

# *At* PLAY *in* BELFAST



CHILDREN'S FOLKLORE AND  
IDENTITIES IN NORTHERN IRELAND

Donna M. Lanclos

## *At Play in Belfast*

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The Rutgers Series in Childhood Studies

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*Donna M. Lanclos*



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Manufactured in the United States of America

*To my parents  
and to my children*



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## *At Play in Belfast*

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# Introduction

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Children are many things in Northern Ireland—as they are throughout the world—but their most public role appears to be that of symbol. In particular, children symbolize the future. They embody all that is at stake if the fragile structures erected by the peace process fail. Their deaths galvanize people to action and outrage in a way that the death of an adult has for the most part ceased to do. Children provide the motivation for adults to work in social and political arenas for peace, to continue to engage in the armed struggle (on either side), or to leave the scene altogether: to flee Belfast for the countryside, to flee Northern Ireland for the South, for Scotland, for England, and for America. Images of Protestant and Catholic children playing together were used during the election campaign of 1997, for example, in a television spot that juxtaposed scenes of frolicking children with the Van Morrison tune “Days Like This,” to suggest a vision of a better future. The advertisement ended with the voice of Morrison himself asking, “Wouldn’t it be great if all days were like this?” Children are symbols for what is at stake in the Troubles. They are present in newspaper and television reports, in commemorative murals, at bomb scenes, on Bloody Sunday, and as victims of plastic bullets, paramilitary and security forces, and petrol bombings. They stand in for the loss of life and innocence of all involved (“From Forward March to Retreat” 1998; Helsinki Watch 1992; Keane 1998; MacDonald 1986; McCarney 1995; Whitman 1992).



Of course children are more than symbols, too. They are daughters, sons, grandchildren, pupils, sports enthusiasts, friends—people in their own right, living their lives in a myriad of roles in a variety of contexts. It is their role as “child” that shapes much of their everyday experiences, and the symbolic nature of that role in Northern Irish society informs many of the constraints upon them.

Children are symbols for social scientists, as well. In anthropology, they have been seen as Primitives, as unfinished Adults, as the means by which adults can either revisit their past (personal or social) or look into their future. Discussing the history and construction of the abstract notions of Childhood has become a way for scholars to discuss society at large and the broader values that shape particular manifestations of Childhood as an experience, a category, a stage of life. Children are popular as ciphers for adult experiences, especially for adults trying to see themselves in their children. It is far more difficult to find—and to present—representations of children that engage the words and experiences of children themselves as social actors, as people in their own right, as residents of the real world that adults inhabit, in sometimes similar, sometimes very different ways.

In this book I present my investigation of the expression and shaping of individual and social identities as expressed in the language and folklore of Belfast children in the divided society of Northern Ireland. I take as my starting point the culturally constructed nature of the category of “Child,” and situate this discussion within a relatively new intellectual space wherein children’s experiences inform research not simply to discuss children as an end unto themselves or as some sort of abstract cultural construct, but rather to stimulate broad discussions about culture and society. Folklore materials collected in 1996 and 1997 at five Belfast primary schools (two Protestant, two Catholic, and one Integrated) demonstrate how kids both are aware of and resist their marginalization as “children” from the real world, the world from which many adults would like to protect them. Central to this work is the notion that children’s own utterances and perspectives must be included in the ethnographies that purport to be about childhood. It is not enough to talk about children; researchers must also talk and listen *to* them. Folklore is a way to connect with kids in a nonhierarchical fashion that allows their own concerns to come through, not just those of the adults around them.

Chapter 1 presents the micro-context in which I collected the folklore, and is a narrative consisting of an amalgam of several weeks' worth of field-work. I then analyze the folklore over the course of three chapters, the first focussing on kids' use of rudeness in confronting the divisions between adult and child, the next on gender and family roles, and the last on sectarian (Protestant/Catholic) categories. The striking similarity of folk traditions among children from all five of the schools, Protestant, Catholic, and Integrated, indicates that the ethno-religious differences that mark the conflict in Northern Ireland are far more a matter of political and economic difference than a matter of difference in cultural content. Both the folklore texts and the social contexts in which they were collected point to a complex interaction of children's sensibilities and the sociopolitical circumstances of their lives—circumstances that they share in many ways with adults, but that are also circumscribed by kids' position in the subculture of childhood.

It is increasingly the case that children are recognized as part of the total population, and therefore as important to anthropological researchers generally and not simply to specialists interested in children as an end unto themselves. Children's lives contain the genesis of culture; they do not merely reproduce what their parents have, but with each generation create something new, an amalgam drawn from their family, peers, and community. The cultural content of any society has its roots in a complex feedback loop of childhood experiences, structured by parents, peers, and teachers, which in turn have profound effects on adult constructions of reality. Child's play should be seen not just as harmless practice for some unspecified-in-time future, but as very real training in skills that children need now or that will be required of them very soon. Children's everyday lives are more than just preparation for the future; they are life itself, and fair game for anthropological concern in their own right.<sup>1</sup>

The children I met in Northern Ireland were bound by several sets of everyday experiences in common, not the least of which is that they were children growing up in (for the most part) working-class parts of Belfast. They were additionally bound by common experiences in encountering gender expectations, and, last but not least, by their common experience of everyday violence—the root of much of which is the current Troubles. In many senses, the experiences that bind children together in Belfast are similar to those of children throughout the Western European and American

urban landscapes. In this case, context is crucial for a discussion of meaning. The folk materials are found throughout the anglophone world—in the United States, Britain, Ireland, Australia, New Zealand, and parts of South Africa (Bronner 1988; Lowenstein 1974; McCosh 1979; Opie and Opie 1967, 1984, 1985, 1992; Opie 1994; Sutton-Smith 1959; Turner, Factor, and Lowenstein 1978). What makes the materials special and relevant in this analysis is the context in which the materials are employed (Dundes 1980). The specifics of the Northern Irish context enrich our understanding of the folklore materials I present here. Interpretation that focuses on the lives of the children who use the materials in their play cannot occur independent of the everyday settings, both macro and micro, in which the materials are employed. The macro-context is the sociopolitical, economic, and geographic spheres, of Northern Ireland and Belfast. The micro-context consists of the schools, the playgrounds, and the particular groups of children I met, and was additionally complicated by whether or not adults were present.

Although the folklore is not unique to Belfast or Northern Ireland, the employment of the materials in the everyday play practices of children points to concerns that are characteristic of life there. Much of what I write here is applicable to the situations of urban working-class children in a variety of places in the world; there are definitely comparisons to be made. But because I was in Northern Ireland, and these children were in Northern Ireland, and because I am concerned with the anthropological meanings that folklore can reveal, it is impossible to completely escape the impact of the violence of the Troubles. Much is defined in Northern Ireland by the presence or absence of violent acts, or the potential for violence. Where one lives, shops, goes for entertainment, goes to school—all of these are circumscribed by the violent circumstances of the past thirty years. That reality shaped the circumstances of my fieldwork, as it does the lives of the people among whom I worked. Violent themes frequently erupted in the folklore, conversations, and actions of these kids, and this is apparent in the materials discussed in each chapter. This is not to say that the children condone or advocate or willingly participate in the violence, but rather that violence is an inescapable part of their reality, one not easily put aside despite the desire of adults (including myself) who would prefer that it not be so.

In writing about age and gender as well as sectarian identities among kids, I am working within a growing body of work that treats the people of Northern Ireland as more than just representatives of their sectarian (Protestant or Catholic) identities and expands the possible realm of ethnographic focus (for example, Arextaga 1997; Bryan and Jarman 1997; Butler 1991; Donnan and McFarlane 1997; Edge 1998; McCoy 1997, 1998; Taafe 1998; Whitaker 1998). Children have been hit particularly hard by the stereotyping power of academic focus of sociological, psychological, and educational scholars, who set their sights (not unreasonably) on the impact of the Troubles on children's lives. Such a focus frequently leads to the exclusion of other aspects of children's lives that, while certainly affected by the Troubles, are not necessarily part of ethno-religious identity. Those works on children that do not center on the impact of the Troubles tend to avoid the real world altogether, in nostalgic collections of children's folklore presented out of context and out of time (for example, Leyden 1993).

I want to write against that disembodied nostalgia for children's lore, to situate kids as people through their folklore and the contexts in which they perform it. By focusing on the negotiation and expression of a variety of identities, I am engaging with current work among adults in Northern Ireland and therefore placing children on an ethnographic par with their elders, as have scholars like Barrie Thorne (1995), Cindy Dell Clark (1995), and Myra Bluebond-Langner (1978).

I approach the folklore materials I collected on the playground as essential components of the children's everyday practices (Bordieu 1990; de Certeau 1988). Furthermore, it is through analyzing the practice and performance of folklore, and the social practices in which such performances are embedded, that I attempt to illuminate the nature of the identity performances (Butler 1990; Foley 1990) I observed among Belfast children. Folklore is part not only of the script but also of the commentary on those performances. Through their folklore, children both engage with and critique the expectations they encounter in their families, in the schools, and among their peers. Folklore, then, is more than a marker, more than a signifier of belonging to one identity (boy/Protestant/child) or another (girl/Catholic/adult); it is a part of the relational negotiations that constitute that very identity (Anttonen 1996).

### *Research Design and Intent*

My first extended visit to Belfast took place in the summer of 1994, just after the pub killings at Loughinisland and just before the first cease-fire was declared by the IRA (in August) and then by Loyalist paramilitary groups (in October). As I returned from setting up the logistics for my projects, I encountered the same question from many of my American colleagues: "Well, you won't want to do your research there now, will you, now that there's a cease-fire?" This was said as if the violence in Northern Ireland were the only aspect that made the people there interesting at all.

I had rather looked forward to seeing the extent to which the cease-fire (and attendant political goings-on) trickled down to the everyday lives of Belfast people. I was particularly concerned with the potential impact on the lives of children, who were frequently used as symbols for what was at stake with the cease-fire but who were not themselves represented in the high-level talks among political parties. The cease-fire broke in 1996, with the Canary Wharf bomb in London, and the Belfast I came back to in September 1996, to begin my research, was once again a different city. People spoke nostalgically about "when there was peace," referring not to nearly thirty years ago, but to just the previous year. The children I met in the primary schools quizzed me about President Bill Clinton, noting with pride that he had come to Belfast last Christmas to light the city tree, "because there was peace."

Belfast is often described as "war-torn Belfast," and is indeed one of the most well-known divided cities in the world. The divisions in Belfast are marked with religious labels: Catholic and Protestant. Much has been written on just how much complexity is embedded in those deceptively simple terms. "Catholic" is often used as a gloss for "Nationalist" or "Republican," two related but different political stances, that have in common a commitment to renewing ties and/or reunification with the Republic of Ireland, from which the six counties that constitute Northern Ireland were separated in the Act of Partition of 1922. "Protestant" is often taken to be synonymous with "Unionist" or "Loyalist," both of which are committed to continuing ties to and/or union with the rest of the United Kingdom.<sup>2</sup> In Belfast, especially in working-class Belfast, Protestants and Catholics do not generally live in the same neighborhoods. It becomes relatively easy, therefore, to identify

people's allegiance by knowing what street they live on. The most famous examples are the Shankill (Loyalist/Unionist) and the Falls (Republican/Nationalist) roads, both of which are in West Belfast, and both of which are frequently described as "heartlands" for their particular communities. East Belfast has traditionally been dominated by Protestants, as has much of South Belfast, with exceptions such as the Shore Road, Andersonstown, and, in the late 1990s, the Lower Ormeau Road. North Belfast is a patchwork quilt of different communities, such that it is possible to pass from one territory to another in a matter of blocks and even in some cases simply by crossing the street. The middle-class Catholics have traditionally lived in neighborhoods in North Belfast, while the more well-to-do Protestants have lived in South Belfast, especially along the Malone Road, often characterized as the "leafy" Malone Road, so as to emphasize its prosperity. Populations are shifting constantly; some shifts happen more swiftly than others. At the time of my fieldwork, the Lower Ormeau Road in South Belfast had only been inhabited by Catholics within the past decade or so, creating a great deal of tension among the Protestants who saw Catholics' presence on "their road" as an invasion. The "leafy" Malone Road is now home to prosperous Catholics as well as to Protestants, and the shifts in North Belfast are difficult to keep up with unless one lives there—and sometimes even if one does. Such population shifts were a major contributor to the tensions that erupted in violence around the Holy Cross Primary School in the Ardoyne in early 2002 (Wallace 2002).

The segregated history of Belfast city is mirrored in its segregated schools (Murray 1985, for an ethnography of two schools; see also Burgess 1993; Osborne, Cormack, and Gallagher 1993; Wright 1991). Since before the 1922 partition of Northern Ireland from the rest of Ireland, there have been two streams of schools for the children of Northern Ireland, one Catholic, sponsored in large part by the Church, and one Protestant, sponsored by the state. Postpartition Northern Ireland had different names for those schools, referring to the funding the schools received. State schools were "controlled," meaning they received all of their money from the government, while Catholic schools were "maintained," with only a small percentage of their funding coming from the government, and the rest from the Church and the local Catholic community. Since education reforms in 1989, the funding

situation has changed: most Catholic schools can draw 100 percent of their funding from the state without losing control over religious instruction, which was the primary concern that led to the establishment of separate schools (Cormack, Gallagher, and Osborne 1991; Dunn 1993; Osborne, Cormack, and Gallagher 1993). Also since the 1980s, an Integrated school movement has been ongoing, started by parents and educators who saw bringing children together in school as a key way to foster tolerance and understanding among the next generation of Protestant and Catholic inhabitants in Northern Ireland (Cairns, Dunn, and Giles 1993; Irwin 1997; McEwen and Salters 1993; McQuaid 1989; Moffat 1993; Wright 1991).

