unnoticed when they engaged in delinquent behavior. On the other hand, the poor, outspoken, undiplomatic, and highly visible Roughnecks were deemed "tough" kids and were constantly in trouble with the police. Chambliss concludes his observations with a striking inference:

> [The Saints] will sow their wild oats—perhaps even wider and thicker than their lower-class cohorts—but they won't be noticed. When it's time to leave adolescence most will follow the expected path, settling into the ways of the middle class, remembering fondly the delinquent but unnoticed fling of their youth. The Roughnecks and others like them may turn around, too. It is more likely that their noticeable deviance will have been so reinforced by police and community that their lives will effectively be channeled into careers consistent with their adolescent background (p. 31).

Longitudinal studies of self-reported delinquency suggest that negative reactions from others are associated with feelings of self-rejection, dispositions toward deviance, associations with delinquent peers, and self-reported delinquent behavior.[104] Such a study by Bernburg, Krohn, and Rivera (2006) provides empirical support to the idea that official exclusionary and marginalizing processes triggered by deviant labeling may often explain the individual's subsequent membership in delinquent groups.[105] Still, Patternoster and Iovanni (1989) argue

[104] Kaplan and Johnson (1991)
[105] Bernburg, Krohn, and Rivera (2006)

that there is no uniform effect of public (formal or informal) labeling. In fact, in certain contexts, applying labels can serve positive reforming functions.[106] This is seen in the successful program of Alcoholics Anonymous, whereby an alcohol abuser pronounces him/herself an alcoholic in order to identify and solve the problem.[107]

IV. The Code of the Street

One ought to be both feared and loved, but as it is difficult for the two to go together, it is much safer to be feared than loved, if one of the two has to be wanting.
—Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince* (p.55)

The street code says it is better to be feared than loved.
—Elijah Anderson (1999:102)

Although not a formalized theory, Anderson's (1994, 1999) landmark urban anthropological work among a lower-class black population in inner-city Philadelphia—an urban setting similar to the context of this Georgia study—provides poignant insight into the socio-cultural causes of violence among adolescents. Anderson (1999) argues that living conditions characterized by high rates of poverty, lack of opportunities, racial discrimination, alienation, and relative deprivation place young people—especially African American males—at particular risk of falling victim to aggressive behavior. This "code of the street" thesis is intended to describe and understand the oppositional sub-culture founded upon a system of informal rules regarding the use of violence in this type of hard urban environment. Stewart and Simons (2006) note that although Anderson's study took place in inner-city Philadelphia, this normative framework is also alive and well outside the inner city and the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States (p. 25).

[106] Thorsell and Klemke (1972)
[107] Trice and Roman (1970)

When it comes to understanding the role of families in this context, Anderson draws two distinctions (although it is possible to switch back-and-forth between each in different situations). There are the "decent" families (as inner-city residents put it) who are strong, loving, and committed to middle-class values, and then there are the "street" families who operate on norms opposed to those of mainstream society. Anderson observes that familiarity with the code of the street even among decent families is essential because "it is literally necessary for operating in public. Therefore, though families with a decency orientation are usually opposed to the values of the code, they often reluctantly encourage their children's familiarity with it in order to enable them to negotiate the inner-city environment (p. 33)."

At the core of this code of violence is the issue of respect, which Anderson (1994) defines loosely as "being treated 'right,' or granted the deference one deserves (p.82)." Respect is something that must be constantly guarded, and is often one of the only accessible and most important forms of social capital that an inner-city resident can accumulate. The flipside to this dynamic, however, is vengeance, or payback. According to Anderson (1999), children learn this code early in life and are taught the preeminence of presenting oneself as having a predisposition to violence in order to protect against future assaults:

> "A person's public bearing must send the unmistakable, if sometimes subtle, message that one is capable of violence, and possibly mayhem, when the situation requires it, that one can take care of oneself. The nature of this communication… can involve facial expressions, gait, and direct talk—all geared mainly *toward deterring aggression* (p. 72, emphasis added)."

If an individual is unable to command respect based on their appearance and demeanor, then he or she may embark on a "campaign for respect"[108] which is characterized by a zero-sum

[108] Anderson (1999:

mentality and the accumulation of material and nonmaterial trophies by taking them from others: A trophy "can be another person's sense of honor, snatched away with a derogatory remark. It can be the outcome of a fight… even somebody else's girlfriend can become a trophy (75)." Anderson notes that in the wider society, middle-class people would not feel a need to physically retaliate after an attack even though they are quite aware they have just been degraded or taken advantage of. Yet in a poverty-stricken, urban black community, to run away from such a situation would only invite further disrespect and would be disastrous to the individual's identity, self-respect, and honor.[109]

The code of the street thesis has strong implications for understanding why urban students fight—and how they *learn* to fight—on and off school property. Local city schools often serve as a "staging area for the streets" in which young people present themselves, represent their neighborhoods, and stay even with or get ahead of their peers.[110] Moreoever, schools serve as a place at which children can "pour their individual life experiences in a common knowledge pool, mixing, negating, affirming, confirming, and elaborating on what they have observed in the home and matching their skills against those of others."[111] Here and elsewhere, even small children learn the social meaning of fighting by testing one another. Pushing and shoving is readily reciprocated, and the child who is toughest prevails. Personal experiences and the observations of disputes among older children reinforce a common message which is often also affirmed at home: "might makes right; toughness is a virtue, humility is not."[112]

[109] Anderson (1999:76)
[110] Anderson (1999:94)
[111] Anderson (1999:69)
[112] Anderson (1999:69)

Studies of how juveniles learn to use violence to resolve disputes are essential to our understanding of student conflict, but they do not answer the deeper question regarding the *origin* of this code in the first place. A compelling survey of disadvantaged neighborhoods across the nation by Kubrin and Weitzer (2003) reveals that conflict is often handled informally and violently because residents of these underprivileged communities are dissatisfied with the kind and quality of police protection. There are two main reasons for this: 1) police tend to normalize black-on-black violence in low-income, high-crime communities and therefore respond less vigorously to these calls than in more affluent areas; and 2) police practices in these areas are traditionally considered abusive and discriminatory. This "policing vacuum," coupled with the resulting alienation from the authorities, may lead residents to take matters into their own hands in the face of real or perceived inadequacies in law enforcement—thus contributing to the development of informal cultural codes.[113] As Anderson (1999) aptly put it, "The code of the street…emerges where the influence of the police ends and where personal responsibility for one's safety is felt to begin (p.34)." Bellair, Roscigno, and McNulty (2003) add to this dialogue by linking the labor market opportunities a young person perceives to have (heavily influenced by the current economic and occupational status of the adults related to and/or around them) to the social learning of delinquency. Their study suggests that when employment prospects and economic mobility appear dim, adolescents conclude they cannot rely on legitimate social mobility opportunity, which places them at greater risk for engaging in violent delinquency (p. 25). Moreover, another study by Bellair and associates found a significant *negative* correlation

[113] Kubrin and Weitzer (2003:159)

between a professional (as opposed to service-sector) community context and male adolescent violence.[114]

Anderson's (1999) observation of the code of the street which views the world as a dangerous place in which one must act tough to deter aggressive encounters strongly resembles Colvin's (2000) concept of "coercive ideation," which refers to the perception that the social environment is filled with forces that can only be overcome through coercion (p. 6).[115] Unnever, Colvin, and Cullen's (2004) study finds a positive and significant link between a youngster's level of coercive ideation and their proclivity to delinquent involvement. The attitudes which underlie Anderson's code of the street thesis find further support in Stewart and Simons' (2006) study of youth in Georgia and Iowa. Overall, their results showed that a large percentage of adolescents self-reported agreement with the following questions: "When someone disrespects you, it is important that you use physical force or aggression to teach him of her not to disrespect you; If someone uses violence against you, it is important that you use violence against him or her to get even; People will take advantage of you if you don't let them know how tough you are; and People do not respect a person who is afraid to fight physically for his/her rights (p.12)."

Overview of Disciplinary Alternative Education

In public school systems that seek to effectively educate all children, alternative education provides innovative learning opportunities for students that, for one reason or another, have not been able to succeed in a traditional public school environment. Tailored to the needs of specific student populations, these intervention/prevention vehicles identify and address common risk factors associated with the educational disengagement of today's youth. The idea

[114] Bellair, Roscigno, and Vélez (2003:215)
[115] Unnever, Colvin, and Cullen (2004)

of alternative education is a broad concept, however, and for the purposes of this paper, alternative schools will be classified based on Raywid's typology[116], which groups alternative schools according to their intended goal and whether a student is affiliated by choice, sentence, or referral, respectively:

- ***Type I** alternatives*, schools of choice which utilize innovative instruction and curriculum in effort to challenge 'gifted and talented' students or students seeking individualized instruction;
- ***Type II** alternatives*, with behavior modification as the primary goal, wherein disruptive students are contained, segregated, and disciplined in a "soft jail" setting; and
- ***Type III** alternatives*, short- to medium-term programs for students in need of remedial assistance or social/emotional treatment, which seek to prepare them for re-entry into mainstream programs.

The students served by Type II and III alternative schools, most of whom are classified 'at risk' because of economic and/or socio-cultural factors which are said to inform of their proclivity to fail or drop out of school, face especially difficult challenges in their educational growth. Thus, alternative education programs seek to mitigate these obstacles by offering their students the appropriate environment and academic support they need to succeed. In general, alternative *schools* are usually housed in a separate facility where students are removed from regular schools, while alternative *programs* are usually housed within regular schools.[117] For the purposes of this paper, this study was conducted at an alternative *school* (Sewtycomb Alternative School) in Camberry County, Georgia.

[116] Raywid (1994:27)
[117] Carver, Lewis, and Tice (2010:1)

According to the 2007-08 report on public alternative schools and programs for students at risk of education failure by the National Center for Education and Statistics (NCES), urban school districts with more than 10,000 students, districts in the Southeast, districts with high minority student enrollments, and districts with poverty concentrations greater than 20 percent were more likely than other districts to have alternative schools and programs for at-risk students.[118] Since Camberry County, Georgia, fits all of these criteria, it is not surprising that it would have at least one such alternative school.

The majority of alternative learning centers are schools of choice, meaning that the decision to send a child to one of these non-traditional schools is made by the student's parents or legal guardian. Disciplinary alternative education programs, on the other hand, which utilize discipline to modify the behavior of particularly disruptive students, are both punitive and mandatory. Students are placed at these (Type II) schools as a "last chance" prior to full juvenile custody, and are typically referred on the basis of severe infractions of the code of conduct—such as fighting either on or off school property—or criminal activity. The purpose of these institutions is to create a "soft jail" environment whereby disruptive students are separated from the rest of the public school student body for a specified amount of time or until behavior standards are met.[119] Whereas Type I schools assume that something is wrong with instructional programs that are not meeting the needs of students, Type II (disciplinary) schools operate on a deficit-thinking model, which assigns responsibility for student failure based largely on individual factors like family characteristics, poverty, or minority status—ignoring external

[118] Carver, Lewis, and Tice (2010)
[119] Aron (2006); Raywid (1994)

variables like school condition and societal factors.[120] These students, the model implies, require "fixing" in order to become socially and economically productive citizens.[121]

It is important to note here, however, that these alternative schools are much more than a first glance would reveal. Research reveals that at-risk students who attend alternative schools are "quite capable of achieving success" and able to grow in terms of "value added" when exposed to a supportive educational environment.[122] There is, however, a crucial difference between Type II and Type III alternative schools, as Raywid (1994) points out. A 1981 study on Type II alternatives in Florida showed that these strictly punitive programs did very little to resolve the problems—ie, dropout, suspension, expulsion, and referral rates—they were designed to address. On the other hand, student behavior, attendance, and the amount of credits earned often improve in the supportive atmosphere of Type III alternatives.[123] Yet these Types are not mutually exclusive—as Raywid explains, a compassionate staff may give a Type II program Type III overtones. In general, anecdotal evidence shows that supportive alternative schools can serve as successful interventions for potential dropouts by reducing truancy, improving student attitudes toward school, and reducing behavior problems.[124]

Unfortunately, the social stigma applied to these disciplinary alternative programs and their students is a well-noted phenomenon among educational scholars and practitioners alike.[125] As one alternative school administrator aptly explains, "Unfortunately, members of the general public—and many educators, as well—often define the students in alternative schools by the

[120] Reyes (2006); Kim & Taylor (2008); Valencia (1997)
[121] Wishart et al. (2006)
[122] McGee (2001); Aron (2006)
[123] Raywid (1994:28), citing FL Office of Planning and Budgeting (1981)
[124] Cash (2004); Morrison et al. (2001); NDPC (2008)
[125] Kim & Taylor (2008); Reyes (2006); McGee (2001)

difficulties they face rather than by their ability to overcome these difficulties."[126] Consequently, DASs often contend with the notion that these schools are 'dumping grounds' or 'warehouses' for at-risk students who are, or may become, juvenile delinquents.[127] Taken to the extreme, this line of thinking, as verbalized by one school principal, can prompt what Epp & Epp (2001) term the "easy exit"[128] of difficult students:

> "Just get rid of them, dump 'em; it cleans out those kinds of kids from the regular school and makes the regular school a better school. It makes the regular school less impacted by resistant kids, truant kids, tardy kids, behavior problem kids."[129]

Some scholars even cite linkages between suspension, "last chance" disciplinary alternative schools, and juvenile prisons. Students on this 'school-to-prison pipeline' are much more likely to be held back in grade, repeatedly suspended, placed in restrictive special educational programs, and banished to alternative settings before dropping out or getting expelled.[130] It is in this context that the nature and causes of fighting—one of the most common offenses resulting in exclusionary discipline policies—become of great importance.