Five different primary schools gave me permission to do my research among their children. The schools were scattered through West, North, and South Belfast (see Appendix A for descriptions of the individual schools). The schools are referred to in this book by their descriptive “code names,” based on whether they were Protestant/state, Catholic, or Integrated schools. P.S. 1 and P.S. 2 are the state schools, C.S. 1 and C.S. 2 are the Catholic schools, and I.S. is the Integrated school. I had originally intended to compare and contrast the folk traditions on the playgrounds of Protestant/state schools and Catholic schools. Having an Integrated school in my sample would provide an interesting “control” for the other, segregated schools. I chose the playground, rather than the neighborhoods, at least in part because of my comparative intents. By living in a mixed area near the university, I maintained my “unmarked” (sectarian) status in such a way that allowed me to be acceptable in all of the schools. Being an American who was not of Irish descent also helped make the case for my openmindedness, if not neutrality.<sup>3</sup>

It was additionally my intention to test the assertion of essential difference between the “two communities” that has appeared so often in representations of Northern Ireland in the academic and popular media. In the history of scholarly and popular discussions of Northern Ireland’s “two communities,” there persists an underlying assumption of cultural differences that must necessarily be the source of the political, economic, and religious disagreements (for example, in Ruane and Todd 1991; see Rolston 1998 for a critique of this assumption). The writer Lauren Holliday, in her introduction to the compilation volume *Children of “The Troubles”* (1997), while at-

tempting to dispel the notion that the conflict in Northern Ireland is all about religion, does suggest that there are essential cultural differences at stake. "In fact, the Catholic/Protestant conflict is more of an ethnic conflict *between two culturally distinct groups* over land and civil rights than a war about religious doctrine" (Holliday 1997, 2; emphasis added). And yet it is common for observers of and participants in the conflict to note how the two communities "mirror" each other (Davis 1994; Loftus 1994).

That sectarian differences in Northern Ireland are not fundamentally cultural in nature has been masked by anthropological tendencies to do intensive research only in one community or the other. This is especially true in urban environments like Belfast, where doing cross-community research can be potentially hazardous to researchers as well as to the community members among whom they work (for example, Sluka 1989). Moving from one community to another in the course of research does necessarily diminish the level of intimacy that one can achieve with any one community,<sup>4</sup> and so anthropologists who work in Northern Ireland frequently have to contend with the necessity of being labeled either "Protestant" or "Catholic" researchers, unless they specifically design their research to confront cross-community issues. This situation was less obvious in the days of rural Northern Irish ethnography (for example, Bufwack 1982; Harris 1972), where commonalities between Protestants and Catholics in everyday life were emphasized despite preexisting group differences and conflicts. The assumptions of essential cultural difference are not borne out by the content of the ethnographies produced by anthropologists and sociologists working in Northern Ireland, nor were they borne out in the course of my research (also see Lambkin 1996 for a critique of the "opposite religions" perspective).

With all of the negotiations for peace taking place at the time I was planning and carrying out my research in 1996 and 1997, it seemed to me that to look at children would be a particularly useful way of evaluating the degree to which administrative changes generated by political negotiations for peace filter into the lived reality of people. I thought that understanding how the children within Protestant and Catholic communities in Northern Ireland understood and perpetuated their separate identities was an important step toward avoiding the flare-up of future conflicts into violence. I saw myself



as looking at the beginnings of the formation of sectarian identities; I expected to be surrounded by concern with the Protestant/Catholic divide from my first visit to the playground, and for that concern to be especially present at the Integrated school, where children from both communities were with each other every school day.

I did not find this to be the case.

In the Belfast schools, having majority Protestant and Catholic student bodies in separate schools remains the usual pattern, but there are increasing numbers of different types of children present, for example, immigrants and children of immigrants from south and southeast Asia. There are also other religious identities represented among the students. Nevertheless, in the schools in which I did my research, the pupils used broad words like “Catholic” and “Protestant” to describe not only themselves and other individuals but also their schools. Furthermore, those who attended the Integrated school frequently defined it as a place where “Catholics and Protestants” could live and go to school together in peace. Therefore, while these categories do have the potential to mask some differences within the school populations, they continue to have meaning for the people who attend these schools.

But the picture of Belfast children that the playground lore reveals is one that is constantly shifting. No one category, be it Catholic or Protestant, Boy or Girl, Adult or Child, held absolute sway over the children’s actions for very long. Rather, depending on context, an individual would react according to a whole range of possible identities, a fact that should not surprise us, but one that does not necessarily come through in most popular or scholarly writing about children. In writing about the children I met and the folklore materials that enlivened their playground experiences, I try to represent them as the complex individuals that I came to know. I especially want to enrich existing representations of children in Northern Ireland (for example, in Cairns 1987; Cairns and Cairns 1995; Harbison 1989; Holliday 1997; Jenkins 1982, 1983) by going beyond the Protestant/Catholic divide and discussing other roles these kids have to explore. Close and everyday interactions with the children I met in Belfast revealed a young population struggling with a range of identities, including age and gender, each constrained to at least some degree by the current political and economic situation in Northern Ireland.

*Research among Children:  
Methodological and Theoretical Concerns*

Given that it is important to gain access to the everyday lives of children in the course of anthropological work, researchers come up against the difficulties inherent in being adults, with all of the power and status connotations that such a label entails in our society. They must try to get information from children, whose interactions with adults are often shot through with attempts to subvert adult expectations and to hide information from adults in the process of constructing their own lives.<sup>5</sup> Adults, especially middle-class Western adults, want children to be separate, in order to somehow prevent them from having to deal with issues they consider to be “too grown up”: sexuality, violence, politics, economic realities and worries. Children, in contrast, are determined to deal with those issues. Indeed they have to in many cases, regardless of adult concerns to the contrary, and so require some kind of separation from the adults in their lives to do so.

How, then, to interact with children as something other than an adult (as defined by the conventions of age relations in Western European and American societies)? It is a constant and not always successful struggle to convince children that you are not the sort of adult they are expecting to deal with, especially within the institutional context of the school. In the course of my research, I spent weeks insisting that I was not a “Miss,” that is, I was neither a teacher nor a playground supervisor, I had no power to punish or sanction them, except as another peer would (by telling another adult, which I tried not to do). What I was instead was always ambiguous, and not all children believed me when I insisted on my powerlessness on their playgrounds. In particular, the children under seven years of age remained comfortable with their assumption that I was there to “look after them.” Older boys at the larger schools never quite believed that I was not some kind of supervisor, capable of exerting power over them if I chose, so they never quite trusted me enough to talk to me in the way that the younger boys and girls, and older girls did.<sup>6</sup>

From the start of my research, my intentions were to use the folklore of the children as a way to connect with them. If I appeared interested in their games and jokes, then I had a relatively natural way to start talking to the children and to establish a rapport with them so that we could eventually have conversations about issues that were brought up by a particular piece

of folklore. Asking about or participating in their folklore created a tenuous sense of *communitas* in our shared interest in what they were doing on the playground. My expressed interest in their play, and their interest in me as an exotic addition to their playgrounds, resulted in many mutual open-ended interviews, where first kids would ask questions about me, and then I would take the opportunity to ask questions about what people were doing on the playground. Eventually I was comfortable enough with several children at each school so that I could ask questions about them personally, in much the same way that they asked questions about me. Folklore research was, at one level, a methodology that allowed me to interact with the kids more on their terms and less on terms dictated by the ordinary rules of adult-child interactions. On another level, the use of folklore was theoretically important, as I was approaching folklore materials as a way of exploring ethnic, gender, age-grade, and other identities on both a social and an individual level.

The analysis of folklore is a particularly effective way of gauging how people, including children, shape and interpret the meanings of their everyday lives. By definition, folklore is held in common by a particular group, but has many potential layers of meaning (literal and symbolic) subject to interpretation by individuals. It is characterized by multiple existence and variation, meaning that materials co-occur in different places and vary slightly with that co-occurrence. The presence of different symbolic meanings, as well as a range of what folklorists call *variants* in folklore materials, facilitates the use of folklore by individuals to satisfy, access, and comment upon not only culturally influenced values but also highly idiosyncratic ones. Different meanings or specific variants might appeal to different individuals, but they would all be drawing on a recognizably related and traditionally standardized set of materials.

Folklore materials include proverbs, tales, legends, jokes, games, folk speech (slang), and material culture. They constitute an important defining element of a group of people, in that they identify themselves to each other and to others in their collectively held body of lore (Dundes 1989, 34–35; Dundes 1980). Folklore is an essential component of the relational processes of identity formation: “folklore is employed in the *making* of groups, in the process of categorizing people, in building boundaries in some places and crossing them in others, and in defining relations between the catego-

ries thus created. Such category-making processes are both argumentative and political in nature, and accordingly, the identities and identifications emerging from these categories are also argumentative and political” (Anttonen 1996, 20; emphasis in original).

I approach folklore studies as important to my research on at least three fronts: to facilitate a focus on what children are learning as expressed in their folklore, to reveal the informal education processes by which they are being taught, and to explore the intersection in the folklore materials of group and individual sensibilities. I take “identity” to be that synthesis of group and individual experience that composes a person’s sense of self. “Identity formation” is approached as a process, then, but also as something—rather like a rock formation—that individuals encounter and must take into account in the course of their everyday lives. For instance, one’s gender identity is constituted by the intersection of one’s personal experiences with preexisting (albeit still shifting) gender roles in one’s society.<sup>7</sup>

The study of folklore materials can be a way to gain access to this difficult nexus of personal psychology and normative cultural expectations, of group categories and individual priorities, and, ultimately, the relationship between what individuals are taught and what they learn from those teachings. Child-centered research has the potential to provide a picture of the range of individuals and institutions from which the children learn—from their parents, from their peers, from their teachers, in formal environments like school and in informal environments like the playground and their neighborhoods. Perhaps even more important, such research can reveal the practices engaged in by children as teachers themselves, and the ways in which they go about educating friends, siblings, acquaintances, and adults in the ways of their world. The study of children’s traditional play and its modern sociocultural contexts can provide a unique view into the creation of and identification with categories based on ethnicity, gender, economic class, and other social groups, and the ways in which children cope with being members of society.

### *Research among Children in Northern Ireland*

There is a long-standing popular as well as academic concern about the state of children’s lives in Northern Ireland; the staff at each school I visited were quite used to “their children” being the subject of various

research projects, especially those from scholars in education and psychology. Those two fields tend to produce the bulk of work concerning children in Northern Ireland, and are persistently socioeconomic or social-psychological in their research methods, data, and analysis (for example, Cairns 1987; Harbison 1989; McWhirter and Gamble 1982; see also Bell 1990; Fields 1977 [1976]; Fraser 1977 [1973]; Jenkins 1982, 1983; Murray 1985). This focus reflects not only the intense interest in the impact of the Troubles on Northern Irish children by professionals in education and psychology, but also a disturbing lack of interest in same by anthropologists until the late 1980s and early 1990s.<sup>8</sup>

With the exception of Jane Hubbard's research in County Derry (1995a, b), contemporary studies of Northern Irish children's folklore and play continue to be, for the most part, popular collections of children's songs and skipping games (as in Leyden 1993). Such nostalgic collections evoke a time perceived as more innocent than the present, as well as a stage of life that is overtly constructed as innocent, thus connecting the innocence of childhood with the times before the current Troubles in Northern Ireland, two different sorts of "good old days."<sup>9</sup> Some collections are put together for the express purpose of "introducing" games to the playground, betraying assumptions that adults consistently have about children no longer playing the games that they themselves used to when they were young. I was told several times during the course of my research by well-meaning adults that "Oh, the children never play like we did anymore. They just run around these days."

Nonetheless the activities of children at play are obviously important—if they were not, adults would hardly be so concerned about attempting to regulate children's behavior during their time on the playground. As Roger Austin (1989), a researcher in the field of education in Northern Ireland, has stated: "playgrounds are a natural barometer of the prevailing values in society and seem likely to remain valuable observation posts for studying the ways in which children are preparing for life in Northern Ireland" (12).

The playground itself is an ideal place for the observation of the social acts of children and for observing kids' active participation in social, cultural, religious, and political identities. It is the site of some of the most intense social interactions in a child's life,<sup>10</sup> and is an informal setting where

the children have an opportunity, relatively free of formal structures and strictures, to literally play with the categories used by the adults in their world.

Barrie Thorne (1995) has written eloquently on the pitfalls of visiting a primary school as a research site when one has been a primary school student oneself. She notes that her memories of elementary school overlapped, sometimes uncomfortably, with her observations in her field site.

In the course of my fieldwork, I felt aversion rather than envy toward Beth, a quiet fourth grader, who continually asked me to sit by her at lunch. Initially I was glad for an invitation. But when I discovered that Beth had few friends, that sitting with her, rather than, say, next to [a popular girl], brought minimal social yield, and that Beth also wanted me to stick by her on the playground, I felt, as I wrote in my fieldnotes, associating to my own elementary school past, “as if Beatrice Johnson had me trapped.” When Beth requested my company, I began to respond vaguely (“maybe”; “we’ll see”), much as I had in fifth grade when I felt Beatrice was trying to cling to me and I didn’t want her social encumbrances. (24–25)

As a fieldworker at a different set of schools than the American ones in which Thorne worked, I faced similar dilemmas. I had to be careful to “ration” my presence, not spending too much time with any one group of kids, so as to avoid cutting myself off from potential informants. I found myself, as the rest of the kids did, avoiding the unpopular ones, drawn to the charismatic ones, and (occasionally) concerned with the welfare of the very young or simply “cute” ones caught up in the constant motion of the playground. I also had to watch my reactions to their teasing me, to be careful that I reacted not as an adult would, by simply stopping the teasing through the power of adult authority, but as a peer would, by either responding in kind or trying to ignore it. This was sometimes painful, making me revisit memories of elementary school I would have just as soon left alone.