Alternative Education in Georgia

The establishment of the Atlanta Postal Street Academies in 1970 for students who had dropped out of school was the first official effort to engage students out of the mainstream education system in Georgia. At first, this chain of three schools was funded by several federal sources, but as funds dried up, leaders behind this movement founded EXODUS, a nonprofit which sought to reach out to at-risk students. This program was so successful and innovative

[126] McGee (2001: 589)
[127] Kim & Taylor (2008: 207)
[128] Epp & Epp (2001)
[129] Kelly (1996: 108)
[130] Wald & Losen (2003:11); Kupchik & Ellis (2008);

that President Jimmy Carter decided to expand the effort of this 'alternative education' nationwide in 1977, creating and funding a new non-profit organization, Cities In Schools, Inc (CIS). After five years, however, federal funding for CIS was cut, and the program went to local businesses for help. Neil Shorthouse, an advocate for alternative education programs since the early 1970s, finally convinced Georgia Governor Zell Miller to begin funding the development of alternative schools in local school systems in 1994. In this way, Georgia's official Alternative Education Program was born.[131]

CrossRoads Alternative School Program (as it was first called) was designed for students who had been removed from regular classroom settings due to chronic disruptions, and focused on providing both the academic and non-academic services they needed to succeed. It remained state funded until the year 2000, with the passage of Governor Roy Barnes' A+ Education Reform Act. This comprehensive reform legislation (House Bill 1187)—in addition to lowering the age of compulsory school attendance from seven to six and mandating Criterion-Reference Competency Tests for students in grades one through eight—required that CrossRoads grants be discontinued, and instead, funds set apart in the Quality Basic Education (QBE) Act of 1985 be used to provide for a new Alternative Education Program for students in grades 6-12. The program which grew from this legislation is still in place today.[132]

The Zero Tolerance Approach to School Discipline

By the time President Clinton signed the 1994 Guns-Free Schools Act into law, the juvenile homicide rate had tripled since 1985.[133] This landmark legislation, which mandated

[131] GA Dept. of Ed. (2006)
[132] GA Dept. of Ed. (2006); GA Dept. of Ed. (2008)
[133] Dohrn (2002)

expulsion for a full calendar year for the possession of a weapon on school property and the referral of offending students to the juvenile justice system, prompted the quickest-ever wave of new compliant state laws passed in order to maintain federal funding eligibility.[134] Taken from language in state and federal drug enforcement policies in the 1980s, the term "zero tolerance" soon came to be applied to these recently introduced disciplinary measures that impose strict penalties—usually suspension or expulsion—on serious and minor offenses alike.[135] The original intention of this stance was to ensure the safety of schools by swiftly removing and punishing threats of violence. Since the late 1990s, however, an increasingly vocal number of scholars and practitioners alike have raised questions as to the ability of the zero tolerance strategy to achieve this goal because of the various unintended consequences associated with it. In the following paragraphs, I outline the basic arguments in support of and against the zero tolerance approach to school discipline and conclude this literature review by reflecting on themes significant for this study.

Those in favor of the uncompromising nature of zero tolerance ground their position on stark realities such as the shootings in Jonesboro, Arkansas in 1998 and at Columbine High in Littleton, Colorado in 1999. The foundation of their argument is one derived from conventional wisdom—namely, that because students have a right to a safe and orderly learning environment, disorderly and violent forces must be removed. This policy of exclusion for dangerous students is called for not simply to protect the rights of other children, but because the lives of students and school staff are at stake. As Hymowitz (2005) explains, "…as the threats continue and the bombs and guns appear, it's all we've got (p. 26)." As the application of zero tolerance has

[134] Dohrn (2002)
[135] Skiba and Peterson (1999:366)

expanded to also include chronically disruptive students since the early 2000s, proponents of the approach cite other pressing reasons such as the inability of the school to perform its core mission: academic instruction. One exasperated school principal put it this way when faced with the decision to indefinitely suspend an especially difficult student: "Kids like him just can't be helped. They take up so much of my time and keep teachers from serving the needs of other children who are here to learn. It may not be the best thing for him, but right now, it's the best thing for the school."[136] Albert Shanker, former president of the American Federation of Teachers, echoes this concern for the learning of the other students by maintaining that zero tolerance policies demonstrate to both offenders and would-be-offenders "a very clear connection between behavior and consequences." He frames this issue of deterrence in the following way:

> When a youngster does something that is terribly wrong, and all of the other youngsters are sure that something is going to happen to him because he did something wrong, we had better make sure that we fulfill the expectations of all those other youngsters that something's going to happen. And they're all going to say, "Thank God, I didn't do a terrible thing like that or I would be out there, and something would be happening to me." That is the beginning of a sense of doing something right, as against doing wrong.[137]

Thus, by applying immediate consequences without regard for extenuating circumstances, an effective system of deterrence from future acts of violence or disruption is said to be established.

While agreeing that the safety of schools should be a paramount concern, critics of zero tolerance policies find that this approach promotes knee-jerk reactions to behavior that fail to

[136] Noguera (2003)
[137] Shanker (1995:360)

respond to the student's unmet needs or the factors responsible for the problem behavior.[138] As Reyes (2006) points out, this "removing the problem" approach is not concerned with teaching and reinforcing appropriate behavior or behavioral expectations. In his 1995 analysis of the administrative "fight against violence," Noguera finds that such an over-reliance on punitive measures may actually increase a school's vulnerability to violence due to the climate of fear it fosters and the way in which discipline can come to be the primary way adults reassert their power and authority over students.[139] In addition, the "fixation with behavior management and social control that outweighs and overrides all other priorities and goals" exhibited by many schools incorrectly assumes that the removal of difficult students is the only form of discipline available for difficult students.[140] Studies showing correlations between zero tolerance policies and increased rates of dropout[141] and high rates of repeat offending[142] challenge the notion of the deterrent effect of swift, strict sanctions and suggest that in some cases, "suspension functions as a reinforcer… rather than as a punisher" of students' bad behavior.[143] This may be attributable to the very exclusionary nature of suspension and expulsion itself, because research indicates that students with strong school bonds are less likely to engage in delinquent behavior.[144] Thus, any discipline strategy that seeks to sever these bonds by restricting access to the classroom, critics assert, merits both strong justification and heightened scrutiny. A study by Dunbar and Villaruel (2002) also reveals how the highly disparate interpretation and implementation of zero tolerance policies throughout the state of Michigan raise questions of judiciousness for students. These

[138] Mendez (2003); Noguera (2003)
[139] Noguera (1995)
[140] Noguera (2003:345-346); Wald and Losen (2003)
[141] Bowditch (1993)
[142] Tobin and Sugai (1996)
[143] Bowditch (1993); Skiba & Knesting (2001)
[144] Unnever, Colvin, & Cullen (2004:255); McNeely, Nonnemaker, and Blum (2002); Thornberry et al. (2003)

researchers also found that the heavy use of exclusionary discipline negatively affected the opportunities for teachers and administrators to cultivate positive relationships with their students. This loss of "teachable moments" is significant for the issue of deterrence because, as Cassella (2001) explains, "What often prevents violence are not threats or even behavior modification techniques, but more personal and caring circumstances in the lives of potential offenders (p. 58)."

Concluding Remarks

In the year 2009, public schools across the United States responded to 79 percent of all physical attacks and fights with out-of-school suspension, 4 percent with expulsion, and 17 percent with placement at disciplinary alternative schools.[145] This means not only that exclusionary discipline influenced by the zero tolerance approach is highly prevalent in schools today, but also that physical fighting and suspension rates are closely linked. In this chapter, we have reviewed literature regarding current trends and conditions associated with adolescent violence and explored three distinct theories as to how an individual becomes delinquent. Social learning theory holds that delinquent behavior is learned through behavioral reinforcement, while control theory asserts that people are naturally inclined to deviancy and are only kept from becoming delinquent because of certain internal and external restraints on their behavior. Labeling theory highlights the role of society in reacting to delinquent behavior, as negative reactions have the potential to foster negative self-concepts and self-fulfilling prophecies. Anderson's (1999) "code of the street" thesis was also presented in order to give the reader a cultural perspective of the normative role that violence and aggression play within some social subgroups. After discussing disciplinary alternative education, we finally traced the principal

[145] Dinkes, Kemp, and Baum (2009: 66)

arguments for and against the use of zero tolerance discipline policies which respond to both grave and minor offenses with the same swift punishment. This review provides a scholarly framework within which to situate this study—the methodology of which is detailed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

This chapter is intended to provide for the reader a description of the methodology implemented in this study and proceeds in the following manner: First, I outline the overall research design. I then account for the formulation of research variables, survey instruments, and interview questions. A summary of the recruitment and consent-obtaining process for student, parent, and faculty interviews and surveys follows. After explaining the record-keeping and data analysis techniques used, I conclude with a description of my techniques for analysis of primary statistical data and secondary scholarly materials.

Description of Research Design

The research design is of mixed methods, involving interviews, self-reported questionnaires, and content analysis of discipline records.[146] In this way, both qualitative and quantitative data were collected. The K-12 population at the Staycomb's disciplinary alternative education program was selected for study because of its unique cross-section of the district's student body. Students who attend this program hail from every school in the district and comprise the highest concentration of students in the district who fight, have been suspended, and are (or have been) involved in delinquent activities. Moreover, these students represent a large pool of local public school students who exhibit poor conflict management skills, and/or the study's demographic variables. As ground zero for the vast majority of exclusionary

[146] Maxfield and Babbie (2005:106)

discipline cases among Staycomb public school students, the Radick Center was the ideal setting for an investigation of the research variables of interest.

Preliminary interviews of students and parents affiliated with the Radick Center (n=6) were conducted in June 2010 for the purpose of developing themes and goals related to the Mediation Center's launch of a new peer mediation program in 7 area public high schools. Responses from these open-ended interviews provided a foundational understanding for the types of questions to be asked on surveys and interviews, and initiated the researcher's thinking as to what the significant enabling factors of student fights might be and how zero tolerance policies and levels of fighting among students are interrelated. The resulting study hypotheses were:

> ***Hypothesis 1*.** Significant enabling factors for the "culture of conflict" among students in Staycomb include:
>
> a) violence in the home environment
> b) the societal label of "problem student"
> c) a lack of emphasis on one-on-one conflict resolution in discipline processes
> d) the appeal of earning greater respect among peers for delinquent behavior
> e) the belief in the need to fight for (social or physical) survival
>
> ***Hypothesis 2*.** Peer mediation training may lead to a decrease in student fighting to resolve conflicts in the Staycomb context.
>
> ***Hypothesis 3*.** Zero tolerance policies have little, if any, positive effect on the student culture of violence and aggression.

By combining insights from students and parents with those of the literature, the researcher also developed a list of demographic (independent) and research (explanatory) variables with which to test these hypotheses, as shown in **Figure 3.1**.

Study Variables

Demographic Variables	Main Research Variables
Students ▪ age ▪ gender ▪ grade level ▪ number of parents lived with ▪ race/ethnicity ▪ level of violence in home environment	*Students* ▪ family rules for solving conflicts ▪ beliefs about why students fight ▪ belief in need to fight for survival ▪ belief in reputation gained by violence ▪ identification with "problem student" label ▪ tendency to fight once suspended ▪ level of adult help experienced post-conflict ▪ perceived role of conflict resolution in discipline process ▪ view of peer mediation ▪ change in level of self-confidence since coming to alt. school
Faculty/Administrators ▪ age ▪ gender ▪ length of involvement in public schools ▪ race/ethnicity ▪ General job title ▪ whether had classroom behavior mgmt. training in past 24 months	*Faculty/Administrators* ▪ beliefs about why students fight ▪ beliefs about prevalence "problem student" label ▪ view of suspension's ability to change student behavior ▪ view of student tendency to fight once suspended ▪ view of alternative setting as "punitive" or "restorative" ▪ view of peer mediation ▪ view of level of adult help experienced by students post-conflict ▪ view of role of parents (in and out of discipline process) ▪ level of support received to handle conflict
Parents ▪ age ▪ gender ▪ grade of child ▪ age of child ▪ single parent status ▪ race/ethnicity ▪ # of times child suspended	*Parents* ▪ family rules/procedures for solving conflicts ▪ belief in need to fight for survival ▪ belief in reputation gained by violence ▪ identification of child with "problem student" label ▪ child's tendency to fight once suspended ▪ level of adult help experienced post-conflict ▪ view of peer mediation

Figure 3.1

Whereas demographic variables consisted of general identifiers such as gender, age, and the general level of violence in a student's home environment, research variables placed keen emphasis on student and family beliefs, orientations, and rules that guide decision-making when considering whether to fight in a given situation. Research variables also focused on faculty views regarding issues such as changes in student tendencies to fight after suspension, the (actual

vs. ideal) role of parents in the disciplinary process, and the projected potential of peer mediation training to reduce levels of student fights.

Permission to conduct this study was achieved by approval from the University of Georgia Institutional Review Board, the Staycomb-Chippling County Public School System's Office of Accountability, Research, Evaluation, Assessment, & Statistics, and the Radick Alternative Learning Center. There were no control conditions or assignments to group, and data was collected via three primary methods: confidential face-to-face interviews, anonymous surveys, and content analysis of local and state discipline records.[147]

Sampling. Nonprobability sampling was used throughout this study, but varied in form between each subject population. Due to policies of confidentiality among this population of under-consent-age minors and a low return rate of take-home permission forms, purposive sampling was used for both student interviews and surveys.[148] Reliance on available subjects sampling was applied in the remainder of the study.[149] All teachers of grades 6-12 were asked to telephone the parents of at least 5 randomly selected students in their advisement class to obtain verbal permission for their child to complete the questionnaire. All emancipated students attending school on Friday, March 12, 2010 were also invited to fill out the survey and be interviewed. All faculty were given an opportunity to both complete their respective survey and volunteer for an interview. During the week of March 1, 250 randomly selected students were sent home with informational recruitment packets with an enclosed parent survey and interview permission forms, which students then brought back to school.

[147] Maxfield and Babbie (2005)
[148] Rubin and Babbie (2001:254)
[149] Ibid. (p.253)

Interviews. The researcher conducted two types of interviews at the Radick Center, involving a) 6 faculty and 1 administrator, and b) 3 students, age 14 to 20 years. Faculty interviews were held on location on February 19 and March 12, 2010, while student interviews were conducted and audio-recorded on March 12, 2010. Plans were originally made to also interview parents via telephone, but due to a low response rate and circuitous recruitment process (identities of parents were kept confidential, so the researcher relied on sending letters home with students), this step was not implemented.

Surveys. The researcher also conducted three types of Likert-format (Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree) surveys, involving: a) 44 students at the Radick Center; b) 22 faculty and administrators at the Radick Center; and c) 7 parents of Radick students. Faculty interviews were held on location January 22-29, 2010, while parent take-home surveys were administered March 1-7. Student surveys were conducted in three different sessions on location on March 12, 2010.

A note about sequencing. Faculty surveys were implemented as the first phase of the study for several reasons: 1) doing so would encourage staff familiarity with the project and would help encourage potential volunteers for teacher/administrator interviews in the next phase; 2) so that faculty would know what to expect when forms were sent home later with their students; 3) teacher/administrator familiarity with the research may help parents and students view the study as legitimate and worth their participation.

Other data sources. I also obtained and reviewed state discipline data from 2003-2009 via electronic mail from the Georgia Department of Education, and Chippling-specific information from the Staycomb Youth Futures Authority and the Staycomb-Chippling County

Board of Education. National discipline statistics from the National Center for Education Statistics are discussed in Chapter 2.

Recruitment and Informed Consent

Due to the transient nature of the student population at the Radick Center[150], the recruitment process was most successful when applied directly. Informational letters and surveys were placed in faculty's mail boxes with instructions to please complete and return to a submission box in the main office by the end of the week. With the facilitation of the school principal, I also contacted faculty via electronic mail in regards to recruitment for a confidential 20-minute interview, to which interested participants replied.

The recruitment process for parent and student surveys and interviews required slightly more finesse. Confidentiality policies prohibited the researcher from obtaining parental contact information to obtain informed consent for students under the age of 18—consequently, the researcher assembled and sent informational packets home with students to be returned with parent signature. These packets contained the following: 1) an opt-out letter for parent surveys whereby parents could sign to decline permission for their child to be surveyed; 2) an informed consent document for student interviews; 3) a parent survey and informational letter; and 4) an informed consent document for parent phone interviews. A low return rate of these packets resulted in the generous decision of the school's administrators to have teachers personally make phone calls to parents in order to obtain verbal informed consent for their child under 18 years old to be surveyed and/or interviewed. In this way, a significant amount of subject participants were recruited.

[150] Students are placed at this program for a mandatory time period (usually a semester or a full calendar year, depending on the severity of the infraction), after which they return to their home school.

Data Analysis

Notes taken during interviews were compiled by question type and descriptively analyzed for themes and trends among the subject population (faculty n=7, students n=3). The researcher recorded survey data on digital spreadsheets and created pivot tables comparing results from different questions. These bivariate tables, along with frequency distributions, are represented by bar, line, and circle graphs.[151] Whereas Likert-format survey data were numericized for purposes of quantitative analysis, responses to open-ended questions such as "Briefly describe your family's views on conflict. When is it OK to fight?" (SQ2) were compiled and categorized according to response type (ie, self-defense, non-violent, or retaliation).

Other primary data sources (ie, those from the Georgia Department of Education) regarding types of offenses, discipline action counts, and total enrollment demographics were reviewed and tabulated by the researcher according to the scope of the project. At the request of the researcher, the Staycomb Youth Futures Authority also generously calculated tables of difficult-to-access data. Graphs and charts were developed to display these numbers.

While reviewing secondary scholarly sources, I particularly looked for works that 1) tested the hypotheses of social learning, control, and labeling theories; 2) analyzed longitudinal studies regarding juvenile delinquency; 3) directly discussed the relationship between violence (fighting) and suspension and expulsion; 4) dealt with at-risk, low-income, urban, and minority populations; 5) centered on juvenile (as opposed to adult) delinquency. From these books, articles, and reports, I sorted and compiled literature according to general topic (ie, zero tolerance or fighting among adolescents), theory, and ideological stance.

[151] Rubin and Babbie (2001)

In this chapter, I have both described the methods by which I conducted this study and explained the research design, procedures for recruitment and obtaining informed consent, and means of data analysis. Next, I present the reader with the results of this study and discuss their significance, limitations, and implications for policy in the final chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR

PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

The purpose of this section is to present the self-reported data obtained from faculty, students, and parents affiliated with the Radick Alternative Learning Center. Survey and interview results (labeled R1, R2, etc.) are organized according to the respective hypothesis (H1, H2, and H3) each is intended to test. The study's research questions are listed as rQ1, rQ2, and rQ3. Within each section, primary findings are reported first, followed by secondary findings of particular interest.

rQ1. What are the significant enabling factors associated with the "conflict culture"—defined as the social code which says fighting is the only viable way to solve conflicts?

H1. Significant enabling factors among students in Savannah include:

A) level of violence in student's home environment

B) the belief in the need to fight for survival

C) identification with the label of "problem student"

D) a lack of emphasis on teaching conflict management in the discipline process

E) the appeal of earning greater respect among peers for delinquent behavior

R1. Results as to the prevalence of these enabling factors are grouped to corresponding survey questions. Student survey questions are referred to as sQ1, sQ2, etc. and Faculty survey questions are labeled fQ1, fQ2. Most questions are structured according to a Likert scale, illustrated as follows:

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
SA	A	N	D	SD
1	2	3	4	5

A) *Home Environment Domain*. A frequency distribution of responses to the statement in sQ1, "Violence is common where I come from," illustrated in **Figure 4.1**, indicates that the vast majority (n=29) of students surveyed (n=44) experience high to very high levels of violence in and/or around their home. At the 95 percent confidence level, this data tells us that somewhere between 51.9 and 79.9 percent of students *in the district* consider their home/neighborhood environment to be characterized by at least some level of violence.[152] Norms associated with fighting, the subject of sQ2, are also an integral part of a student's home environment. As **Figure 4.2** illustrates, the vast majority of students reported that it is acceptable in their family to physically retaliate when provoked. The data reveals with 95 percent confidence that the actual percentage of public school students *in the district* who have retaliation as their family's approach to fighting is between 51.7 and 79.7 percent. Examples of student's comments in response to sQ2 which can be classified as retaliation include: "*When someone come in my face and start talking smack or when someone hit me first*,"

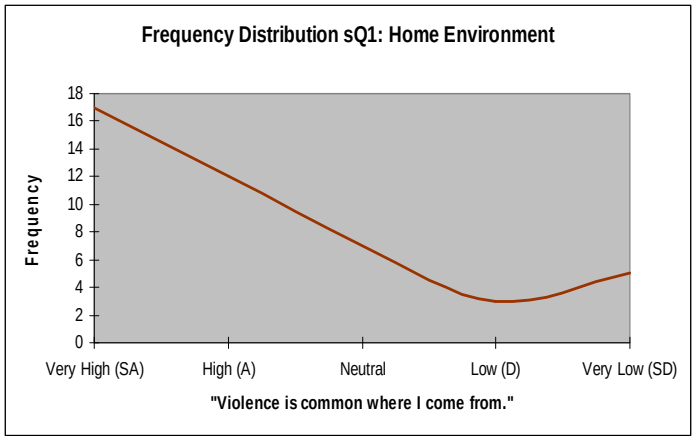


Figure 4.1

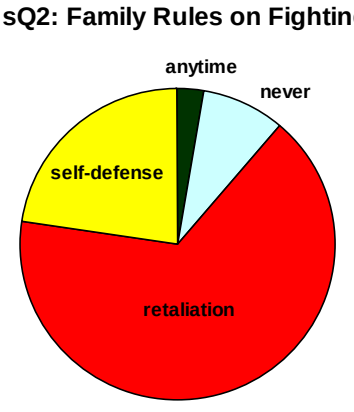


Figure 4.2

[152] All confidence interval calculations are based on an estimated district population of 34,000 students.

"*Only when someone hits you first*," and "*Where I come from, if someone hit you, you should hit them back.*" One teacher even estimated in an interview that 70 percent of parents actively encourage their children to fight.

A strong correlation exists between levels of violence in students' home environments (sQ1) and the presence of certain family rules about fighting (sQ2), which is graphically portrayed in **Figure 4.3**. This data shows that as the level of violence in a student's home environment increases, so does the prevalence of the view that physical fighting is acceptable when used for retaliation purposes. It is interesting to note that among students who reportedly experience very high levels of violence in their home environments, not one of them cites self-defense as a justification for fighting.