Although I sometimes participated in kids’ activities at their request, I was far more frequently an observer and recorder. To be even occasionally allowed to play, as well as to be privy to kids’ rudeness, I had to constantly insist on my status as “not a teacher, not a supervisor” (see also Thorne 1995, 11–27, for her discussion of similar processes).

I try to convey some of the ambiguity of my own position on the playground by using both the terms “children” and “kids” for the people I encountered on Belfast playgrounds. Iona Opie (1994) and Barrie Thorne (1995) have both discussed the problems of terminology when writing about young people. How can we present them as people in a noncondescending way, without losing the sense that these are still people defined as “children,” and who live with all of the social restraints that this term implies? My solution is an admittedly imperfect one, but one that I think is true to my own uncertainty in this regard. In much of my theoretical discussions, they are “children,” indicating a certain level of distance between myself and the ethnographic objects I am discussing. When I refer to “kids,” it is most often in descriptive passages, or ones where I am deliberately trying to present them as people, rather than as sociocultural constructs or philosophical abstractions.

### *Foregrounding the Playground, Revealing Children's Voices*

I have organized my analysis of Belfast children's folklore along three broad categories: age, gender, and sectarian,<sup>11</sup> reflecting the importance of these identities as I witnessed them on (and sometimes off) the playground. I begin with a descriptive chapter, a creation of an “every-playground” where the reader can experience a bit of what I did in the field, as an attempt to prevent the folklore materials I analyze from being separated from the children who use them. Chapter 2 explores some of the adult anxieties surrounding children in Northern Ireland, and especially addresses the positioning of young people as “children” in relation to adult society, and how their rude folklore reveals their reaction to that position. Subsequent discussions on gender and sectarian categories, in Chapters 3 and 4, demonstrate how kids, despite the efforts of many adults, do participate in “real world” issues and situations. Throughout these analyses, folklore serves as a gateway through which one can enter and explore the children's discourses about the kinds of gender and sectarian identities they are forced to confront in their everyday lives.

The specter of violence appears throughout this work, but is only explicitly tied to the Protestant/Catholic divide in one chapter. It is telling that I did not collect sectarian rhymes or games in a “natural” playground envi-

ronment. One of my primary findings was that while the kids are at school, such identities are primarily irrelevant to their everyday interactions. In the Catholic and Protestant schools, the kids are in a homogeneous environment, one where they know (or think they know) the relevant ethno-religious identity of all of their schoolmates, and so there is no need to “mark” their identities through overt performances of Loyalist/Unionist or Republican/Nationalist ideals. At the Integrated school, the kids were also among “likes,” in that they and their parents were committed to the idea of intercommunity schooling. The philosophy of the Integrated school was one of tolerance, and it was that tolerance that dominated the playground; when a child was teased or rejected, it was never because he or she was Protestant or Catholic. Many of those same kids, however, lived in segregated neighborhoods, and were aware of the different reality they would encounter in the “society outside the school.”<sup>12</sup>

The narrative in Chapter 1 is intended to give the reader a vivid sense of what it is like to be on the playground. Via this descriptive piece, I hope to avoid the pitfalls of presenting children as little more than the sources of disembodied texts, as has been persistently the case in folklore research with children (for example, the work of Brady 1984; Gaignebet 1974; Leyden 1993; McCosh 1979; Opie and Opie 1967, 1984, 1985, 1992). I take as my inspiration Iona Opie’s rich descriptions of her days on playgrounds in England (1994), the participant observations of Barrie Thorne among American elementary school kids (1995), and the psychological analysis of children’s humor by Martha Wolfenstein (1978 [1954]; see also Goldman 1998 and Hirschfeld 2002 for examples of anthropological work that takes children seriously as actors in their own right). In all of those works, the children are present in the text as people, far more than as incomplete adults, symbols of innocence, the future, or even a golden age gone by that adults believe they remember.

The narrative in Chapter 1 is a composite one, drawn from the total body of field notes I took and tape recordings I made during my nine months of fieldwork at the five different playgrounds in North and West Belfast. Part of the reason for this composite description of the playground, drawn from Catholic, Protestant, and Integrated schoolyards, is that what “kind” of community inhabited the school had little if anything to do with the differences in play between schools. Rather, far more prosaic concerns, such as available



space, equipment, and time tended to affect the presence or absence of games or the dominance of one genre over another. For example, I collected no skipping rhymes at one school until someone brought a skipping rope out to the yard, well into the school year. For another part of the year, I collected almost nothing but jokes and clapping games at one school, where the time to go outside was very short and play was limited to that which did not involve a great deal of space or special equipment. How many pupils attended the school also had an enormous effect on play patterns. The smallest school I visited, P.S. 2, had roughly 110 pupils. On the rare occasions when several classes were out on the playground together, there was far more mixing across age groups than occurred at the largest school (about 800 pupils at I.S.), where children could afford to associate only with their close age-mates, because there were so many of them.

In short, community “allegiance” had a very low impact on the kinds of differences I observed on the playgrounds of the five schools I visited. The categories that seemed to matter the most to the kids while they were on their breaks at school were those of age and of gender. Not that the kids were unaware of sectarian categories, or that they did not employ them as a part of their everyday lives, sometimes even while at school. But while in the society of the school, whether one that was homogeneous (as was the case with the Protestant or Catholic schools) or one with a strictly enforced philosophy of toleration (as was the case with the Integrated school), sectarian categories faded into the background. They would be foregrounded when relevant, as was the case when kids went on trips with pupils from “the other side” as a part of the Education for Mutual Understanding (EMU) program, or when they were attending football tournaments with mixed (both Protestant and Catholic) school participation. This shifting emphasis is entirely consistent with theories of racial/ethnic identity that argue for the importance of context in the relevance and expression of that identity (Barth 1969; Ogbu 1991).

The reader will notice that not all of the kids who appear in Chapter 1, or indeed in the rest of the book, are given names.<sup>13</sup> This, too, reflects my experiences in the field. While many children became familiar faces, and I considered several to be my friends, I never knew all of them by name. My knowledge of what class they were in was far more consistent and accurate, because that age-based category was so frequently noted by the kids

themselves. I took some comfort in the fact that the kids did not seem to know the names of everyone at their school, either (with the exception of the very small school, P.S. 2), nor did they always know my name. Kids frequently referred to one another in terms of their class level within the school, as in “those P4s are messing with us.”

The class groupings in Northern Irish primary schools, as is the case in the rest of Britain, Ireland, the United States, and most parts of the world that use the Western European model of schooling, are based on age ranges: P1 is four to five years old, P2 is five to six, P3 is six to seven, P4 is seven to eight, P5 is eight to nine, P6 is nine to ten, and P7 is ten to eleven. “P” stands for “Primary,” so “P1” is pronounced “Pee one,” and is short for “Primary Year One.” At all of the schools, the children were separated by age during their break, so that the older and younger kids each had their own playgrounds, making it impossible for me to visit both age sets at one time without missing significant chunks of playtime. I worked around this by visiting one yard in the morning and the other in the afternoon. In Chapter 1, the morning is spent with the so-called wee ones, the P1s to P4s. The afternoon is spent with the P5s to P7s. I have chosen to refer to kids by class rather than by age, because that is how they referred to each other: “Those are P4s.” “The P7s aren’t letting us play!” This was a firmly entrenched “native category,” and one that I came to use in my own fieldnotes.

In the “Day in the Life” narrative, I include a brief description of the dinner hall, because that is where many of my actual conversations with the kids took place. The dinner hall was also a site for play similar to that which they engaged in on the playground, but constricted by the fact that they were supposed to be either standing in line or sitting properly at the table. The dinner hall is also where I present the sectarian references in the narrative, because it was primarily in the course of conversations that a verbal space would be opened enough for kids to even mention such things to me. Sectarian jokes or references occasionally surfaced in the broader context of being rude. I will discuss this further in later chapters, but it is important to note here that children are aware of the socially inappropriate nature of sectarian epithets, as they are aware of that of dirty jokes. In the same way that at least part of the appeal of graffiti, sectarian or otherwise, is the knowledge of its assault on “respectable” (generally, cognitively situated in the middle class) sensibilities (Buckley 1998, 7), so too is the appeal

of sectarian references rooted in an awareness of their potential to be rude. It is in this context that the two sectarian references in Chapter 1 (one to “Orangies,” an epithet for Loyalist Protestants, and one to “Fenians,” an epithet for Republican Catholics) should be understood.

The reader will also notice episodes of highly gendered play and speech and the juxtaposition of violence and rudeness, as well as that of rudeness and sectarian references. The analyses that follow this narrative will delve more deeply into the issues of gender and family roles in playground lore, the uses of improper behavior and language in kids’ social practices, and the awareness of and participation in sectarian categories. In analyzing what kids do among themselves, anthropologists have access to issues that are relevant to all people, of all ages.

Too often, children’s folklore is read simply as text, or song, without regard for the actual performances or context within which those performances took place, but these should also provide fodder for academic analysis. Although the narrative in Chapter 1 is somewhat linear, I attempt to provide a sense of the simultaneity of the folklore events: while one group is playing a skipping game, another is playing football, and still another a game of Change Corners. I am present in several parts of the narrative, but not always, reflecting those frequent times when activities were occurring and I was not there to observe them. The narrative is a composite day, far richer than many days I spent while in the field.<sup>14</sup> In the course of my days on the five playgrounds, I would often miss some activities because I was engrossed in observing one, or alternatively, I would get a broad sense of the range of activities, but not a sense of the details of each individual activity. If the range of activities is at first bewildering, so much the better, for the playground at first glance does appear to be nothing but repetitive running and chaos, seldom visited by structure. But as one of my friends from the playground informed me, “there are always different sections, and people doing different things.” There is order in the chaos, and it is worthwhile to penetrate it.

*One*

## A Day in the Life

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I walked through a checkpoint on my way to school; the army was stopping cars, but not pedestrians. It was raining on and off the whole morning, and the tunnel vision my rain hood gave me left me unprepared for the army patrol that seemed to appear out of nowhere in my line of sight. I was dismayed to see that they were on the side of the road I needed to be on, so I walked by as best I could, trying not to notice the big machine guns. I even had to say “Excuse me” to one soldier, who was standing in front of the school gate, waiting for word to move—backward—farther down the road. He readily moved out of my way, but it was unnerving all the same.

It is a relief to get onto the school grounds. The rain has stopped for a while, and the sun is shining through a brief gap in the clouds. I am standing at one end of the long playground, waiting for the bell to ring and for the school’s morning break to begin. The bell rings, and a couple of minutes pass before the kids explode onto the playground, running down the ramp to the yard. The explosion is a visual one—girls and boys tearing out into the yard in their school uniforms, clutching bags of crisps and other morning snacks—as well as an aural one—the sheer noise of their released energy, in the form of shouts and screams, as they run. One girl asks another, “Let’s run, OK?” The other agrees, so they join hands and run down to the other end of the yard and back again. There are a few pairs of kids who start off this way, and then three or four of the pairs get together and

form a line, and they cry “choo choo!” as they make their way over the length of the playground. This bigger group splits into smaller lines, and then individuals just arriving on the playground join them. A dispute arises when a couple of girls tell another two, “You can’t play!” and reinforce this edict, as the two rejected ones stand uncertainly, by repeating “Not yousins!” a few times. The two rejected girls quickly regroup and run off, seeing someone else with whom they can try to play. Once they find someone, they form their own line, this one formed with players standing side by side, arms linked. The girls shout, as they stride across the playground: “Anybody in the way, gets a big FOOT!” They kick with their feet, almost chorus-line style, as they shout the word “foot.”<sup>1</sup>

A red-haired boy, a P4, about seven or eight years old, approaches me—I haven’t yet made it very far along the yard—and offers a joke:

“What d’you get when you cross a cow and a kangaroo?”

“I don’t know, what?”

“An animal that goes . . .”

The jokester thinks intently for a minute, and a —his classmate—standing to his left prompts him with the answer:

“Boing boing moo, boing boing moo!”

The girl swiftly takes over, and has two jokes:

“Why did the penguin cross the road?”

She doesn’t wait for a response—“To get to the other side!” The second joke quickly follows:

“Knock Knock”

“Who’s there?”

“Penguin.”

“Penguin who?”

“Penguin ‘Bawk Bawk!’” and she flaps her arms like a chicken. Much giggling ensues, as these are clearly hilarious jokes. The girl runs away, and the boy follows her.

A P2 girl grabs my hand and pulls me toward the growing group of her age-mates, boys and girls, who are playing Train: the lead child runs, and the rest of them hold on to the back of the shirt of the person in front of them, and they all run around the playground in a line. This is the game that started earlier, and nearly anyone, it seems, can try to join in, although some get invited by the lead child as she runs by them. I am the second

“car” in the train for quite a while, until the playground aide tells us we’re not supposed to play that, because there are too many on the playground for it to be safe, if we run fast. Dismayed, the kids disband, leaving me to wonder if they thought they would be allowed to play this once, if I was involved. The P2 girl, Lisa, takes my hand again as we stroll across the yard to see what else people are doing.