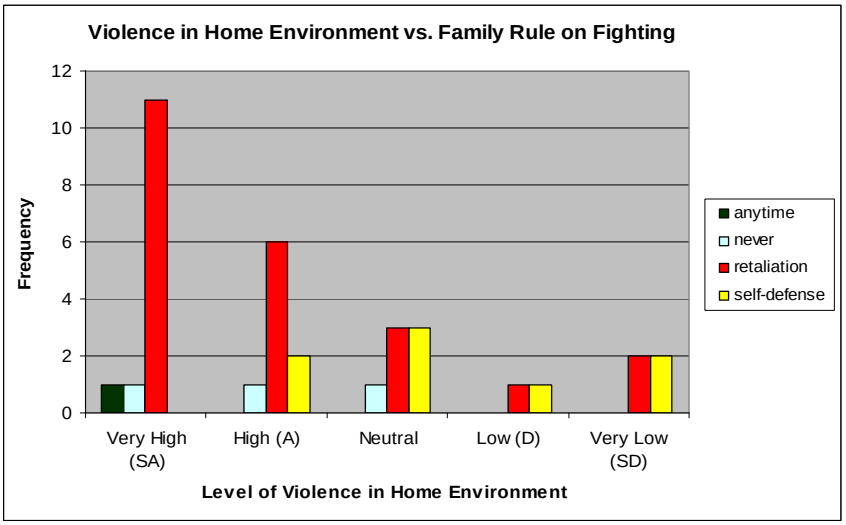


Figure 4.3

B) ***Fight for Survival Domain.*** The majority of students (n=26) agreed with the statement n sQ3, "Students my age in Savannah often feel like they need to fight in order to survive," while amount of students who expressed neutrality and disagreement was equivalent (n=9). On a scale from 1 (SA) to 5 (SD), the mean response for this question was 2.27 ($\underline{M}$ = 2.27, $\underline{SD}$ = 1.25). From these numbers, we can say with 95 percent confidence that somewhere between 44.6 and

73.6 percent of students *in the district* hold the belief that at least some Savannah students must fight for survival. The belief in the need to fight for one's survival correlates with the level of violence in a student's home environment, as **Figure 4.4** demonstrates.

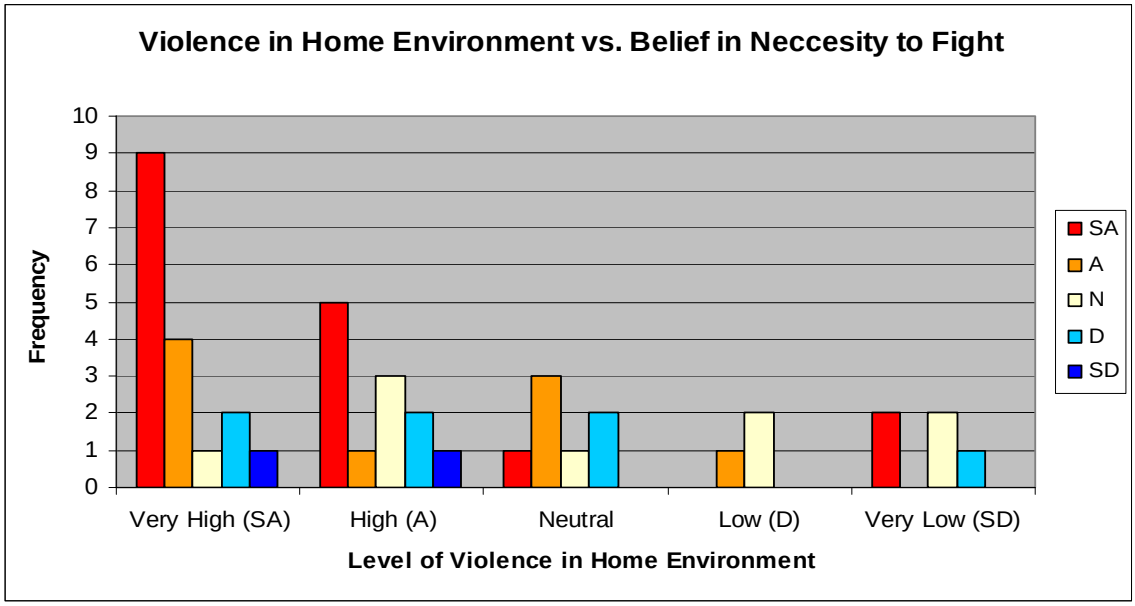


Figure 4.4

As a student's home environment becomes more violent, he/she is more likely to adopt the belief that physical fighting is necessary to get by in life. Examples of student responses which explain agreement for sQ3 include: "*Because most people are always picked on and have no choice,*" "*because people feel like they have to fight or they will get taken advantage of,*" and "*if you beat a person up, they won't mess with you no more*." It is noteworthy, however, that across different home environments, there exists a small group of students who disagree with the idea that fighting is essential. As one such student explains, "*Not really- Only the ones who want to fit in or be accepted by their peers* [feel like they have to fight to survive]."

When this variable is compared across grade levels, it becomes clear that the belief that students in Savannah must fight for survival is prevalent among elementary, middle, and high school students alike. **Figure 4.5** demonstrates this phenomenon. It is interesting to note here

that this belief does not become significantly challenged (indicated by disagreement) until the high school years.

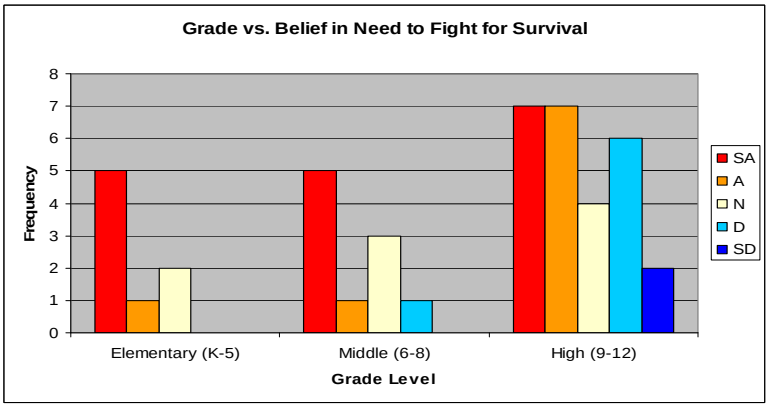


Figure 4.5

C) *Label of "Problem Student" Domain.* Slightly over half of the students in the sample (n=22) reported that they are *not* thought of by others as a "problem student", while a smaller amount (n=16) indicated this was in fact the case. The frequency distribution for sQ5 thus roughly resembles an inverted bell curve, as shown in **Figure 4.6**, since the majority of respondents indicated they felt strongly, one way or the other, about this label. At the 95 confidence level, we can say from this data that the actual percentage of students *in the district* who identify with the "problem student" label is somewhere between 22.8 and 51.7 percent. When compared with the level of violence in a student's home environment, the overall relationship between the two variables is not so clear-cut.

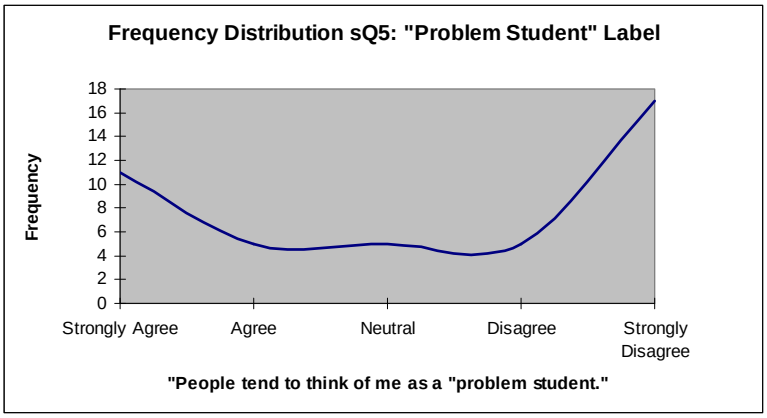


Figure 4.6

Two distinctive trends emerge upon closer examination, however, as **Figure 4.7** (on the next page) illustrates.

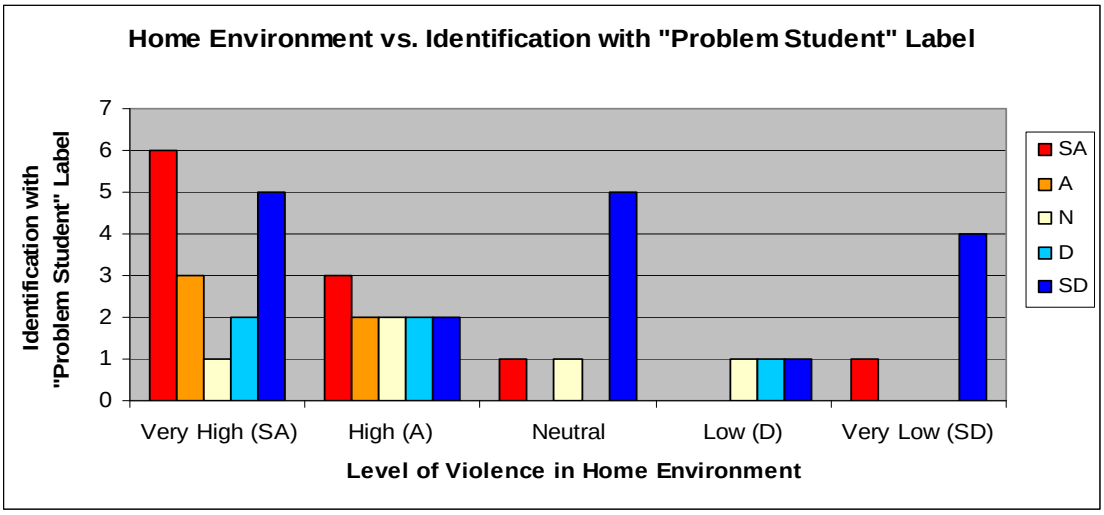


Figure 4.7

First, there is a correlation between high levels of violence in a student's home environment and positive identification with the label of "problem student." Secondly, however, across all types of home environments, a significant number of respondents indicated strong dis-identification with this label. When asked about the tendency of teachers throughout the school system to "dispose" of thusly labeled students, it is interesting to note that two-thirds of teachers (n=14 out of n=21) indicated positive agreement that this was in fact the case.

D) ***Conflict Resolution Domain.*** The frequency distribution of student responses to sQ8 (see **Figure 4.8**) indicates another roughly bimodal distribution—this time, centered at "Agree" and "Strongly Disagree." Thus, students appear to be divided on whether or

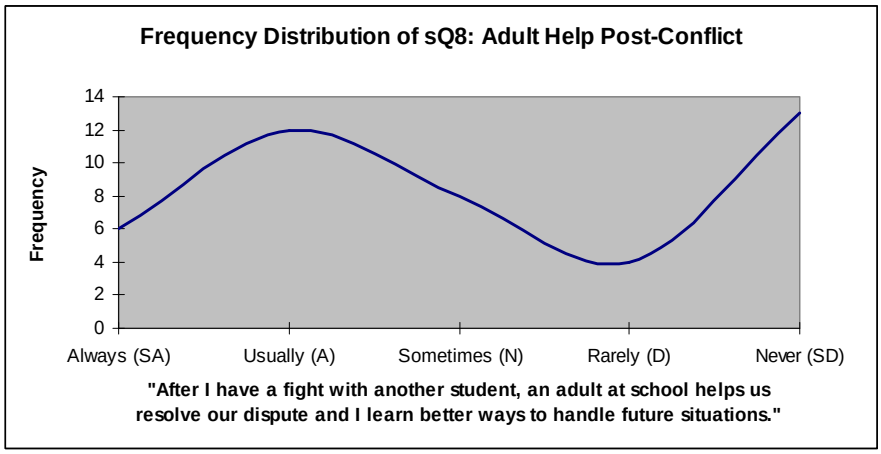


Figure 4.8

not adults at school help them to learn conflict management skills after fighting. Even so, we can say with 95 percent confidence that the actual proportion of students in the district who say they *never* receive conflict management help from an adult after a fight is between 17.6 and 42.3 percent.

E) *Peer Culture Domain.* In response to sQ4, "My peers will respect me more if they know I have a history of fighting or jail-time," a slight majority of respondents indicated disagreement (n=19), while slightly less (n=17) indicated agreement. The mean value of these responses was 3.21 (indicating slight disagreement), while the standard deviation was 1.50. We can be 95 percent confident from these numbers that the actual percentage of students *in the district* who say violence is a way to earn respect among their peers is somewhere between 24.3 and 53.0 percent. Two sub-trends emerge from this data which are similar to previously mentioned comparisons involving the Home Environment variable, as evidenced by **Figure 4.9**.

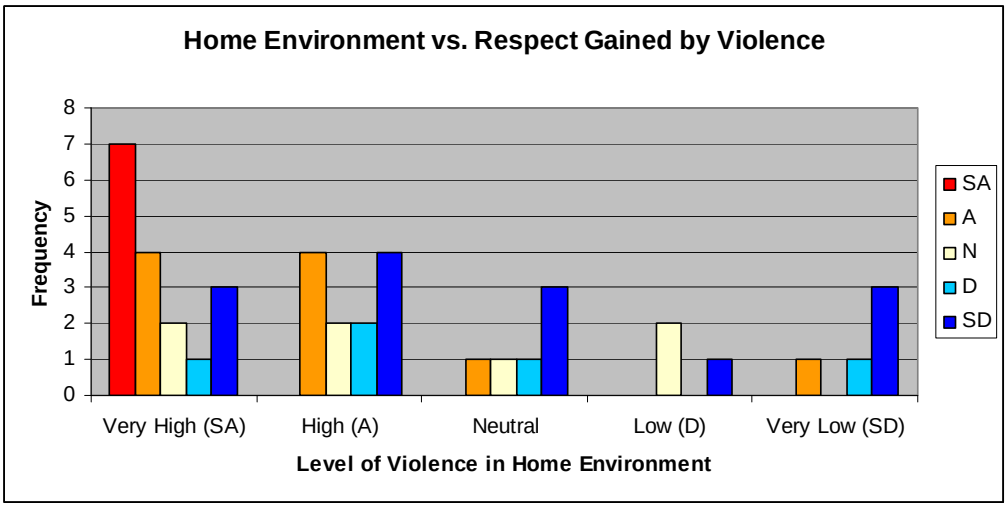


Figure 4.9

On one hand, as the level of violence increases in a student's home environment, he/she is more likely to earn respect among peers by engaging in fighting or going to prison. Yet across all

types of home environments, a significant number of respondents strongly disagree that violence will gain them greater respect.

The issue of gaining respect among peers was also elucidated by responses given during student and faculty interviews. Each interviewed student made mention of an unspoken social rule whereby individuals, when either physically or verbally 'tried,' 'checked,' or 'picked,' are expected to fight back or risk losing respect among others. As one student explains, if a person walks away from a 'pick,' "that person might be called scary…they'll think that you're scared to fight, scared to stand up for yourself… but the wiser kids, they'll know they did the right thing." When asked if engaging in violence helps students gain respect, another interviewee responded confidently, "Yes… when you're boosted up to fight, if you don't do it, you're labeled as a punk, or you're scary." Interestingly enough, however, two out of three students interviewed had never actually seen a person back down from a fight and receive the heaps of disrespect associated with it. It seems as if the fear or pressure of losing credibility among peers operates as enough of a deterrent against "punking out." Teachers, on the other hand, expressed a different perspective of the giving and taking of respect among students. "Jail," one business education teacher observed, "is a rite of passage for these kids. I heard one student tell another just this past week, "You still ain't nobody, 'cause you just been to Juvy." 'Juvy,' this interviewee told me, refers to Chippling County Juvenile Detention Center, while 'County' refers to Chippling County Jail.

rQ2. How might these factors be effectively addressed?

H2. Peer mediation training may lead to a decrease in student fighting to resolve conflicts in the Savannah context.

R2. **A) *Peer Mediation Domain.*** Students, parents, and faculty expressed their view of whether peer mediation training has potential as a fight-decreasing force for Chippling County by answering a variant of "Students I teach would probably fight less if they were trained to mediate their peers' disputes," in sQ11, fQ8, and pQ9. **Figure 4.10** displays a comparison of results among the three subject populations. The mean for the composite of the three groups is 2.36 (generally in agreement), while the standard deviation is 1.18. Due to a very small sample size for parents (n=7), these data are unreliable, but it is interesting to note the relative similarity in composition across all three subject populations. When organized according to student gender (see **Figure 4.11**), it is also noteworthy that a greater percentage of males express confidence in the potential of peer mediation training to help stem their levels of fighting, while the majority of girls surveyed indicated ambiguity about this strategy.

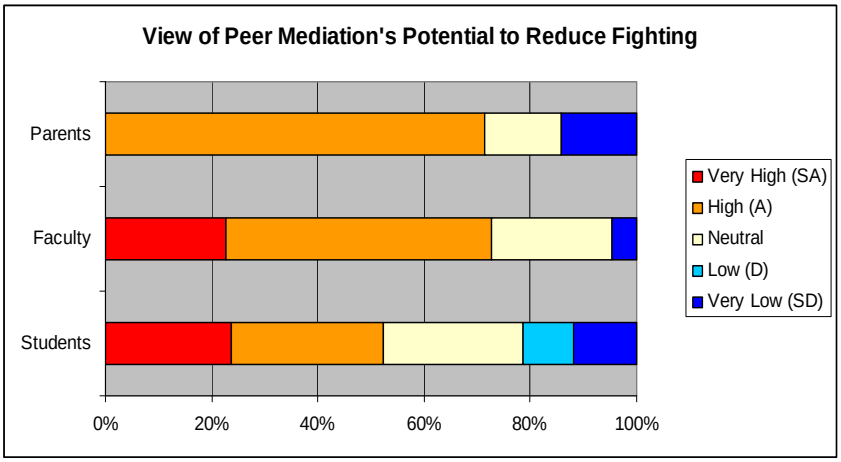


Figure 4.10

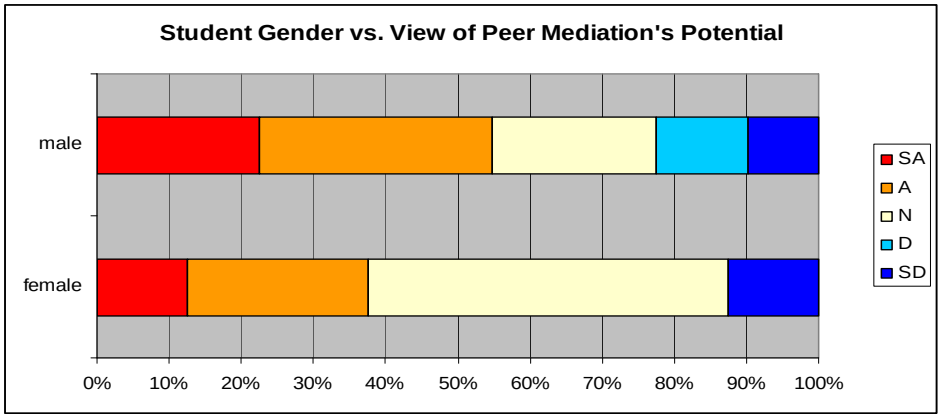


Figure 4.11

B) *The 9th Grader Effect.* Upon review of the literature and discipline data from local, state, and national sources, it was observed that 9th graders (students age 14-16, for the purposes of this study) typically exhibit the highest rates of physical fighting of any age group.[153] Self-reported survey data confirms this trend, as shown in **Figure 4.12**. While 40 percent of students age 14-16 years indicated that they were more likely to fight now that they have been suspended, this number is less for their 17-20 and 10-13 year old counterparts. Moreover, since the 2007-08 school year, a little more or less than a third of all suspensions throughout the system were awarded to 9th graders.[154]

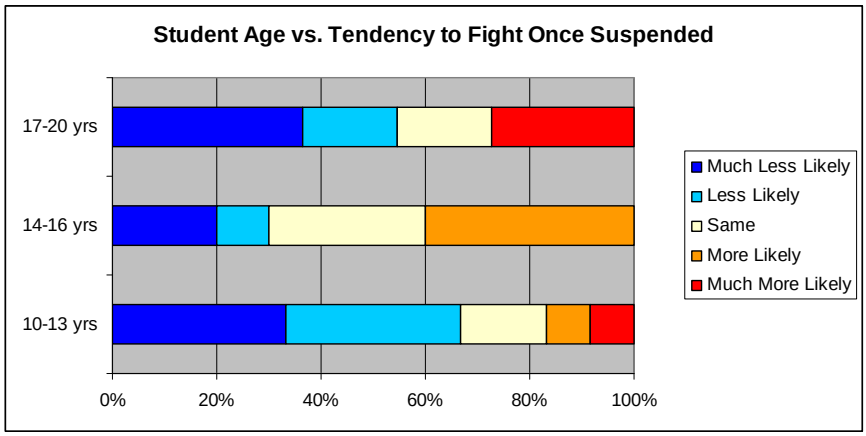


Figure 4.12

C) *School Bonds.* The theme of student connectedness to school was mentioned frequently in faculty interviews and evidenced by the same situation: many students do not appear eager to leave the Radick Center. As one administrator explained, "I believe that Radick is the safest school in the district—not because of our metal detectors, resource officer, and discipline procedures, but because of the rapport and relationships we have built with our students that make kids not want to leave when their time is up." Student connectedness to the Radick Center was also measured by responses to sQ9, the results of which are depicted in **Figure 4.13**.

[153] Shoemaker (2010:269); CDC (2007:7)
[154] SYFA (2010), compiled using reports from SCCPSS

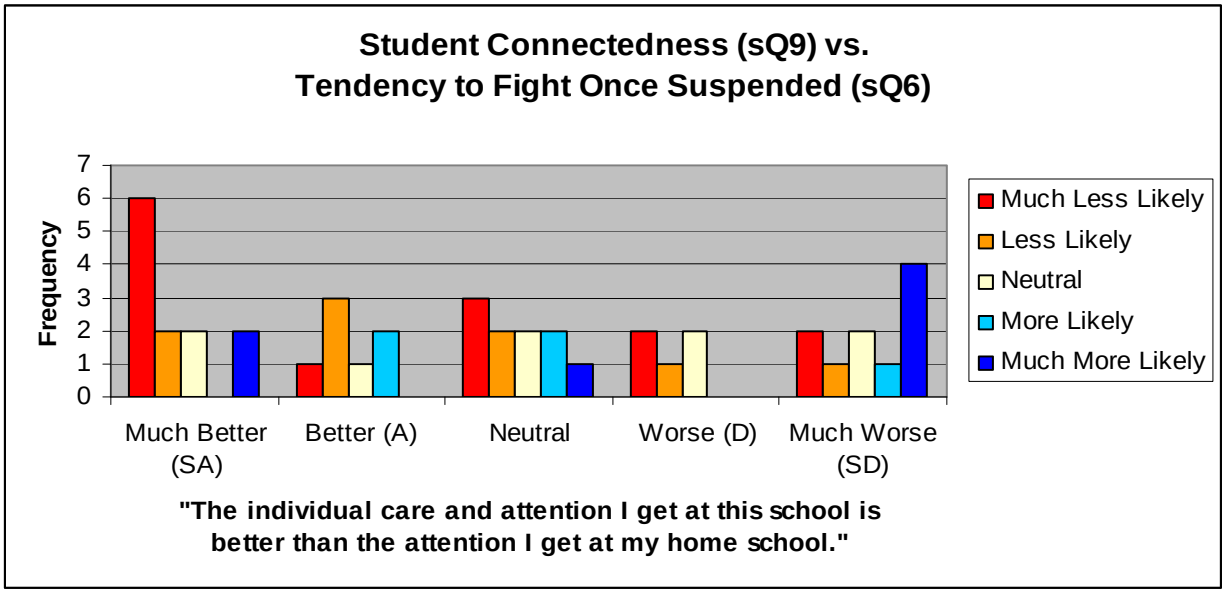


Figure 4.13

Although no definite trend can be determined here, it is worth noting that the highest points on the graph—both extreme responses to sQ6, "I am less likely to fight now that I have been suspended or expelled"—are located at the extremes of the sQ9 scale. This suggests at least a faint correlation between these two explanatory variables.

<u>rQ3.</u> Is a reliance on punitive discipline adequate to address Chippling County's high levels of student fighting?

H3. Zero tolerance policies have very little, if any, positive effect on the student culture of violence and aggression.

R3. **A)** ***Tendencies to Fight Once Suspended.*** Beliefs regarding the improved behavior of a suspended student differ depending on who one asks, as **Figure 4.14** demonstrates. A simple majority of students (n=23) surveyed reported that they were less likely to fight now that they had been suspended or expelled. Likewise, the majority of parents (again, the issue of small sample size is raised) also feel that their child's behavior has improved since receiving a

suspension or expulsion. The opinion of faculty, however, is noticeably different: the majority in this case holds that a student's behavior typically does not improve after returning from a suspension period. Yet a frequency distribution of faculty opinions as to the effectiveness of suspension as a behavior modification strategy, found in **Figure 4.15**, reveals a seemingly contradictory bimodality in favor of suspension's effectiveness in behavior modification.