Less than three minutes have passed since the bell rang.

A swarm of P4 boys have spilled onto the playground in the first minutes of break, and they quickly start a running/chasing/kicking game. One boy says to another, “You’re On!” and his reply comes back, “No, you!” The first boy accepts the responsibility, saying “I’m On!” and immediately runs after his mates. Some boys alternate between playing this game, called Chasies,<sup>2</sup> where the wall is “safe,” and just standing against the wall and eating their snacks, bags of crisps. Two of the P4 boys rope me into the game as I walk by with my friend Lisa, running up and tipping me on the hand, “You’re On!” This carries on for a few minutes, chasing and tipping, passing the On status along and occasionally negotiating who’s On—usually by pointing and shouting, “you’re On!” or “he’s On!” I wear out early and say I’m not playing anymore, but they keep trying intermittently to get me back into it by running up and tipping me. A few times Michael runs up, holds out his hand, and cries, “Tip me!” So I slap his palm and he runs off to chase the other boys—On status having apparently been given by that “tip.”

Five six-year-old girls gather together and crouch to put their feet into the circle they form; this is called Footsies In. One girl acts as the counter, and begins by tapping her index finger in the middle of the circle, saying:

Dip dip dip

Then she starts the counting-out rhyme. At each syllable, she taps the foot of each girl:

A bottle of ink<sup>3</sup>  
fell down the sink  
How many miles  
did it tra-vel?

The girl whose foot is chosen says “three,” and the count continues:

One-two-three  
and you are not On It  
for the rest of the game.

“You’re out,” proclaims the counter, to the girl whose foot was chosen at the word “game.” Her foot is removed from the circle, and one more round of the counting out to this rhyme is done, leaving three players in the circle. One girl knows she’ll be out, and finishes the rhyme herself, “. . . of-the-game! I’m out!” She is very pleased to be out.

The counter, for variety, switches rhymes:

My mummy punched your mummy<sup>4</sup>  
on the nose.  
What color was the blood?

The girls in the circle, as well as the ones who have already been declared “out,” volunteer a whole host of colors: “Blue,” “Green,” “Yellow!” The counter is the one who got to choose the color, because her foot was the one chosen. After much thought, she finally picks

RED!  
R-E-D spells red  
and you are not On It  
for the rest of the game.

Once all but two feet had been eliminated—the counting had been interrupted by occasional questions, such as “Is that one out?” with the owner of the foot moving it more clearly “in” or “out” of the Footsies In circle—the counter stopped saying “Ip dip dip” before each rhyme, and switched to a (literally) quick and dirty one:

Tarzan in the jungle  
had a belly ache.  
Need to go to the toilet—  
[PPPPHBPT!]  
Too late!

The girl picked to be On It was the counter: “Stacy’s ON!” her playmates cried, and ran away from her, starting the game of Chasies. A white circle,

painted on the playground surface, was used as a Den, the place players could go to be safe from the person who was On. There is a lot of standing at the Den, jumping out and saying “Nyah!” as On comes closer, and then going back to safety. Soon, On It catches another girl. “Tip,” she cries, as she transfers her On status, “Cliona’s ON!” Cliona tries to tip someone dangerously far from the Den, but that girl protests, “I’m still in Den! I’ve got both thumbs up,” displaying her thumbs for all to see. Her argument is accepted, and the girls play on.

Another group, this one of three five-year-olds, are preparing to play their own game of Chasies. This counter has the other two girls hold out their fists, explaining how it is done, telling one girl in particular, “No, hold them like this!”—showing fists apart, rather than together, as the errant girl had them. As she counts, she uses her chin to substitute for the fist she is using to count, and she chants:

Meeny miney moe,<sup>5</sup>  
catch a beggar by the toe  
odds bodds out!

At “out,” the girl tipped puts one fist behind her back. The chant continues:

Meeny miney moe,  
catch a pig by the toe  
odds bodds out!

Once a player has put both fists behind her back, she’s not On It. Leah keeps doing things wrong: holding her fists in different places, not staying out when she’s called out, and the counter keeps correcting her. Then Leah starts making fun, saying, “Meeny miney moe!” and “Odds bodds out!” at the same time as the counter, simultaneously jumping and bumping into the counter. The counter gets very cross, telling her to “do it right,” and at one point, near the end of her tether, says, “We’re not going to play with you if you’re not good!” The third girl is not much help to the counter, giggling at the silliness. Finally, the counter gives up, and takes the third girl by the arm. “We’re not playing with you!” she tosses over her shoulder. Leah stands there and watches them walk away—it’s possible she didn’t expect that they would actually leave.

Another round of Counting Out, with a different group, has resulted in



a game of Witches. This group of P3 girls is using a stairwell as Den, and also as a Dungeon. They can go to the stairwell to escape the Witch, but also seem to be trying to capture the witch: two girls in particular try to “kill” her by saying, “We’re throwing water on you! You’re melting! You’re dead!” And they drag her off to the stairwell.

P4 Claire had wanted to play, and asked if she could, but one girl said “NO,” and the rest followed. The first time Claire asked was then they were counting out, the second right before they actually started playing Witches, while they were organizing themselves into non-Witch roles: “We’ll be twin sisters . . . , and you be the Mummy, and you the Auntie.” Claire is rejected at this organizational stage, too—the other girls simply ignore her—and she goes off to find something else to do.

What she finds is me, full of questions about what the Witches players are doing. Claire is happy to explain, despite the fact that she wasn’t allowed to play; I have become something of an activity in and of myself. Claire states, “The Witch chases you, see? And catches you and goes ‘HSSSSSSSS!’ [raises hands up as if casting a spell], and turns you into a witch. And then you’re a witch until someone throws water on you.”<sup>6</sup>

A large group of boys are playing their own game of Chasies, at the opposite end of the playground. Several started off running and chasing and continued doing that for most of the break. A large game formed; they picked On first by counting out—the boy doing the counting out did the words to himself, so that all you can see is him pointing, and then stopping and telling a person they’re “out.” Those who were declared “out” were very pleased: “Yes!” they’d cry, and pull their fist towards their hip. Finally someone was picked to be On: “Tony’s ON!” and the Chasies commenced. Part of a brick wall served as Den, and as long as they were touching it, they could not be tipped and frozen in place. Those who were tipped froze and put their arms out until someone freed them by touching their hands. “Help me! Get me!” the boys cried, as their still-mobile playmates ran past, trying to evade On It.

At the edge of one of the Chasies games, against a wall, two P4 girls are intent on their clapping game. They call “Bramble Bushes,” and begin to sing:

Under the bramble bushes<sup>7</sup>  
down by the sea  
boom boom boom  
Johnny broke a bottle  
and he blamed it on me  
I told my Momma  
I told my Po-ppa  
they hit me with a stick.  
[change in tempo]  
Ooh-ah  
cha cha cha  
How many fishes in the sea?<sup>8</sup>  
twelve and twelve makes  
twen-ty-four.<sup>9</sup>  
Shut your mouth and  
say no more!

At the end, they poke each other in the stomach, “racing” to see who can poke whom first. They repeat this performance a few times, and then one initiates a switch, calling the change: “Do See See!”

See see my playmate<sup>10</sup>  
come out and play with me  
and bring your dolly, too  
climb up my apple tree.  
I’m so so sorry  
I cannot play with you  
My dolly’s got the flu  
chicken pox and measles, too.

This clapping game expands and contracts, beginning with the original two players and then swelling to include additional players, who form a circle. The circle contracts back to two, as some move to another group, or even form a pair by themselves. Some girls drift over from a nearby Chasies game, but are rejected when they try to get into a circle. Some of the clappers admonish their partners regarding their technique: “No, you do it like this!”

Two girls in particular are doing See See, with one holding out her hands, still, palms facing her partner, and the other performing the intricate clapping. It looks as though the stationary girl does not know the clapping to the rhyme, and this impression is confirmed when they switch, and she is the one supposed to do the clapping. She falters at the motions, but knows the words better than her partner, and adds verses that had not been sung before:

See see my playmate  
 come out and play with me  
 and bring your dolly too  
 climb up my apple tree.  
 I'm so so sorry  
 I cannot play with you.  
 My dolly's got the flu  
 chicken pox and measles, too.  
 There is no rainbow  
 into the cellar door,  
 and we'll be jolly friends  
 for-e-ver  
 more more more more more!

P3s Alanna and Matthew, nearby, are doing My Boyfriend, and are surrounded by a group of their classmates; Matthew is the only boy in the group. All sing along, even those who are not clapping, and are especially loud at the "I kicked him" parts:

My boyfriend gave me an apple<sup>11</sup>  
 My boyfriend gave me a pear  
 My boyfriend gave me a [kiss kiss kiss]<sup>12</sup>  
 And I kicked him down the stairs  
 I kicked him over London  
 I kicked him over France  
 I kicked him over U-S-A  
 And he lost his underpants!  
 I made him do the dishes

I made him do the floor  
I made him do the baby's bum  
And I kicked him out the door!  
I kicked him over London  
I kicked him over France  
I kicked him over the U-S-A  
And he lost his underpants!

Matthew only knows the basic clapping, pressing his palms together, and then pressing his palms to Alanna's, and so she tries to teach him the more elaborate motions. Several false starts and You-can't-do-its later, Alanna gives up, and they go back to the basics, playing another couple of rounds of My Boyfriend.

A ring of P3 girls, singing and jumping, attracts attention. As they jump, in time to their singing, they criss-cross their legs. They sing, loudly:

Cat's got the measles<sup>13</sup>  
the measles  
the measles.  
Cat's got the measles  
Y-O-U  
You dirty kangaroo  
It's half-past two  
Your mother's got the flu  
Y  
O  
U!

At the final "U!" they inspect how everyone has landed. Those whose legs are crossed have to take something off: a coat, a watch, a shoe, or a hair bauble. Those who land with their legs spread get to stay as they are. They do this for several rounds. As they continue the game, girls who land with legs spread get to retrieve items they previously had to take off; the first things they take back are usually shoes, since having only one shoe on makes it awkward (but fun!) to jump without falling over.

At the edge of the playground, along the grass, are two P4 boys kicking

a football around. Another less localized football game ranges all over the yard—no one shoots goals, they just seem to try to keep the ball among teammates, and away from the “opposite” team.<sup>14</sup> It is hard to tell if the game is a boys versus girls thing—there appear to be elements of that, mostly from boys not passing it to girls at first, but it isn’t very consistent.

Two pairs of boys split off to pass to each other, and for a while it is a two-on-two game of Keep Away. They start “scrimmaging” a bit—one dribbles and the others try to get at the ball. One in particular was quite good at faking the other boys out. They do some comparing of their football skills—“can you lift the ball with your two feet?” “How long can you keep the ball up in the air?” Eventually, they call teams: “me and you, and you and him”; then decide where the goals are, and start to play football. Some rules get decided as the game goes on, for instance, “no outs,” meaning that there is no out of bounds, and that they will just “play on.”

Along one of the school building walls, a group of several P3 girls are playing Babies: they all lie on the ground, acting helpless, waving their arms and legs about. They cry, talk baby talk—“Ma-ma! Wa-wa!”—and reach for the “mummy,” the one girl who walks around, pretending to pick them up. She pats them on their heads and (when she can reach them) backs, soothes them with “there there” syllables, and occasionally protects them from the incursions of the people playing Chasies and football, who come close to invading their space: “Go a-WAY! You’re not playing!”<sup>15</sup>

Seven P4 boys have come out to the playground with “guns” (plastic, green- and blue-colored rectangles with circular holes in them) and “walkie-talkies” (calculators). They begin the break running around and “shooting” at each other. I ask, “What are you playing?” “Cops and Robbers!” several shout. They claim their sides, “I’m a cop!” “I’m a robber!” and run off to carry on playing. Stuart and Ryan are particularly good at dying dramatically, and Nathan has cultivated a pretty mean-looking snarl that accompanies his “Let’s get ’em!”. Stuart parrots Nathan, attempting an American accent when he does so. Jamie catches one “cop” and gets him in a headlock, “gun” pointed at “cop’s” neck, then throws him down onto the ground. The “cop” cries out dramatically, and then Jamie pretends to kick him—you can see he’s not actually connecting his foot to his friend’s stomach—with the “cop” crying out at each impact.

This vignette is interrupted by their noticing that the larger game has changed—three of the P4 girls have stolen some of the “guns” and in so doing have temporarily transformed Cops and Robbers into a boys chasing girls game of Keep Away. The girls team up, and when the girl with the pilfered “guns” is caught by a few boys, she reaches out to try to hand them off to another girl. The presence of the girls actually solves a problem the boys have been having in identifying who was on what team; at one point Jamie tried to “huddle” and strategize with two others, and suddenly one started, and said, “I’m a cop, I’m not with you!!” and a gun battle commenced. After the girls involve themselves, Nathan cries, “The girls are robbers, and we’re all cops!” It is not clear, however, whether the girls are participating in the game as the boys have framed it, or if they are more interested in participating by disrupting the game.

There are several pre-painted hopscotch grids on this playground, put there by the school staff. Many of the kids, especially P2 boys and girls, are messing about on the grids, but not so much playing the game itself as demonstrating their jumping skills. They play with the grids, stepping on the squares, one after another, “follow the leader” style. At one point two girls go over to a ladder game with numbered squares, also painted on the tarmac, and one declares that they should sit down on their ages—one on the number 4, the other on 5.

In part of the open space in the playground, a large ring of P4s playing Farmer in the Dell circle around a boy in the center, who was chosen because, as he says, “it [the Farmer] has to be a boy.” The players sing:

Farmer wants a wife<sup>16</sup>  
The farmer wants a wife  
Heerio my deario  
The farmer wants a wife.

The Farmer is Matthew, who had been playing clapping earlier, and he peeks as he turns around in a circle, so he can pick his friend Alanna to be the Wife. The singing continues, in the same vein: the Wife wants a Child, the Child wants a Nurse, the Nurse wants a Dog, and the Dog wants a Bone. With each verse, a new member of the circle is chosen at random (although most of the players peek when they’re turning in a circle, so as to pick their

friends) to come into the middle. Once the Bone is picked, however, all of the players except the Bone fan back out into the circle. They sing, patting (with varying degrees of gentleness) the Bone on the head:

Ha Ha, look at the bone  
 Ha Ha, look at the bone  
 Heerio my deario  
 Ha Ha, look at the bone.

Then all players spread back into the circle, except the Bone, and sing:

The bone's left alone  
 The bone's left alone  
 Heerio my deario  
 The bone's left alone.

One girl, who'd been picked as the Dog, is a little unclear on this last verse, trying to stay in the middle and hold on to the Bone's hand. She finally figures it out and gets a place in the circle while the others are singing. Right after this last verse, they begin all over again, with the "Farmer wants a Wife" verse; the Bone becomes the Farmer.

This round of the game begins with the "Farmer wants a Wife," but then the second verse transforms:

The wife wants a dog  
 The wife wants a dog  
 Heerio my deario  
 The wife wants a dog.

Someone cries, "No, a child! The wife wants a child!" And there is a small discussion about whether the wife wanted a child or a dog. It is settled in favor of the dog. After the dog is chosen, however, the game is run through by some of the kids playing Chasies, and the ring game regroups around another activity, suggested as Rapatapatap on Her Shoulder by Linda.

The P4s, minus the few who joined the chasing game, form a new circle, hands joined and held up, over head. Linda weaves in and out, under the other players' arms, while singing goes on.

In and out go the dusty bluebells<sup>17</sup>  
 In and out go the dusty bluebells

In and out go the dusty bluebells  
I'll be your  
mas-ter.

Linda steps behind Carol, and taps with both hands on Carol's shoulder.  
All players sing:

Rap a tap a tap her<sup>18</sup>  
on your shoulder  
Rap a tap a tap her  
on your shoulder  
Rap a tap a tap her  
on your shoulder  
I'll be your  
mas-ter.

Then Carol joins Linda in weaving in and out. They carry on their play until there are only two people left in the circle. The game is a little chaotic because there are two girls playing Chasies and occasionally using the game as a hiding place, or a way through to the person being chased. The Dusty Bluebells play on, occasionally telling the chasers they "can't do that."

A slightly different ring game is happening where the game of Witches used to be. The players yell the first two syllables:

OH! WE'RE!

and then continue singing:

going taking turkey<sup>19</sup>  
We're going over there  
To see a Senorita  
With flowers everywhere  
Oh shake her Senorita  
Shake her if you can  
Shake her like a mushroom  
and do the best you can  
Oh rumble to the bottom  
rumble to the top  
and turn around and turn around until your finger stooooooooooooops.



In the past I have seen them go around in a circle, and wait until the “flowers” line before rushing into the middle to mess up the hair of the girl there. In this game, they get to “turkey” and then all rush in to mess with the hair of the girl in the middle. She tries to mitigate the damage potential to her hair by saying, “Now, don’t mess up my bun!” Of course they go for her hair especially fiercely, after that.

Marie tries to enter the game by getting into the outside edge of the crowd—as they are “shaking” and “rumbling”—and she also tries to get in at the end, when the players all form a circle again, so the player in the middle can pick the next one On It, the “Senorita” in the middle. She enters the game successfully for one round, but then, as she is at the back of the crowd for the next round of “shaking,” Marie is noticed as she bumps into one of the “original” players, who says, “Who said, you could play, Marie!?” with a great deal of scorn in her voice. Upon which Marie declares, “I’m not playing, anyway,” and walks off to join the skipping games.

Cinderella<sup>20</sup>  
dressed in yellow  
went upstairs to see her fellow  
How many kisses did she give him?

The count goes until the skipper, a P4 girl, messes up. She makes it to ten, and the cry goes up, “Ten kisses!” Much giggling ensues among the rest of the players. Next up is Danielle, who calls a different rhyme: “A-B.”<sup>21</sup> She chants the alphabet as she skips, and she trips on the rope at “M-N.” The girls holding the rope let her continue—she’s gotten this far—and she makes it all the way to Zed.

Zed, zed, sugar on bread<sup>22</sup>  
Take three skips or else you’re dead!

She “dies” in the game, as she trips on the rope at “dead,” unable to do the last three skips. The next girl up calls yet another rhyme, giving her friend behind her an opportunity to skip, too:

Granny in the kitchen<sup>23</sup> [first girl skipping on her own]  
doing a bit of stitchin’  
In comes the Boogeyman [second girls jumps in]

and chased Granny out [first girl jumps out]  
“Ah” says Granny, “that’s not fair.”  
“So,” says the Boogeyman, “I don’t care!”

There are three to four skipping games going on at once, mostly girls, with a few boys hanging about, rarely skipping, mostly disrupting—but perhaps part of this is because the girls were very forceful about not letting them skip. They exclaim “You’re not allowed!” “You can’t do this!” . . . often shouting it in the boys’ faces. A few girls get this treatment as well. Some of the P3 and P4 boys seem genuinely interested in skipping, but usually aren’t very good—perhaps reflecting a lack of practice—thus reinforcing the girls’ assertions that boys “can’t do that [skipping]!” One little boy becomes quite discouraged, his face solemn, arms crossed, when he isn’t allowed. I notice, and ask him if they ever allowed him to skip, “No.” “Why not?” I persist. “Just because,” he says, with an evocative shrug.

A few boys are less sanguine in their acceptance of not being allowed to skip; at times several of the skipping games degenerate into “running with the rope” games, with boys who either didn’t want to or weren’t allowed to play running through the skipping game, catching the rope around their middle, and running farther, dragging the two girls who were turning the rope and who now usually protest, saying, “Get off!!!” In one case, two girls deliberately tangled themselves in the rope, and giggled about that for a while, but then two others decided they wanted to skip again, and had to say to the entangled ones, “Noooo! Get OFF! We’re not playing that anymore!”

Finally, the bell rings for them to line up. Three sets of two P3s squeeze in one last activity, playing clapping in line as they wait to go back into their classrooms:

An-na Pi-an-o<sup>24</sup>  
plays her pia-no  
twenty-four hours a day!  
Splits!

As they say “Splits,” they spread their legs apart, and then repeat the rhyme and clapping. With each “Splits” they put their feet farther from each other, and their bodies get lower and lower. The first one to keel over loses—much giggling accompanies the fall, especially since they know they are

supposed to be quiet and still in line, and are risking the teachers' censure by persisting in their game.

They go back into their classrooms, only fifteen minutes after the morning break bell rang. I dash to the staff room to grab a cup of tea and take frantic notes on what I managed to see, and to get out of the rain that has just started to fall. It is nearly two hours until lunchtime.

Lunchtime, in the dinner hall. Those kids who brought packed lunches are eating in another room, but all will be out on the playground after they finish eating. There is a lot of waiting involved in eating in the dinner hall, so some girls start doing clapping games in line. Other kids speculate about what the dinner will be, and whether they'll want to eat it. One boy thinks it's going to be spaghetti bolognese—"With mince!"<sup>25</sup> he cries. "My mum doesn't let me eat mince anymore, because of the Bee-Ess-Eee,"<sup>26</sup> so I'm going to eat mine ALL." Several around him agree.

I sit at a table of boys and girls, P6es and P7s, after wading through a sea of "Here! Here!" cries from kids at other tables. Next to me, Corinne is switching her cutlery around so that it doesn't match the arrangement of the cutlery that Tony, sitting across from her, has. Tony knows that Corinne will get teased that she likes him if anyone else notices, and so keeps switching his knife and fork so they are exactly opposite those of Corinne. Once he gets bored with that, he notices that several people at the table have chosen to get salad rather than spaghetti, and he shouts, "Copy-kater!" and then continues:

Copy-kater number nine  
Stick your head in a bottle of wine!<sup>27</sup>

Three P7 girls at another table are finished eating, but aren't allowed to go out yet, until everyone's done, so they pass the time playing Chico Chico. They lay their hands, palms up, on top of their neighbors', so they form a rough circle (more of a triangle, since it's only three). One girl slaps the palm of the girl to her left with her right palm, and that action is repeated around the circle. They sing—softly at first, so the dinner ladies won't notice, but they soon forget and get a little loud:

Essco chico chico  
chico chico chock

Essco chico chico  
chico chico chock  
Follow, follow  
follow, follow,  
1-2-3-4-5!

At the number five the girl getting slapped tries to jerk away, to avoid the slap. She succeeds, and so stays “in.” Some negotiation in each group about how to really play it, especially on when the final slap happens (that is, how high to count), with Suzanne in particular suggesting that Nicola was really dense not to know the right time. They keep playing until all the players are out.

Suzanne tells the girls at her table that she was at the doctor’s, and he told her she was allergic to oranges. “I asked him,” she says, “does that mean I’m allergic to Orangies??” and she laughs, explaining for my benefit, and for whoever else isn’t paying attention, “Like, Prods? And he said, ‘certainly not!’” She made the doctor sound extremely stuffy and indignant. Her table-mates act as though they’ve heard it all before, so Suzanne moves on to tell dirty jokes:

There was this woman, and her wee boy asks [pointing], “What’s that?”  
And she says that’s my garage. And then he asked his Daddy, coming out of the shower, what’s that? And he said that’s my car.

She stops at this point, giggles, and says, “I don’t want to say it!” “Ah, go on,” I say, “I won’t tell anyone.” She finally continues.

So at night, in bed, the wee boy says, “Mummy, Daddy’s trying to get his car in your garage! [mad giggling] . . . better put the spotlights on to see!”<sup>28</sup>

She and the other two girls giggle furiously, and all appear embarrassed, but then Suzanne immediately starts with another “rude joke”:

There was a family on the plane, and the plane starts to go down, so they have to get out, with parachutes, so they jump out, and when they get down, the baby is there, too. So they ask it, “How did you get down?” and the baby says:

Me no stupid  
Me no thick

Me hang on to  
Daddy's dick!<sup>29</sup>

The punch line of that joke is later chanted by the girls among themselves as they line up to go out to the playground—although they're sure to keep out of earshot of both the boys and the dinner ladies as they do so.

Rachel and Laura, P6es, are laughing about Rachel nearly spitting juice onto Laura. Someone tells the story of a friend who accidentally spit spinach and milk onto her Daddy, which inspires a series of Popeye the Sailor<sup>30</sup> songs from the girls. Some of the boys nearby join in, especially during the second one:

I'm Popeye the sailor man  
I live in a caravan  
I walked through the door  
And fell through the floor  
I'm Popeye the sailor man

I'm Popeye the sailor man  
I live in a caravan  
I turned on the gas  
And burned up my arse  
I'm Popeye the sailor man

I'm Popeye the sailor man  
I live in a caravan  
I went up the stairs and kissed all the girls  
I'm Popeye the sailor man!

Before they get to leave their tables and line up to go outside, Jamie taps me on the shoulder and shows me that he isn't wearing any socks. "Know what kinda socks them are?" he asks. I shake my head, no. "Fenian socks!" he grins.

After lunch, the rain has lifted, and the P6 and P7 boys head out to the football pitch. A few P7 girls join them, as well. The pitch is separate from the regular playground, also called the "games yard," and only older kids are allowed on it. Before enough come out to play football, the boys and girls who are already out play a Keep Away game with the football. The boys

versus girls theme is carried on when the football game teams are being picked—they start to do “picking” for teams, until one of the girls suggests, “Let’s just do Boys against Girls!” So they do and the boys are totally chagrined when the girls score the first goal. The football rules are rather informal, but still more structured than the free-form game played by the younger boys in the morning. If the ball goes out of bounds, yells of “lift it” encourage whoever did it first to get the ball, to throw it in to his or her teammates. Sometimes no one “lifts it,” especially not P7 William, who shouts, “Don’t need to!” as he dribbles it away from opposing players and back to the pitch. Restarting after a goal is seldom done at “center field,” and much discussion (usually in the form of “no goal” or “that’s a goal” proclamations) ensues about whether a score was good. Balls flying into groins are not very common, but the couple of times it does happen, the boys go down with the usual cupping and rolling, and one of the other boys notes, “That got *him* in the marbles!”

Away from the football pitch, on the games yard, the after-lunch frenzy is in full swing. I am besieged by kids rushing up and asking to be “saved!” from a play-fight or chasing game. A small game of P5 Red Rover<sup>31</sup> inspires a huge game composed of P5, P6, and P7s—it is so big they nearly form a circle out of the two lines, like this: ( ). This helps them see and hear and keep track of what is going on. One team sings:

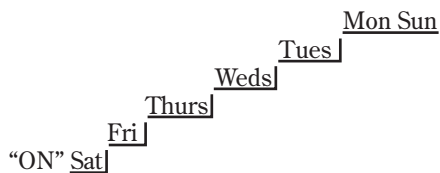
Red Rover Red Rover  
We call Lindsay over!