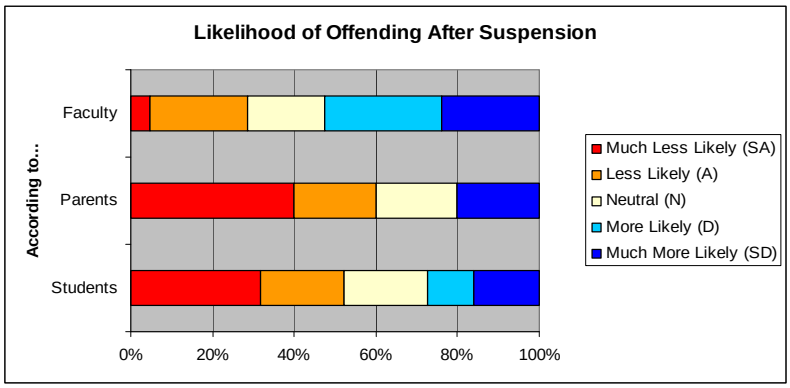


Figure 4.14

Data from the Georgia Department of Education offers an empirical perspective regarding suspension rates and the number of fighting incidents. While the reported fight-per-capita rate for Chippling County reached its lowest level in 6 years in 2009 (at 0.052 fights per capita, it is still ranked 5th in the state of Georgia among the largest 10 school districts), the average number of suspensions each suspended student received has been steadily increasing to its 2008-09 rate of 2.6 suspensions per capita.

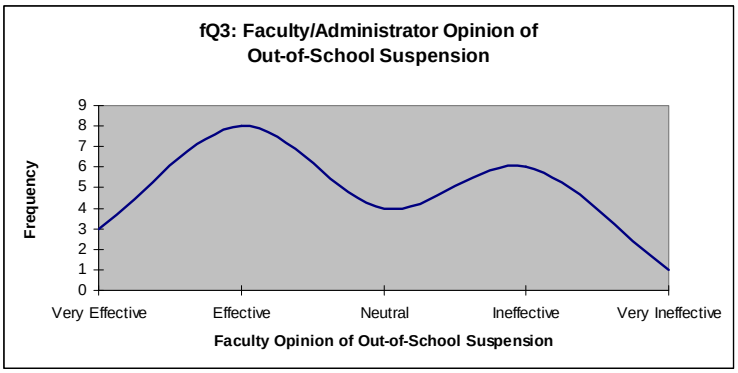


Figure 4.15

B) ***Faculty Beliefs Regarding Zero Tolerance and Punitive Discipline.*** Six out of seven faculty members interviewed expressed dissatisfaction with the current implementation of zero tolerance in Savannah public schools. Reasons cited for this opinion include: a) neglect of the issue of

intent when determining student penalties; 2) inconsistent enforcement of zero tolerance standards; 3) neglect of causes of problem behavior. Moreover, the majority (n=12) of teachers surveyed indicated that the Radick Center approached discipline from a restorative—or personal growth-oriented—perspective, as shown in **Figure 4.16**.

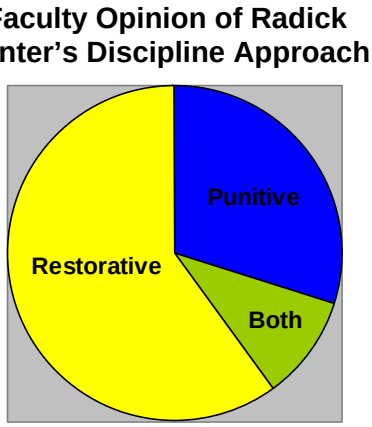


Figure 4.16

When faculty characterization of the Radick Center's discipline approach is compared with opinions as to the effectiveness of suspension as a behavior modification strategy, a slight trend exists between the two, as **Figure 4.17** demonstrates. Respondents who characterize the Radick Center as a restorative environment were more likely to indicate positive belief in the effectiveness of suspension, while those who typified the school as a punitive setting were slightly more apt to believe that suspension is an ineffective discipline strategy.

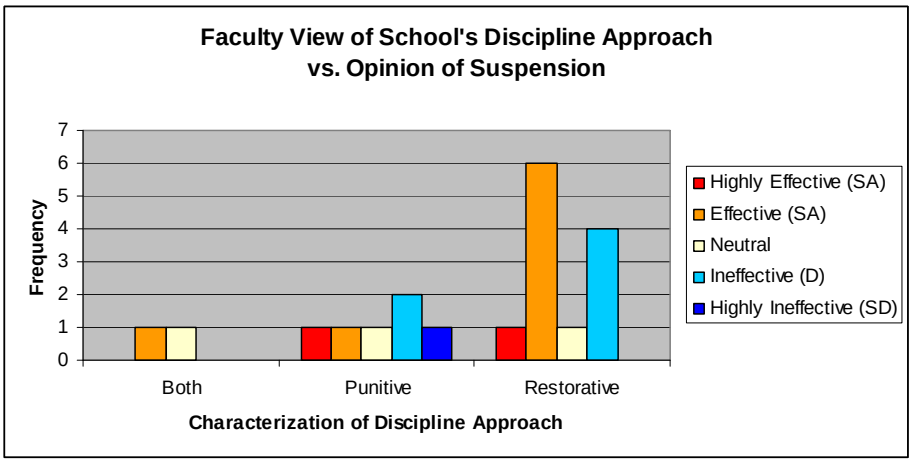


Figure 4.17

In this section, I have presented and analyzed the study's main and subsidiary findings. The final chapter highlights and discusses points that have applicability to both previously established delinquency theories and future directions for discipline policy and research.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

"You know, we don't home-grow our students."
—Administrator, Radick Alternative Learning Center

As mentioned in Chapter 1, understanding and addressing the culture of fighting among students in Staycomb is essential if there is to be any sustainable reduction in levels of out-of-school suspension. Findings from this study suggest, however, that the relationship between the two may not be unidirectional. Under the Staycomb-Chippling County Public School System's recent implementation of zero tolerance policies, offenses that would ordinarily have been considered misdemeanors are now met with much more serious and lasting punishments such as suspension, expulsion, and mandatory placement at the local disciplinary alternative program. Although this approach was originally intended to keep public schools safe and provide for quality learning environments, research consistently reveals associations between zero tolerance and higher rates of repeat offending, increased levels of dropout, over-representation of minority students in discipline action counts, weakened school bonds, and belief in the inexistence of disciplinary alternatives for difficult students.[155] In fact, Noguera (1995) argues that an over-reliance on punitive measures may actually increase a school's vulnerability to violence due to the climate of fear fostered where punishment becomes the primary way adults reassert their power and authority over students.

[155] Bowditch (2003); Tobin and Sugai (1996); Skiba and Knesting (2001); Unnever, Colvin, and Cullen (2004); Noguera (2003); Mendez (2003).

This final chapter is intended to present the reader with a list of take-away messages which surface from the survey, interview, and primary-source data presented in Chapter 4. First, major findings are discussed as they relate to each of my three hypotheses and implications for discipline policy are also considered. After comparing this study's results to the hypotheses of the delinquency theories reviewed in Chapter 2, I then assess the limitations of the research. The document concludes with a scholarly reflection on potential avenues for future study.

Distillation of Major Findings

1. Many—or perhaps most—families of students in Staycomb operate according to a "hit-'em-back" worldview.

The students at the Radick Center represent a cross-section of many different layers of Staycomb society. Contrary to stigma-laden characterizations of this school and its students, the only tangible difference between these youth and those who attend regular public school is that the former were caught. As one administrator aptly put it, "You know, we don't home-grow our students. You all [in the wider society] send them to us." This situation allows our study to take on district-wide applicability, as data gathered from the Radick Center's population is profoundly reflective of the larger student body. Consequently, when 65.7 percent of students surveyed indicate their *family* (as opposed to peer or personal) rule on fighting encourages them to physically retaliate if provoked or struck first, this finding (see **Figure 4.2** in previous chapter) has reverberations for the entire system.

Data shows the prevalence of this retaliatory framework to be strongly associated with the level of violence a student experiences in his or her home environment. That is, the more violent a student's home environment, the greater likelihood that the student's family views fighting as an acceptable response to a previous slight. But what explains this? In an interview,

one male student described the practice of "picking" (also referred to as 'checking,' 'trying,' or 'dissing'), whereby youth test each other to see how the other will react as a way to amass respect or 'cool points' by taking them from the victim. Another interviewee explained that to walk away from a fight is to be labeled a 'punk' or 'scary' by one's peers, and to send the nonverbal-but-crystal-clear message that others may easily take advantage of him/her. Anderson (1994, 1999) refers to this 'zero-sum' game in his exposition of the code of the street, observing that parents often reinforce this behavior from the time children are very young. As he explains,

> Many parents actually impose sanctions if a child is not sufficiently aggressive. For example, if a child loses a fight and comes home upset, the parent might respond, "Don't you come in here crying that somebody beat you up; you better get back out there and whup his ass. I didn't raise no punks! Get back out there and whup his ass. If you don't whup his ass, I'll whup your ass when you come home." Thus the child obtains reinforcement for being tough and showing nerve.[156]

The literature also shows how two opposing systems of deterrence are at work. On the one hand, there is the otherwise 'decent' youth who maintains a tough or confrontational façade in order to ward off 'picks' from potential aggressors[157], while on the other, authority figures use swift and severe punishment to "send a message" to potential offenders in the wider student body that certain disruptive behaviors will not be tolerated.[158] In this way, the informal family model of retaliation contradicts the formal zero tolerance approach to school discipline in a way that may have profound alienating effects on a student in this position.

What can be done to practically address this inconsistency? Parent training programs which teach parents how to more effectively discipline their children and family members how to

[156] Anderson (1994: 86)
[157] Anderson (1999:72)
[158] Shanker (1995:360); see Chapter 2's discussion on "The Zero Tolerance Approach to School Discipline."

better resolve conflicts with each other, are one option.[159] The effectiveness of this strategy lies in the way it promotes the social learning of conventional behavior (parents serve as conventional role models), fosters increases in control (parent-child emotional bonds are strengthened, development of adolescent's level of self-control), and reduces negative labeling (since parents are less apt to verbally or physically abuse their children).[160]

2. Suspension seems to work in some cases, but not others.

During the 2007-08 school year, out of school suspension (OSS) for five days or more was the most common disciplinary action taken nationwide.[161] A discrepancy existed, however, in the survey and interview results of this study. On one hand, the majority of teachers surveyed indicated that they believed suspension to be effective as a behavior modification strategy (n=10, compared to n=7 for ineffective)[162], while on the other, a majority of the same subject population reported that, in their experience, students who return from suspension periods are no less likely to engage in fighting.[163] Furthermore, six out of seven teachers interviewed held that suspension was ineffective because it sometimes functions as a reward for some children as it gives them the very thing they want: time away from school to engage in unsupervised activities like playing video games. This incongruency may be a function of the wordage used in fQ3, "Suspension and expulsion are unfortunate but effective ways to change a student's behavior," since this question lacks specificity and does not account for variations in student population. The issue of student population was paramount to one history teacher interviewed. As he explained,

[159] For an overview of parent training programs, see Farrington and Welsh (2002); Petrucci and Roberts (2004); McCord, Widom, and Crowell (2001); Clark (2003)
[160] Agnew (2009:413-415).
[161] Dinkes, Kemp, and Baum (2009: 64-67)
[162] see **Figure 4.15** in Chapter 4
[163] See **Figure 4.14** in Chapter 4

> "Out of school suspension is not effective with destitute people, because these disadvantaged groups don't place the same value on education that other, more privileged and upper middle-class groups do. So… let's say I'm a hard-to-handle kid from a low income family, and you have me repeatedly suspended for disruption. In these moments, how are you punishing *me*? Heck, I'd love a break from teachers breathing down my neck. Unfortunately, the punishment comes at age 25 when the only work I can get is flipping burgers because I never got my high school diploma."

Yet other teachers interviewed at the Radick Center expressed that suspension does lead to a reform of student's behavior when it is applied in the presence of strong school connectedness. Empirical research in the literature also corroborates this finding: If a student has strong ties to the school, its ideals, and its people, he or she will be less likely to engage in behavior that leads to separation.[164] Rudimentary support for this idea also comes from an analysis of the relationship between whether a faculty person views the Radick Center as a restorative (that is, personal growth-oriented and relational) or punitive (focused on punishment for problem behavior) environment and their view as to whether suspension improves student behavior.[165] Respondents who indicated a restorative environment were more likely to say suspension is an effective discipline strategy, while those who indicated a punitive environment were slightly more likely to say it is ineffective. Student relationships with teachers and staff also account for the frequently cited observation in interviews by teachers and one administrator that many students express a desire to stay at the Radick Center once they have served their designated time. Where these relationships are present, suspension seems effective; but in the absence of such bonds, the potency and effect of suspension is diluted.