All of the players chant, “Lind-say! Lind-SAY!” as she gears up to run across, and then finally makes the dash and tries to break through the opposing team’s line of players. This game draws in most of the people who started off the break chasing each other, except for one group of P7 boys, who run through the game a couple of times. The teams are mixed by age and by gender, unlike the smaller game, which in addition to being exclusively P5s, was boys versus girls. That original team struggles hard not to lose people to the larger, more mixed (both in age and in gender) game.

The yard that serves as the playground to the older kids has a part that forms an almost perfect square; two of the sides are formed by parallel curbs that lead up to the teachers’ parking lot. This space is the setting for a game called One Two Three Change Corners, and there are five P5 girls playing

it. One girl stands at each corner of the square they have formed, and one girl is at the center, who is “On It.” She spins around, calling “One two three change corners!” and the girls have to run to a different corner—they often point and “call” the corner, by calling the name of the girl on that corner (and therefore catching her attention), and then they run and switch, sometimes touching hands at the midpoint. The object is to get to the empty corners before On does. If On takes a corner, the one left without a corner becomes the new one On It. More girls try to play, but there “aren’t enough corners,” according to one of the original players. There was some discussion about whether or not a particular place could be a “corner.” One tries to make a small drainage pipe cover along one of the lines of play into a “corner,” but it was nearly at the midpoint between two of the original corners, and wasn’t really acceptable to the other players.

The small set of stairs that leads up to the teachers’ parking lot is the setting for another game, aptly called Steps. P6 girls playing this game explain to me, as I look on curiously, that each step is a day of the week. Sunday is the same step as Monday, just slightly beyond it, because there are only so many steps:



On stands at the bottom of the steps, on Saturday, and calls out a day, and the players have to go to the step that corresponds to that day, with Monday being the highest step, farthest from On, and Friday being the lowest and closest. On calls out the day and the players go to that step. When On yells “Saturday,” “she gets to tip them,” according to one of the players. That is, she gets to try to catch one of the players as she tries to run back up the stairs to the relative safety of Monday—On is not allowed to run up the stairs. Whoever is tipped becomes the new On.

Today Cliona drags the game out, refusing to call “Saturday.” One of the players keeps saying, “Go on and say Saturday, already!” When she finally does it is when the players are all on Friday, and they freeze—hesitating to

step on “Saturday,” because it is so easy for her to get them. Finally one brave soul steps down and runs back up. She is followed by a rush of others, after another one is pushed down to “Saturday” by one of her neighbors. That unlucky girl is tipped, of course, but protests that she was pushed and that it didn’t count. So Cliona remains On, and this time refines the rules, calling “no steps”—meaning they have to go directly from where they are to the step specified, jumping if they have to, without touching the steps in between. One girl takes steps after “no steps” has been called, and they are reprimanded by On and the other players: “No steps, remember!”

The girls playing Steps reveal an interesting way of avoiding being On as well: pretending that you don’t know (or are genuinely unaware) that you’re the one who’s been tipped. On usually calls “tip” when she gets someone, but sometimes the player gets away, or is only slightly tipped and keeps going to the top, to Sunday. A couple of times, On tips one, realizes (and accepts) that that tip hasn’t “taken,” and tips another—the second one tipped is not allowed to wiggle out of it.

Walking away from the Steps game means walking into the Skipping Zone. At least three different skipping games are going on. A group of P5 girls run up to me and say, “Come watch us!” so I do, and see them doing Miz Brown:<sup>32</sup>

Went downtown  
and met Miz Brown  
She gave me a nickel  
so I bought a pickle  
The pickle was sour  
so I got a flower  
The flower wouldn’t smell  
so I bought a bell  
The bell wouldn’t ring,  
so I began to sing  
On the hillside<sup>33</sup>  
stands a lady  
Who she is I do not know  
All she wants is gold and silver  
All she wants is a nice young man



Up to this point the skippers have just tried to make it through the rhyme by getting over the rope. Now they have to follow instructions:

Lady Lady<sup>34</sup>  
touch the ground  
Lady Lady  
turn right round  
Lady Lady  
show your shoe  
Lady Lady  
run right through!

A nearby skipping game is to Jam Tarts, with three girls playing skip-ping, and one end of the rope tied to the iron fence railing

Jam tarts, jam tarts<sup>35</sup>  
Tell me the name of your sweetheart  
Is it  
A, B . . .

After the letter of the alphabet was landed on—this time, E, a name is picked : “Edward! You love Edward!”

Edward Edward  
Will you marry me?

They turn the rope very fast for:

No, yes, no, YES!

A huge sequence of verses ensues, including “How many kisses will she give him” and “What will you live in (mansion, pigsty, stable, flat).”

This particular skipping game is right in the middle of things, and the players keep getting their game run into by the “war” going on between some of the P5 and P6 girls and P5 and P6 boys—not to mention the occasional deliberate attempt to stop the rope by one or two P5 boys, who were also occasionally playing in the “war.”

Stephen, a P7, breezes by, mocking the skipping rhyme of the younger girls:

Jam tarts, jam tarts  
Tell me the name of  
you-or fart

A “tug of war” springs up in the third skipping game, interrupted by boys not interested in skipping and girls who were not allowed to play. One girl shouts, “You didn’t let us play with you, so you can’t skip with us!”

Two of the P5 boys catch me and drag me to two different skipping games, to show me how they can skip. They are both quite good, although they tend to barge—but not quite bully—their way into the game. The boys try to skip in the Jam Tarts game, where three girls were playing, but when one boy stands in to try to take a turn (after helping mess up the skipping girl’s turn), the two girls turning the rope simply start rolling up the rope in their hands, stopping the game. He asks me to make them let him skip, but then the boys notice that P5s Emma and Kathryn have started another game close by, and they go to that one, instead.

P6es Rachel, Maria, Leah, and Laura, their feet in a circle, are doing Footsies In. Leah leads:

Eenie, meenie, miney moe  
Catch a baby by the toe  
If he screams, let him go  
Eenie, meenie, miney moe.

Two rounds of Eenie Meenie, and then they switch to:

One potato, two potato<sup>36</sup>  
three potato, four  
five potato, six potato  
seven potato, more.  
One bad spud  
got left in the mud  
and you are out.

Finally only Laura is left, and the rest cry, “Laura’s ON!” and run off. The game is Stuck in the Mud.<sup>37</sup> Those Laura catches are “stuck in the mud” —or just plain “stuck,” and have to stand still with arms out until another

player comes by and touches them, either on the hand or on the arm. This makes them “free” to run again, and also to free their co-players who have been stuck in the meantime. At one point, Laura tips Maria, and then stands there right in front of her so that even if she did get “freed” she could be tipped again right away. The other girls see what is going on, and decree, “That’s not fair!” Everyone becomes “free” and Laura is made to count, to give the players time to run far enough away, before chasing after them again. It is fun being chased—several of the girls call out On’s name, saying, “Here I am! Come and get me!” and taunting her into chasing them. It is also a challenge weaving in and out of the people on the playground who are not playing, at the same time trying to keep track of where On is, exactly. The girls continually encourage one another: “There! You’re free! Run!” or just plain “Go!” after touching someone. When Laura was clearly tired of being On, Maria volunteered to be On It, and the game continued.

A smaller group of P5 girls declare one girl to be On It and the wall at the far end of the yard as “Den.” On yells, “There’s no Dens!” and one girl runs off the wall, but On has to yell it a few times before all on the wall run off, squealing. Some girls start playing as if it were Stuck in the Mud, but one girl protests, “It’s not Stuck in the Mud! It’s Tippiess!” In Tippiess, whoever is tipped becomes On It, which is different from the more permanent On of Stuck in the Mud.

In a group of three P6 boys, one says to another, “you’re On!” and their Chasies game begins. A few moments into it, one boy stops and calls, “Freeze! Freeze it! I’m tying my lace.” He stoops to tie his shoe, and the game stops temporarily. The boy On It runs over, however, and tips the lace-tying boy on the head; he earns a nasty look and a reprimand that the game isn’t on yet.

Huddled against a section of the main building wall, three pairs of P5 girls are doing clapping. They start with several renditions of *My Boyfriend*, interspersed with *Hi Lo Jack-a-Lo* and *That’s the Way*.<sup>38</sup>

My name is  
 Hi Lo Jack-a-Lo  
 Jack-a-Lo Hi Lo  
 Hi Lo Jack-a-Lo  
 Jack-a-Lo Hi Lo

That's the way  
uh huh uh huh  
I like it  
uh huh uh huh . . . [repeat last four lines]

They go back to My Boyfriend time and again, with louder voices at each rendition. Several girls who are not participating in the clapping join in the singing of it, looking over the shoulders of the clappers.

One pair of the P5 clappers separates from the others, and begins to focus on doing the intricate up and down clapping very quickly, so that they forget to say the words. Sometimes their lips move silently, sometimes one phrase or word escapes their lips, but the point has clearly become to do it fast and accurately. Suddenly a P6 girl swoops down on the pair; she knows this version of My Boyfriend. She acts as a kind of coach, telling them to do it faster, or stepping in and showing them how she'd do it. She doesn't approve of their silence, either. As the P5s start clapping without singing, the P6 leans in, tugging her ear, "Hello? I can't hear! Turn up the volume!" The P6 gives up trying to force them to sing, and declares, "Right, you do it [the clapping], and I'll sing!" She adds, "Do it as fast as you can!" She indulges in much rolling of her eyes when they don't meet her expectations. She asks them if they know Hi Lo Jack a Lo, and when they are slow to answer, she takes one of the P5s, and starts doing Hi Lo very slowly. The P5, insulted, turns back to her friend and does it once at a regular pace. The P6 is still not happy, and she grabs a P6 partner from a passing Chasies game, so she can demonstrate it quickly. The P5s deal with her interventions with patience; they wait for her demonstrations or interventions to end, and then go back to what they had been doing.

The Red Rover game has been disbanded; the playground supervisors were upset at the way the kids were flinging themselves through the lines of the respective teams, and were worried that kids would get hurt. "What will we play now?" one P5 wonders. "Mister Wolf!" is the answer.<sup>39</sup> The kid who suggests the game sets himself up as Mister Wolf, his back to a wall, and the players, facing Mister Wolf, put a decent distance between themselves and him. They chorus:

What time is it Mister Wolf?  
Are you hungry Mister Wolf?

Mister Wolf says “Twelve o’clock!” and the players take twelve steps.

What time is it Mister Wolf?  
Are you hungry Mister Wolf?

Mister Wolf says “Eight o’clock!” and the players take eight steps. They had started off taking big steps, but the steps get smaller as they get closer to the Wolf, because they’re not supposed to step beyond where he is standing (plus, there’s a wall blocking their way). All the players are very close, and some are at the point of taking steps while staying in place, as they once again say:

What time is it Mister Wolf?  
Are you hungry Mister Wolf?

This time, the Wolf shouts “Dinner time!” and runs after the players, who have to get back to where they started in the game in order to be safe. One girl is caught, and she becomes the next Wolf. Two rounds of the game, and then a cadre calls a switch. This switch means that some players filter over to the skipping games, but a core remains to play Colored Eggs.<sup>40</sup>

For Colored Eggs, there’s a “Mummy” as well as a Wolf. The Mummy stands on the edge of the rest of the players, who have arranged themselves in a rough semicircle, facing the Wolf. The Wolf stands outside of the semicircle, back to the players to start, while Mummy assigns them colors—they stand in a huddle for this, so the Wolf will not know who is which color. Several times people are shushed when they say their or someone else’s color too loudly. “The Wolf will hear!” A couple of boys and girls who are not playing the game, but are passing by the “staging area,” play at trying to listen in on the “color huddle,” so they can find out someone’s color. They then stand near the Wolf, and shout, “Get Samantha! She’s purple!”

Once the colors are assigned, the players stand in a loose group, Mummy turns her back to the Wolf, and the Wolf comes over and “knocks” on Mummy’s back.

“Knock knock.”  
“Who’s there?” Mummy asks.  
“Mister Wolf.”  
“What d’you want?”

“A colored egg.”  
 “What color?”

The Wolf calls out a color: “Red!” The player who was assigned red runs off, the Wolf chasing after. This time, the player makes it back to the Den—where the other players are standing, cheering—without the Wolf catching her, and the Wolf remains the same.

Three P7 boys are illegally on the grass, playing “Pig in the Middle.”<sup>41</sup> Two boys toss the third boy’s hat back and forth, and he runs to try and retrieve it. The longer the game goes on, the shriller his shouts of “Give IT!” become. It is not at all clear that it was his idea to play this game.

The bell rings—line-up time! The P7 class lines up nearby two painted parallel lines on the tarmac. Kirsty takes advantage of that location to fit in one more game, jumping German Jumps<sup>42</sup> style, as if the lines are elastic held by the legs of two girls. She chants as she jumps:

England	00	[feet to the left of lines]
	>	[jump to the right]
Ireland	00	[feet to the right]
	<	[jump to the left]
Scotland	00	
	>	
Wales	00	
Inside	00	[feet within the lines]
Outside	0   0	[feet on either side of lines]
On the	00	
Rails <sup>43</sup>	**	[feet standing on the lines]

Thirty minutes have elapsed from when the kids arrived from lunch, and they all file back into their classrooms for the rest of the day. I go back to the staff room to take notes before I head home.

## *Two*

# Rudeness and Defining the Line between Child and Adult

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The playground is an environment that is created and circumscribed by the rules of adults. It is striking, then, how much of the folklore on the playground works at observing, criticizing, and refuting the divide between adult and child. Children do not passively accept the definitions of “child” that are imposed from without—they are aware of the realities from which adults try to shield them, and find their own ways to address the world in which they find themselves.

Children’s use of rude or “dirty” folklore reveals their awareness of “adult” issues, giving the lie to a complete separation of children and adult concerns in the “real world” of economics, politics, and society. Kids’ awareness of their status as Children, and the limits that such a status places on the ways they can respond to the pressures of the world around them, show up starkly in folklore dismissed by adults as rude or even obscene. I am concerned in this chapter with the ways in which Belfast children used rude folklore to mark and question age categories among themselves on the playground. The adult/child divide that we can observe is dependent upon Western constructions of Childhood, and folklore materials reveal children’s awareness of and ambivalence toward the very label of Child. In working-class Northern Ireland, it seems to be particularly difficult to maintain a rigid split between adult and child, and both kids’ and parents’ awareness

of this difficulty informs many of the apparent contradictions between standards of behavior within the schools and those applied without.

It is crucial to recognize the importance to kids of presenting to adults the “expected” behavior (that is, that which correlates most closely with adult preconceptions of how Good Children are supposed to behave). Those kids who fail in these presentations run the risk of being categorized as Bad Children, or possibly of being taken out of the category of child altogether, especially for their unauthorized awareness of matters concerning sex and violence. Folklore is an important component of the expression of children’s awareness of and criticism of those “adult” topics, in particular because the forms of folkloric expression (games, songs, jokes) fit so well the prescribed conditions of “childishness.” The forms of folklore provide an essential mask of innocence that can then provide kids with the opportunity to process the information that they cannot help but receive about topics that adults would rather children know nothing about.

A careful consideration of the uses of rude or “dirty” folklore on and off the playground reveals how adult expectations and desires for their children are often enacted in rude performances and references to rudeness by children. Reactions to verbal “dirt” reveal both the construction of children in the minds of adults and the reaction of children to that construction. They explore it, they resist it, and occasionally they attempt to enforce it among their peers. The reaction of adults to the forbidden words and actions of kids, whether or not they are their own children, in turn speaks to anxieties and expectations that adults have about children and, by association, about the society of the future.

The folklore materials I focus on here are those that the kids themselves classified as “dirty” or “rude,” especially those concerned with scatological or sexual words and situations. I found in the course of my research that children’s use of rude materials, and corresponding adult reactions to and anticipation of that use, serves as a kind of flashpoint for the discussion and negotiation of definitions of what it is supposed to mean to be a child. Fundamental to this discussion, then, is a sense of what is meant by “dirty” and what is meant by childhood. Mary Douglas’s (1970 [1966]) description of “dirt” as “matter out of place” is also crucial to this argument (also see Beck 1962 for the equation of “dirty” with forbidden or obscene folklore). In this



case, the “matter” in question consists of the sexual and scatological words and references. In Belfast, the children I met encountered two different “places” where particular sorts of “matter” were unwelcome and therefore “dirty.” The first place was institutional settings, especially schools, which are permeated by generalized middle-class notions of propriety (notions that do not include public references to sex or other bodily functions). The second place was that of the abstract notion of Childhood, also as defined by the middle class, as a protected and (forcibly) innocent space ideally unsullied by forbidden, adult knowledge.

Although the vast majority of the kids I worked with in Belfast were from working-class backgrounds, in the course of their everyday lives they were in frequent contact with institutions such as schools and with conventional, middle-class notions of proper childlike behavior. In this they were like the adults in their lives, who are regularly forced to confront middle-class expectations of behavior in their encounters with government agencies, department stores in the city center, and so on. Most adults have long since learned the unspoken rules of conduct that determine when and where particular language and actions are and are not appropriate. Children are in the middle of their struggle to learn the contexts in which “rudeness” is allowed (or at least tolerated), but are also embroiled in the struggle to understand what can easily be perceived as adult hypocrisy around such issues. Until the conventions are more clear to kids, they often see adult silencing and censoring as hypocritical: how can teachers forbid them to use the very same words they hear other adults using in the shops or even at home? As kids learn the nuances of rudeness and the importance of context, the distinction between institutional, teacher-based behavioral expectations and the other everyday models they encounter outside of school becomes more clear, and they become increasingly adept at interpreting and acting on contextual cues.

One set of references, however, is uniformly perceived across class lines as forbidden to children, and that is references to violence, especially sectarian violence. The association of rude, “dirty” language and violence is inherent in much of the folklore materials I collected in Belfast. I explore the implications of this connection toward the end of this chapter.

### *A Word on Age Groups in Northern Irish Schools*

The institutional separation in the Belfast schools of the children into very finely graded age groups (P1 through P7), means that school-children receive strong signals about the importance of age in separating themselves from each other in their everyday school practices. This fine age-grading, where only children of the approximate same age are considered proper playmates within the schools, is true in many societies, especially those in North America and Europe. Such institutional separation of age-grades frequently translates into separation away from school as well: parents in the United States frequently use whether or not there are children the same age as their own as a factor in deciding whether to move into a particular neighborhood, and the children themselves can take on these age-grades as given, if they have enough people their own age around to maintain such separations. In neighborhoods or schools with low populations of children, however, the rigidity of the age-grades breaks down in favor of simply having someone to play with (Goodwin 1990; Thorne 1995; Van Rheeën 1998).

In the Belfast schools in which I worked, even though children mixed with other age groups on the playgrounds, the mixing was controlled by the adults in the schools. For instance, at C.S. 1, the teachers allowed the younger girls (P1–P4) to mix with the older girls (P5–P7) for about ten minutes during their lunch break, but at the end of that time insisted that the younger children line up and go back into their classrooms. Resistance to mixing also came from the kids themselves, especially among groups close in age (for example, P4s and P5s). I saw P5s rejecting P4s who volunteered to play with them, something that happened at the populous schools in my sample: P.S. 1, C.S. 1 and C.S. 2, and I.S. But if maintaining the rigid age-grades meant that there wouldn't be enough players in a game, or simply that play wouldn't be very satisfying, children were quick to adjust, as they would do in their home neighborhoods, where a potentially wide range of ages would share a street.

Internal (that is, within the category of Child) age-grade distinctions were most frequently maintained in the practice of play. That is, distinctions were made from one group through the exclusion of people from the game, or from overt declarations that "you don't know how to do it properly," a

dismissal that resulted more often than not in the child's retreating to the company of age-mates, and playing with them. The distinction between child and adult, though also exercised in physical practice (children ran around on the playground and played, adults supervised that play), was more frequently present in the performances of folklore materials, especially in rude rhymes, jokes, and songs, wherein children would not only mark the distinction but challenge and mock it.

Regardless of internal divisions among the pupils at all of the schools, all were classified as "children" by the adults, including teachers, playground supervisors, classroom aides, and custodial staff. Although the divisions within the school of, for example, P7 from P4 were important, the constant status of "child," held by all pupils at the schools, permeated the everyday experiences of every child.

### *The Child as Innocent: Constructions of Childhood*

For the purposes of this analysis, expectations of "proper" child-like behavior directly inform notions of what is "dirty" when said or done by a child. These behavior expectations are linked to broader Western (European and North American) expectations of how children are supposed to act, by virtue of the fact that they are Children. Much has been written about the sociocultural constructions of the Child, and Childhood, beginning with Philippe Ariès's seminal volume *Centuries of Childhood* (1962). In particular, the notion of a proper child as innocent, meek, and protected has been discussed as a particularly bourgeois and Western concept, but one that has become a conventional model, in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, for what the behavior (if not the actual essence) of a child ought to be. Because the innocence of children can only be observed by adults through patterns of behavior, underlying assumptions about the true nature of the Child can vary, even within uniform expectations of behavior patterns. Therefore, while one parent may subscribe to the model that children are inherently bad and must be taught to be good, and another parent may assume that children are inherently good and learn to be bad from outside sources, both parents may still hold expectations of behavior that require outward appearances of goodness and innocence. In the end, it does not matter if the children curse inwardly, so long as they do not do it aloud, among adults, and so rupture the desired image of the child as innocent.

Although Ariès was not the first to discuss the culturally constructed nature of Childhood (see especially the work of Mead and Wolfenstein 1955; also B. Whiting 1963), his discussion of a particularly protected, bourgeois notion of Childhood is important here, because it is this notion that Belfast children (and most children in the urban Western European and North American worlds) regularly encounter in their everyday lives. This is not to say that this ideal model of the innocent and dependent child is accepted wholeheartedly, either by the children themselves or by their parents. It is to say that this model has been generalized to such a degree that it has become the picture of what “should be normal,” in Belfast and elsewhere. It must therefore be confronted, both in this theoretical discussion and by the kids themselves.

The epistemological move that Ariès documents via social history, the removal of young people from the realm of everyday adult life and into a separate, protected Childhood, coincided in the nineteenth century with an invention of notions of obscenity and pornography that explicitly constructed women as particularly susceptible to the corruptive influences of pornography (de Grazia 1992; Hunt 1993). Women and children were—and to a great degree, continue to be—constructed as vulnerable, and therefore needing protection from harm, including the potential harm of obscenity. Some feminist theorists today define pornography as another form of violence, and if women and children must be protected from violence, then they must likewise be protected from pornography and obscenity.

I do not intend to suggest that children (and women, and all others) should not be protected from sexual and other sorts of abuse. The fact that obscenity definitions include far more than just pornography, however, means that children’s speech is regularly censored by well-meaning adults who are afraid that children’s familiarity with “dirty” materials will lead to familiarity with other, more dangerous and antisocial realms, including violence.

While in the Belfast city center, I regularly observed women or men talking to friends on buses, in taxis, or simply on the street as if their child were not there, observing every act and listening to every word. The adults would often use words like “fuck,” “shite,” “hell”—words that children are not supposed to say, even if they know them. Even if parents do not necessarily punish their children for rudeness—I did observe some parents laughing

indulgently at a “cheeky” child—some adults will, especially teachers and playground supervisors. Regardless of the individual model of childhood constructed within each family, children encounter the societal model at regular intervals. The tensions that result between what children observe to be true about adult behavior and what is expected of “proper” children’s behavior are writ large in the rude folklore of the playground.

### *Folklore and Definitions of the Obscene*

Folklorists’ struggle with obscene materials, self-censorship, and the censorship of informants, especially children, who produce obscene or even slightly off-color materials, has a long history (Borneman 1974; Green 1975; Halpert 1962; Legman 1979, 1992). It is telling that the censorship in print of children’s lore begins in the seventeenth century, a time that Ariès (1962) identifies as one of the most “plentiful” in the definition of Childhood as an innocent time apart from the adult world. During the late nineteenth century, when folklore was just beginning to be defined as a discipline, censorship of children’s folklore was at its height, as evidenced by the production of the “lily-pure” (Legman 1979, xvii) 1894–1898 collection by Lady Alice Gomme, *The Traditional Games of England, Scotland, and Ireland* (see also Gomme 1894). The Victorian sensibilities surrounding Childhood in turn continued to influence subsequent generations of folklorists, most notably Peter and Iona Opie (1967, 1984, 1985, 1992). Although the Opies’s collections are undisputedly important contributions to the field of folklore collection, their dismissal of scatological or sexual materials as only used by “ogre” or “savage” children (Opie and Opie 1967, 95–96; Opie 1994, 26) continued the recently established tradition of normalizing “innocence” among children and marking the display of any other kind of knowledge as pathological.

Of course, Freud (1962) and those who followed him wrote much to disrupt the Victorian hegemony of the innocence of the (middle-class) child, and some folklorists were influenced by his attempt to reintroduce the notion of childhood sexuality as normal and as requiring more study than silence.<sup>1</sup> The work of Martha Wolfenstein (1978 [1954]) is exemplary in its analytic approach to children’s humor of all sorts, including the sexual and the scatological. The number of folklorists actively collecting (and more important, finding publishers for) obscene materials from anyone, including

children, has remained a steady trickle since the 1930s, especially in the United States and Britain (Legman 1979). Today, one can with relative ease find published collections of children's obscene lore, but much of it lacks analysis and remains in disembodied collections, with little sense of the purpose to which children put these materials (Bronner 1988; Lowenstein 1974; McCosh 1979; Turner, Factor, and Lowenstein 1978; one exception is Fine 1981). It should also be noted that many collections of obscene materials, both from children and from adults, are attempts to fill in the "holes" left by expurgated volumes printed earlier (for example, Randolph 1992). With children's folklore, researchers are trying to balance the previous "lily-pure" picture given by earlier scholars, and in so doing produce volumes that actually exaggerate the existence of obscene children's lore in everyday practice. Publishing the materials in separate volumes highlights them in a way that is not true to the actual performance of the lore, which tends to be mixed and highly dependent on the intentions of the performers and the context in which they are performing.

Such exaggeration can feed the fears of adults who continue, as most do in the United States and Britain, to hold to at least some extent the now middle-class ideal of the good child as an innocent child, and a good childhood as one that shields children from inappropriate experiences and materials. Such an ideal has an impact regardless of economic class, in that it tends to be the middle and upper classes who make and enforce the rules, and when those rules pertain to children and child welfare, the middle-class ideal of innocence is imposed upon everyone.

The censorship of children's folklore in print and in practice speaks as much to adults' need to protect themselves from the awareness that children are not and cannot be the ideal innocents so perfected in image by the Victorians. As Michel Foucault (1990) made clear with the case of sexuality, however, the silencing of the obscene (much of which was defined as such because of explicit references to sexuality, not coincidentally) in fact highlights its titillating appeal for adults as well as for children.