3. Peer mediation holds promise as a supplementary intervention, if carefully applied.

[164] Unnever, Colvin, and Cullen (2004); McNeely, Nonnemaker, and Blum (2002); Thornberry et al. (2003)
[165] see **Figure 4.17** in Chapter 4

The majority of students (52.4 percent), parents (71.4 percent), and faculty (72.7 percent) surveyed reported a belief that a peer mediation training program would lead to less fighting among students. Yet this is not necessarily a measure of the *effectiveness* of this style of intervention, but more an indication of the extent to which local parents, faculty, and students are open to the idea. A wide array of literature provides empirical support for the potential of peer mediation to decrease levels of aggression-related disciplinary incidents and improve overall school climate.[166] Yet other sources highlight the reality that conflict resolution strategies can be quite ineffective and/or counterproductive when implemented without regard to realities associated with school resources, student contexts, and prevailing informal norms.[167] As Anderson (1997) explains,

> "The culture of the street doesn't allow backing down. When the boys at the Youth Study Center (Philadelphia's juvenile detention facility) saw a video on conflict resolution as an alternative to fighting, they just shook their heads. They knew that you never back down. That is to set yourself up as a doormat. You have to be tough. If you show fear, others will exploit you. So you always have to give the impression that you are strong, that you are a "thorough dude." Even a teacher who shows fear becomes vulnerable and can be emotionally undone by the kids. When that happens, the kids know they've won (p. 97)."

When survey responses to sQ11 are compared with gender, it is interesting to note that males feel more strongly about the potential behavioral benefits of peer mediation, while females tended to display more ambiguity in this regard.[168] This may be due to the gender-specific developmental origins of aggression reviewed in Chapter 2, as males exhibit higher levels of testosterone which informs as to their proclivity to physically react in conflict situations. Since

[166] Woody (2008); Molina et al. (2004); Smith (2004)
[167] Gottfredson (1997)
[168] See **Figure 4.11** in Chapter 4

context-sensitive peer mediation training programs are shown to increase both male and female students' knowledge of—and abilities to apply—nonviolent means to resolve conflicts through peer mediation training, this strategy serves as an important supplement to other intervention efforts.[169]

4. Ninth graders are key.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Youth Risk Behavior Survey (2007:7), the prevalence of having been in a physical fight in high school was highest for 9th graders (40.9 percent of students reporting having fought), even when gender was taken into account. Studies of juvenile arrests and referrals also show that the peak age of delinquency is around 16.[170] Local data from the Youth Futures Authority from school years 2007-08 and 2008-09 also show that the unduplicated suspensions per capita rate among 9th graders in Staycomb was higher than the system-wide average.[171] In this study, survey respondents age 14-16 (around the 9th grade age) were also most likely to indicate a strong proclivity to fight even after being suspended. In light of the literature surrounding developmental pathways for delinquency, it is of great importance that intervention efforts or discipline policies consider ways to address the needs of this specific subpopulation of adolescents.

Notes on Theoretical Congruence.

Although not specifically intended to test the individual theories of delinquency discussed in Chapter 2, this study does provide interesting perspectives as to how the tenets of these theories may be at work in the Staycomb context.

[169] Woody (2008)
[170] Shoemaker (2010:269)
[171] SYFA (2010) See Appendix C: Out of School Suspension Rates for 9th graders

Social Learning Theory. The design of this study was more conducive to exploring ways in which the social learning process is employed post-conflict, rather than pre-deviance. Thus, it is interesting to note that while the most common response to sQ8, "After I have a fight with another student, an adult at school helps us resolve our dispute and I learn better ways to handle future situations," was "Strongly Disagree" (n=13), the vast majority of respondents (n=31) said that they view conflicts as learning opportunities (sQ7).[172] This discrepancy raises questions as to the *type* (whether internally, from peers, parents, or others) and *quality* (whether reinforcement for negative or positive behavior) of learning is in fact occurring. Furthermore, the data for sQ11 ("I would learn a lot about managing conflict in my own life by helping other students work out their disputes") indicates that a peer mediation training program may have potential to influence students' learning of conflict strategies. Since no data was gathered related to differential associations and/or the learning of how to fight, supporting or challenging this theory is beyond the scope of this analysis.

Control Theory. Here again, although this study does not serve to validate or contest control theories, a comparison of sQ9 and sQ6 does offer a tentative glimmer of support for Hirschi's hypothesis[173] that students who exhibit less attachment to school are more prone to engage in delinquent behavior.[174] As discussed in Chapter 4, this study finds a faint correlation between student agreement with the statement (sQ9), "The individual care and attention I get at this school is better than the attention I get at my home school" and a student's self-reported tendency to fight after being suspended. It should be noted here, though, that since the survey instrument asks respondents to *compare* the levels of attachment they feel to different school

[172] See **Figure 4.8** in Chapter 4
[173] Hirschi (2002:120-130)
[174] see **Figure 4.13** in Chapter 4

environments, this data does not give a reliable measurement of overall student connectedness. Faculty interview responses also shed light on the idea of low levels of self-control among students which may lead to an elevated risk of engaging in violent behavior. As one teacher put it, "Many students lack a genuine respect for the value of human life. Shoot-'em-up video games, brutal music lyrics, and community role models constantly pump kids with the message, 'The more you kill, the greater you are.'" Although this study did not specifically test for the presence of such influences in student lives, the literature consistently finds a relationship between desensitization to violence and a willingness to commit aggressive acts.[175]

Labeling Theory. The data shows that the majority of students surveyed either strongly identify or strongly *dis*identify with the personal characterization as a 'problem student' (see **Figure 4.6** in Chapter 4). Moreoever, the reader will recall that a comparison of responses to sQ1 (level of violence in home environment) and sQ5 (identification with 'problem student' label) reveals two trends at work: a) across all types of home environments, a significant number of students do not identity with this label, and b) the higher the level of violence in a student's home environment, the more likely he or she is to bear this brand. The presence of two parallel but distinct populations at the Radick Center may suggest that the students who attend consist of, as one teacher explained in an interview, "the kids that need to be here, and then the kids that were just swept up in the zero tolerance tide." To test the self-fulfilling hypothesis of labeling theory, however, further investigation is necessary regarding changes in student behavior before and after the label was perceived to be applied.

Code of the Street. Perhaps the most consistently supported thesis throughout this research process was the normative framework described by Elijah Anderson in his work among

[175] Hurst, King, Smith (2003)

disadvantaged inner-city African Americans in Philadelphia. Student surveys indicate both a predominance of family cultures which highly value one's ability to physically retaliate[176] after being disrespected and a majority of students (n=26) who believe that some students in Staycomb must fight to survive. Both of these variables (sQ2 and sQ3) were strongly correlated with the level of violence in the home environment.[177] Moreover, the level of respect associated with having a violent reputation (sQ4), which Anderson (1999) presents as a core element of his thesis, is highest (n=15) among those students who hail from violent home environments (see **Figure 5.1**)—thus suggesting, as Stewart and Simons (2006) posit, that the code of the Philadelphia street is also alive and well in places like, and among similar populations as those in, Staycomb, Georgia (p.25).

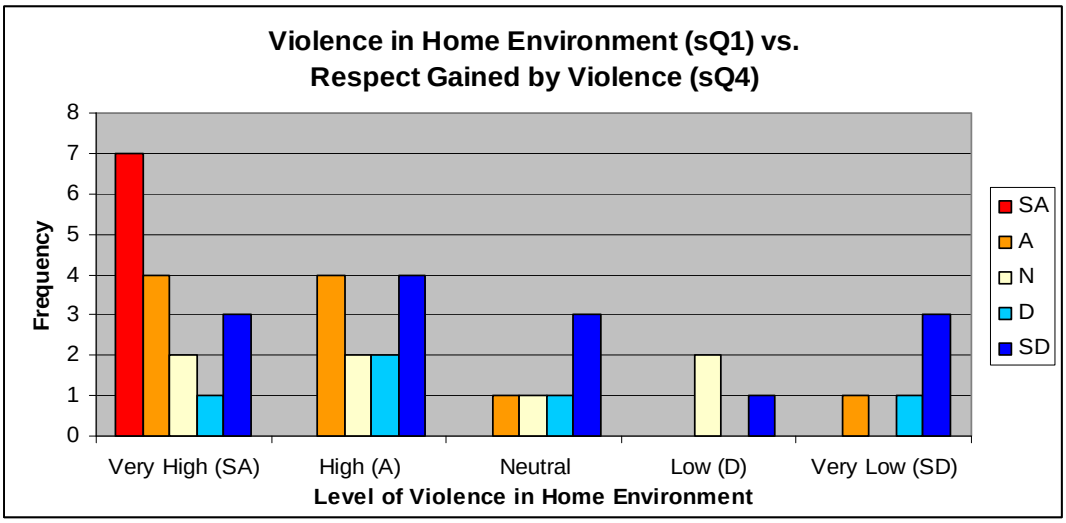


Figure 5.1

Student and faculty interviews generated a fuller understanding of 'picking', whereby individuals accost each other in order to test and see if 'cool points' or 'respect' can be snatched by force or other means. Of keen interest is the fact that both students and teachers are privy to this social

[176] see **Figure 4.2** in Chapter 4
[177] see **Figures 4.3 and 4.4** in Chapter 4

code which holds that fighting—or showing aggressive, retaliatory tendencies—is the most reliable means of solving disputes. Given the rather striking familiarity of on-the-ground practitioners with this normative framework, it is surprising that more efforts to understand and address it have not been fully employed.

Limitations of the Research

The results of this study are constrained at least in part by several limitations. First, small sample sizes (parents n=7, faculty n=22, and students n=44) due to a circuitous and indirect recruitment process prohibited a wide array of viewpoints and a clearer definition of trends in survey data. While surveys offer considerable advantages in terms of the measurement of views among a large population, these standardized instruments may miss what is *most* appropriate to respondents by designing questions that are at least *minimally* appropriate to all respondents.[178] Moreover, surveys are unable to capture a three-dimensional sense of the life situation in which respondents are thinking and acting, and these instruments cannot be altered once interviewing has begun. Thus, as Maxfield and Babbie (2005) explain, "survey research is generally weaker on validity and stronger on reliability (p.273)." The use of self-reported survey measures also presents caveats to the study. Questions regarding a student's opinions and beliefs regarding violence and delinquency are sensitive because these are asked of respondents in a school setting where such behaviors are illegal, and the individual may face grave consequences if discovered by authorities.[179] In addition, subjects may respond in such a way as to make themselves appear more principled than they actually are, although this possibility was mediated by the anonymity of surveys in this study.

[178] Maxfield and Babbie (2005)
[179] Marcus (2007:17)

Directions for Future Study

Understanding the relationships between and among enabling factors and violent episodes is a never-ending process. There are always more conditions to test, more people to ask, and more exceptions to explore. While this study builds upon investigations into these issues, it has also unearthed particular areas for future research possibilities in the Staycomb context. First, a greater examination of the role that parents play in the reinforcement of aggressive behavioral 'definitions' (to use a term from Sutherland) in their children would deepen our understanding of the prevalence of the retaliation rule. This could be accomplished by a further assessment of teacher, parent, and student perspectives related to at-school interactions between parents and their children regarding displays of physical control. Second, opinions of faculty in the system at-large about zero tolerance and suspension policies represent a rich area for future study. In this way, it would be interesting to compare the views of teachers at the Radick Center with teachers in regular public schools as to the improvement of student behavior after suspension. Third, the phenomenon of 'picking' or 'checking' among students and their peers deserves a closer look. How and where to students learn this behavioral code? For students who have "matured" out of this mindset, what factors, influences, or beliefs led to the spell being broken? Do parents also exhibit this behavior?

Concluding Remarks

Banishing problems does not mean they will go away. Moreover, developmental and school-to-prison trajectories are not diverted by merely suspending them. While it is absolutely essential to maintain safety and order in our schools, this study has addressed a topic that is all too often taken for granted in the quest to effectively handle discipline problems: namely, understanding the culture of fighting that flourishes among disadvantaged students. From

interviews and surveys of teachers, administrators, parents, and students themselves, I have sought to construct a more three-dimensional portrait of the situation in one Georgia school district. The findings of this research are intended to inspire dialogue among school and community leaders regarding the teachable moments afforded by student fights, and serve to "challenge the assumption that discipline is just punishment and that it functions only as a deterrent."[180] By better understanding the major contributing factors for this code of violence, teachers, parents, and policymakers alike may be more able to hone their efforts at sustainably reducing violence in the schools. While there is no one-size-fits-all approach to violence prevention and intervention[181], peer mediation training may come to play an important role in defusing the code of the Staycomb streets. This initiative requires trained and dedicated staff, monetary resources, and long-term political will to sustain. The lasting benefits, however, of "[empowering] students to learn the procedures, skills, and attitudes required to resolve conflicts constructively—for and by themselves—in their personal lives at home, in school, at work, and in the community," are undeniably real.[182]

Thomas (2006) conceptualizes the treatment of violence in America's schools as the careful work of a physician. Some treatments are understood to work well for certain patients, while others may respond to something different. This same logic applies to the implementation of school discipline: while suspension may work for students who already exhibit strong school bonds, others may need more thorough and life-preserving interventions than those prescribed by zero tolerance. And by better understanding these patients' histories and home environments, we are more able to spot and treat the roots of the malady for the long term.

[180] Breunlin et al. (2002:356)
[181] Williams (2005)
[182] Johnson and Johnson (1996); Breunlin et al. (2002)

APPENDIX A

FIGHTING OFFENSES PER CAPITA
AMONG 10 LARGEST GEORGIA SCHOOL SYSTEMS

GA School System (sorted Largest to Smallest)	FY 2004	FY 2005	FY 2006	FY 2007	FY 2008	FY 2009
1 (Largest)	0.023	0.022	0.022	0.021	0.019	0.018
2	0.026	0.026	0.024	0.023	0.019	0.017
3	0.097	0.087	0.080	0.067	0.064	0.058
4	0.038	0.035	0.034	0.034	0.029	0.030
5	0.060	0.061	0.065	0.060	0.050	0.057
6	0.099	0.093	0.081	0.080	0.069	0.068
7	0.033	0.032	0.031	0.034	0.035	0.029
8	0.016	0.011	0.010	0.010	0.009	0.009
Chippling	**0.066**	**0.065**	**0.054**	**0.082**	**0.072**	**0.052**
10 (Smallest)	0.063	0.066	0.076	0.077	0.070	0.062

Sources: *GA Dept. of Education (2004-2009). October 2004-2009 Full-time Equivalent Data Collection Cycle (FTE 2004-2009-1).*

GA Dept. of Education (2004-2009). June 2004-2009 Student Record Data Collection Cycle (SR 2004-2009).

APPENDIX B

OUT-OF-SCHOOL SUSPENSION PER CAPITA
AMONG 10 LARGEST GEORGIA SCHOOL SYSTEMS

GA School System (sorted Largest to Smallest)	FY 2004	FY 2005	FY 2006	FY 2007	FY 2008	FY 2009
1 (Largest)	0.11	0.11	0.12	0.12	0.12	0.13
2	0.14	0.16	0.16	0.15	0.15	0.14
3	0.31	0.30	0.28	0.29	0.28	0.26
4	0.15	0.15	0.17	0.18	0.21	0.23
5	0.30	0.27	0.27	0.28	0.29	0.32
6	0.40	0.41	0.37	0.36	0.30	0.23
7	0.15	0.16	0.16	0.17	0.17	0.16
8	0.08	0.09	0.10	0.09	0.08	0.08
Chippling	**0.34**	**0.35**	**0.35**	**0.40**	**0.55**	**0.45**
10 (Smallest)	0.36	0.42	0.57	0.59	0.55	0.42

Sources: *GA Dept. of Education (2004-2009). October 2004-2009 Full-time Equivalent Data Collection Cycle (FTE 2004-2009-1).*

GA Dept. of Education (2004-2009). June 2004-2009 Student Record Data Collection Cycle (SR 2004-2009).

APPENDIX C

OUT-OF-SCHOOL SUSPENSION IN STAYCOMB-CHIPPLING COUNTY SCHOOLS
COMPARING 9TH GRADERS TO SYSTEM

School Year	2006-2007	2007-2008	2008-2009
Number of unduplicated students suspended (System wide)	6,703	7,819	5,898
Total number of incidents of out of school suspension (System wide)	14,839	18,377	15,473
Average per student* (System wide)	2.2	2.35	2.6
Number of unduplicated 9th grade students suspended	1,444	2,055	1,623
Total number of incidents of suspension for 9th grade students	3,130	6,441	4,583
Average per student* for 9th grade students	2.16	3.1	2.8

* The average per student was derived by dividing the total number of incidents of out of school suspensions by the number of unduplicated students receiving out of school suspensions.

Note-1: This outline was compiled using reports and information from the SCCPSS.

Note-2: This outline only serves to provide an average number of out of school suspension incidents per student suspended. It does not attempt to provide an outline of the problem of recidivism with regards to out of school suspensions.

Source: Staycomb Youth Futures
personal communication, March 26, 2010

APPENDIX D

STUDENT SURVEY

For the following questions, circle the one that best expresses your honest opinion. For some, write a short answer.
SA= Strongly Agree, **A**= Agree, **N**= Neutral, **D**= Disagree, **SD**= Strongly Disagree

1. Violence is common where I come from. **SA A N D SD**

2. Briefly describe your family's views on conflict. When is it OK to fight?

3. Students my age in Savannah often feel like they need to fight in order to survive.
SA A N D SD
Why or why not?

4. My peers will respect me more if they know I have a history of fighting or jail-time.
SA A N D SD

5. People tend to think of me as a "problem student." **SA A N D SD**

6. I am less likely to fight now that I have been suspended or expelled. **SA A N D SD**

7. In general, I see my conflict-related mistakes as learning opportunities. **SA A N D SD**

8. After I have a fight with another student, an adult at school helps us resolve our dispute and I learn better ways to handle future situations. **SA A N D SD**

9. The individual care and attention I get at this school is better than the attention I get at my home school. **SA A N D SD**

10. The Character Education part of this school's curriculum is relevant to my daily life.
SA A N D SD

11. I would learn a lot about managing conflict in my own life by helping other students work out their disputes. **SA A N D SD**

12. My self-confidence has improved since I came to this school. **SA A N D SD**
Why or why not?

13. I am in _____ grade. **14.** I am _____ years old. **15.** My race/ethnicity is _____.

(Circle the choice that best describes you.) **16.** I live with **(one both none)** of my parents.

17. I am **(male female)**.

APPENDIX E

Interview Questions for Students

Gender:____ Age: ___ Ethnicity: _____ Single Parent Family? ___Grade: _____

1. Describe your home school experience.
    a. Did you enjoy your time at that school?

2. Describe the event or events that caused you to be at Scott Alternative Learning Center.
    a. How did you feel when you learned about your suspension?
    b. Did you experience any conflict resolution before coming to Scott?

3. How many times have you been suspended or expelled?
    a. Is this your first time at Scott?
    b. How long have you been at Scott?

4. Does engaging in violence earn a student in Savannah more respect among his/her peers?

5. Do you ever feel like you (or other students) need to fight to survive? Why or why not?
    a. What would happen if you did not fight?
    b. Do you have any friends that you respect that haven't been in a fight?

6. Why do you think students in Savannah fight so much?

7. When students have a fight, do teachers work with the students afterwards to resolve their dispute and help them learn better ways to handle disagreements?

8. Since being suspended, do you feel more or less likely to fight to solve a conflict? Why?

9. How does your family usually handle conflict? When is it OK to fight?

10. Has your self-esteem changed at all since you came to Scott?

11. Think for a second about other students in Savannah. What would it take to get these students to choose not to fight?

12. What would you need in order to learn how to handle conflicts better?

13. What do you think the consequence ought to be for students who have a fight at school?

14. Do you have an opinion about the current discipline process?

APPENDIX F

FACULTY/ADMINISTRATOR SURVEY

For the following questions, circle the one that best expresses your honest opinion. For some, write a short answer.
SA= Strongly Agree, **A**= Agree, **N**= Neutral, **D**= Disagree, **SD**= Strongly Disagree

1. It is never the role of a school to help train a child how to positively handle conflict.
SA A N D SD

2. On a scale from 1-10, with 1 being the least and 10 being the most, how much discretion do you feel you have in determining the punishment for a student who offends under your supervision?
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

3. Suspension and expulsion are unfortunate but effective ways to change a student's behavior.
SA A N D SD

4. Have you ever had a student suspended or expelled from school? **Yes No**

5. Students who return from their suspension/expulsion period are usually less likely to fight.
SA A N D SD

6. Teachers throughout the school system tend to seek ways to "get rid" of "problem students."
SA A N D SD

7. Teachers at our school tend to seek ways to "get rid" of "problem students." **SA A N D SD**

8. Students I teach would probably fight less if they were trained to mediate their peers' disputes.
SA A N D SD

9. In your experience in dealing with student conflict, which approach does your school tend to emphasize more: *punitive* (punishment-oriented) or *restorative* (personal growth-oriented) discipline? What evidence leads you to this opinion?

10. After a student has been in a fight, an adult at our school works with that student to help them develop better ways of handling similar situations in the future, treating the fight as a learning opportunity.
SA A N D SD

11. Have you undergone any classroom behavior management training in the past 24 months? **Yes No**

12. In general, teachers here are given the support they need to handle student conflict effectively.
SA A N D SD

13. General job title: _____
14. I have worked in the public school system for about _____ years.

15. Race/ethnicity: _____. **16.** Age category: 20-39 40-59 60+ **17.** Gender: **M F**

APPENDIX G

Interview Questions for Faculty/Administrators

Gender:_____ Age: _____ Position Title:_____

1. How long have you been involved in the public school system?
    a. What grades do you teach?

2. In your opinion, why do most students fight?

3. Do you think sometimes students feel they have to fight? Why or why not?

4. Describe your experience with disciplinary alternative education. Have you personally ever had a student suspended or expelled for fighting?
    a. What things did you take into account when you made that decision?

5. How has the spectrum of punishable offenses changed under the recent adoption of the zero tolerance approach?
    a. What types of offenses are punishable by suspension or expulsion?

6. What is your impression of the students at the Scott Center?
    a. How do other people in the school system view Scott students?

7. What is your take on the changing levels in student population at Scott over the last few years?

8. Is it ever the responsibility of the school (or the system) to help students learn how to handle conflicts constructively?

9. In your experience, how well does the 60/40 curriculum model at Scott prepare a student to return to their home school and become a successful student?

10. In your opinion, what role should conflict resolution play in the disciplinary process?

11. What do you think students need in order to learn how to handle conflicts better?

12. What role do you see parents *actually* playing in student's lives when it comes to conflict, and how does this compare with what you see as the *ideal* parent-student relationship?

13. As a teacher, do you have any advice for parents of students who are prone to fighting?

14. Some scholars claim that suspending, expelling, or placing students in disciplinary alternative schools can be counterproductive in that these techniques may actually help reinforce bad behavior. Do you agree with this, and why or why not?

15. Are there any areas of Savannah's disciplinary process that you would like to see changed in any way?

APPENDIX H

PARENT/GUARDIAN SURVEY

For the following questions, circle the one that best expresses your honest opinion. For some, write a short answer.
SA= Strongly Agree, **A**= Agree, **N**= Neutral, **D**= Disagree, **SD**= Strongly Disagree

1. It is never the role of a school to train a child how to positively handle conflict.
SA A N D SD

2. For my child, fighting is a choice, not a necessity. **SA A N D SD**

3. Do you think some children feel they need to fight in order to survive? Why is this?

4. Briefly describe your family's basic views on fighting. When is it OK to fight?

5. How many times has your child been suspended or expelled from school?
1 time 2-3 times 4-6 times 7+ times

6. In general, my child's behavior has improved since he/she was suspended or expelled.
SA A N D SD

7. After my child is involved in a fight, an adult at school works with him/her to learn better ways to handle similar situations in the future.
SA A N D SD

8. My child's school treats conflicts as learning opportunities. **SA A N D SD**

9. My child would improve his/her behavior by learning how to negotiate other classmates' conflicts. **SA A N D SD**

10. People tend to think of my child as a "problem student." **SA A N D SD**

11. My child truly believes he/she can reach his/her full potential. **SA A N D SD SD**

12. My child is in the _____ grade. **13.** He/she is _____ years old.

13. 14. Are you a single parent? **Yes No**

15. My race/ethnicity is: _____. **16.** My age category: **20-39 40-59 60+**

17. My gender: **Male Female**

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