The individuals defining materials as rude are the adults, and they make these definitions known by silencing or censuring children who are "dirty" within adult earshot.<sup>2</sup> Children then take these definitions on among themselves, gasping in disbelief, disapproval, or (frequently) pleasure when one of their peers comes out with a joke or rhyme that, had adults heard, would

elicit the usual adult response. These are context-driven definitions very much based on a “because we [the adults] say so” rationale regarding the nature of obscene materials. The bourgeois model of an innocent childhood could be seen in the expectations of many parents in Belfast, and in the precautions children took to make sure they were not caught being “improper” (and in the joy they took in disobeying the rules of propriety). It should be noted that what I am calling the Innocent Child model of behavior is not uniform, and is very dependent on class. Children can be protected only insofar as the family can afford to, and if children are needed for domestic work, such as child care, doing the shopping, or taking care of themselves while their parents/grandparents are at work, then the adults, aware that the children are more “exposed” by necessity, are less uniformly condemnatory of obscenity and other “improper” behavior. In some cases, such behavior would be classed as “cheeky” or “bold” in a good way: the working-class child needs that attitude to succeed in the economically, politically, and socially hostile world outside (and sometimes even within) their own community.<sup>3</sup>

McCosh (1979) noticed during her collection of jokes in schools in England and America that teachers uniformly censored kids who asked if they could tell “rude” jokes, but for a variety of reasons. One teacher in Leeds simply asserted that the kids “shouldn’t know any” rude jokes (75); a teacher in San Francisco was afraid that once the kids started telling dirty jokes, they wouldn’t stop. This idea that kids would become uncontrollable once they were allowed to express dirty materials speaks eloquently of broader adult fears concerning the need to control children, and in particular the fear of the potential for “other” children to get out of control. “Other” children are those of the other, whether it be class or race-based distinctions of otherness. Teachers in Belfast—and in other parts of the United Kingdom and in North America as well—are often from a community other than the one in which they teach (although this is changing somewhat) and so do not necessarily see the children they teach or the children’s parents as members of their own community. This fear of uncontrollably “dirty” kids implies that the slope from rudeness to outright obscenity and beyond is a slippery one, nearly impossible to escape once embarked upon.

Additionally, these fears seem to point to an underlying assumption behind the Innocent Child model: if children are not made innocent through

the efforts of adults around them, then they will become Bad Children, uncouth, antisocial, and even violent. There are, in fact, two related models of Childhood embedded in Ariès's discussion and in contemporary popular concepts of the Child: the first, the innocent protected Child, is the ideal cleaved and aspired to, especially by those who can afford to shield their children from the "real world." It is incumbent on parents operating under this model to make sure their children are not exposed, or do not indulge in, behavior that does not fit this model of innocence. Therefore they censure kids who refer to sex or bodily functions, because they interpret such references as beginning the slide down the obscenity slope. The second model, that of the uncontrollable Bad Child, is one frequently employed to discuss the problems with "other people's children." This is the case in many parts of the world with "street children" problems; the kids are stigmatized as inherently out of control and uncivilized, a contaminating influence on whomever they contact and wherever they live (Conrad 1999, 315–322; Scheper-Hughes and Sargent 1998; Stephens 1995, 12). These bad children are the logical result of not protecting children, as well as justification for protecting children in the first place. What is missing from these complementary models is any sense of middle ground, any feeling that kids could, for instance, use "bad words" and still be worthwhile members of society, let alone children.<sup>4</sup> The fact is that kids, like most people, mix obscene, "bad" materials in with the rest of their everyday discourse. They just have to try to make sure they do it out of adult earshot, so as not to invite punishment.

The ability to conform to adult perceptions of how Good Children behave is in many ways the mark of a successful child. The successful child is a kid who retains the protected status of child and avoids being punished for nonacceptable behavior, by remaining aware of context and, in particular, by choosing carefully the times and places that he or she engages in unchildlike behavior. Kids who deliberately and openly (that is, in front of adults) act in ways proscribed by adults run the risk of either being labeled Bad Children or being removed from the category of Child altogether, depending on the seriousness of their offense.<sup>5</sup>

### *Gender and Class in Uses of Obscenity*

Class differences regarding rudeness and the appropriateness of dirty words are clearly evident. The working-class parents I observed



outside of school seemed to be more tolerant of cursing, so long as it wasn't directed at them or perceived as intentionally hurtful. Intentions were far more important than just the bare fact of cursing, and so standards of behavior as far as obscenity (in terms of words, anyway) were more contextual, less absolute in the "children should never say that" sense. Standards about other kinds of unacceptable behavior, including making fart noises, potty talk, and sectarian language, were also situational. I saw some adults simply ignore such things, if they did not feel it was directed at them or if they saw no real harm in the activities. Such flexibility in approaching obscenity among children is a strategy that actually gives the kids some credit for being capable of knowing when it is and is not appropriate, and to some extent lessens the potential hypocrisy of those adults who do use obscene language in their everyday speech. Parents cannot control their kids' speech all of the time, and parents who are selective about the battles they have with their kids conserve precious energy needed to spend on the real problems and pleasures of life.

However, while it might have been more acceptable for the kids in the neighborhoods I was working in to be "obscene" by middle-class Belfast standards, such behavior was still restricted by the potential for adult disapproval. Many kids were still learning and testing when and where they could get away with obscene language, in much the same way (and often at the same time) that they would test the limits of physical play, frequently dancing on the edge of verbal or physical violence and sometimes going beyond it. When they did go beyond accepted boundaries, the kids were frequently pulled back, by peers as well as by adults. Kids who were viciously physical or obscene with their peers were not played with as often or were interacted with cautiously, and not with abandon.

Kids might also, in their uses of obscene language and images, have been rebelling against the hypocrisy of adults who used the very same words and phrases but attempted to prohibit children from doing so. Such prohibition from adults was very gendered; most of the censure I witnessed came from women, and girls tended to be scolded for such language more so than boys. This speaks to particular constructions of the masculine in working-class Belfast, where it is not only expected but more acceptable that men curse and are crude. Women did similarly indulge, but public perceptions of who could do so "acceptably" were strikingly split. This model is also particu-

larly class specific: in the working class, it is more accepted that women do indulge in such behavior, while middle- or upper-class women would not do so, for fear of seeming “lower class.” Again the ideal model of gender behavior is class situated, so that even if working-class women accept cursing and crudeness far more among themselves, they remain aware of the abstract potential for censure from the middle- and upper-class establishment. Whether or not they change their behavior because of the potential censure is an individual matter.

I also heard girls scold each other and their male peers, far more than boys ever would, for obscenity. In my experience, boys rarely threatened to tell an adult about a peer’s obscene conduct, even if they were not friends. Younger boys (under the age of six, for the most part) did appear to be more likely to report obscenity. I was frequently used in attempts to get others in trouble: boys would run up to tell me, “so and so said a bad word!” The minute I asked them (as I tried to do consistently), “which one?” the tattlers knew I was a lost cause as an authority figure. Frequently they would start to say the word and then catch themselves, shooting me a startled and cross look as they went in search of a more effective authority. Girls of all ages, in contrast, would police each other far more vigilantly, even if sometimes it was only in play; they would threaten to tell, playfully, and so highlight the naughtiness of the just-uttered joke or word.

### *Definitions of Dirt*

For the kids I met in Belfast, the awareness of potential adult censure was enough to make most uses of obscenity self-consciously rebellious acts. The older kids, especially boys around the age of eleven, seemed to have a less self-conscious attitude toward cursing—while they were still very self-conscious about sexual matters. This may be related to the rather unself-conscious cursing that many adults in Belfast appeared to engage in, and could reflect the growing conception that the boys (and some girls) had of themselves as near-adults, even at the relatively young age of eleven or twelve.

What then counts as forbidden or rude materials? By whose standards are materials proclaimed as such, and do these definitions always hold true? McCosh (1979), in her landmark consideration of children’s jokes in the United Kingdom and the United States, included all “dirty or ‘rude’ jokes”

under the analytic category of “sex,” which for her included “actual or implied reference to the physical relationship between men and women; parts of the body, both male and female; swear words or dirty words; and bodily functions, such as going to the toilet” (75). She based this definition on children’s attitudes toward the joke, and I agree that this is the most accurate way of ascertaining the level of rudeness that the kids are engaging in. If they perceive the materials to be forbidden, then they are. However circular that definition may be, it is certainly a relevant one to the kids, who know how to classify materials like jokes on the basis of the reaction of those around them, including peers and adults. McCosh notes that the younger children, from about six to eight years of age, tended to indulge more often in jokes concerning bodily functions, especially toilet jokes. The older kids, starting at about nine and, for her sample, through the age of twelve or thirteen, tended to tell what McCosh calls “actual” sexual jokes.

I define “dirty” materials, for the purposes of this discussion, as either language or subject matter considered by adults to be unacceptable, rude, or even wicked for children (and in some cases, depending on the social context, for adults). This includes curse words, the most popular of which were “fuck” and “shit,” references to undergarments and sex, and references to other bodily functions, especially excretory ones. The materials were frequently marked by the kids themselves as “dirty,” either in exclamations about another’s joke (“Oh, that’s a dirty one!”), or in a warning phrase before a joke was told (“This one’s dirty”). Some of their “catches,” which folklorists define as “traditional question[s] . . . not really intended to be answered at all . . . designed to embarrass the unwary” (Brunvand 1986, 97), played with the notion of “the dirty,” especially the following:

Wanna hear a dirty joke?  
A man fell in the mud.  
Wanna hear a clean one?  
He got washed.<sup>6</sup>

These lines tease the audience with the teller’s knowledge that his or her audience *does* want to hear the dirty joke, and then further teases with a very literal punch line. It indicates the teller’s knowledge of the attraction of truly dirty materials, both for him- or herself and for the audience.

My consideration of rude materials on the playground seeks to make

clear the integral nature of materials considered improper or forbidden by adults within the traditions of children. They use “dirt” in very measured ways, for very particular purposes, and not simply because they know adults don’t want them to—although that is certainly part of it.

At what point do materials used by children cease, if ever, to become dirty, and segue into the realm of acceptable? It is possible that the joy taken in expressing such materials is so tied to the awareness of an abstract adult disapproval that it would be singularly dissatisfying to ever move rude materials into the realm of the acceptable.<sup>7</sup> Their very forbidden nature is what makes the jokes, rhymes, and isolated words and exclamations so very attractive, and so particularly useful as well. In some cases, they were used to mark and question my own status. I encountered most such marking early in my field season, when I was still being introduced to the students and when they were still unsure about my status on their playgrounds. I was, clearly, not a “kid,” not one of them. So was I a supervisor? Was I a teacher? If I was none of those, what was I, anyway? In addition to direct questions—of which there were many—the children at all of the schools tended to employ jokes and very measured uses of rudeness as a way of gauging my status.

### *Concealing Dirt in the Schools*

The sensitivity of the kids to their use of dirty materials may in fact be more related to their awareness of the requirements of the institutional setting (the school) than to their adherence to some more abstract notion of innocence perpetuated by middle-class notions of a proper childhood. The two are not unrelated, however, since the schools’ ethos, especially surrounding that of the place of children in society, is directly informed by such middle-class notions, regardless of the class identity of the kids within the school. One game perfectly mocked this sense of propriety: at both C.S. 2 and I.S. I observed kids playing Sorry, wherein the players deliberately run into each other, almost but not quite knocking other players over. Each time they knock into someone, the players call, “Sorry!”—often in whining, insincere tones of voice.<sup>8</sup> The message of the game appeared to be that so long as one held to social conventions and appearances, however insincerely, one’s rude, actual behavior could become acceptable.

As with the rigidity of gender separation on the playground (Thorne 1995;

Thorne and Luria 1986; Van Rheezen 1998), the apparently strict awareness of what is “proper” behavior on the playground may fade once off school grounds, both among kids on their own and among kids and parents. This would help explain why, away from school, I witnessed parents tolerating and even encouraging some kinds of language and behavior that on the playground were instantly censured. The parents were aware of what was “proper” for particular contexts, and were enforcing this sense of propriety when appropriate. In many cases, kids who violated that on the playground did so not out of ignorance, but rather in a very deliberate and calculated way. The violation was a part not only of their continuing evaluation of the loyalty of their peers but also of their challenge to the rigidity of the boundary that separated the acceptable behaviors of adult and child.<sup>9</sup>

One strategy for walking that fine behavioral line was the use of several different versions of the same rhyme within a given child’s repertoire. Most notably, the knowledge and use of a “G-rated” version in place of an “R-rated” version allows reference to the forbidden material without actually saying it. Some six- and seven-year-old girls at C.S. 2 gave me this counting-out rhyme:

Ip dip<sup>10</sup>  
 Dog shit  
 You aren’t On It  
 Everyone but you  
 You aren’t On It.

But one girl at C.S. 1 had a censored version that still allowed her to indulge in the imagery of dog excrement, without saying a completely forbidden word:

Ip dip, dog’s dirt [etc.].

A cognate and much milder version of these two rhymes, also collected from C.S. 2, went as follows:

Ip dip dip  
 My little ship  
 Sailed down the alleyway  
 And you aren’t On It.

The latter version was used quite frequently, especially during the early months of my fieldwork, and I continued to collect it at the larger schools, especially I.S., where not all of the kids knew me well or were very comfortable in my presence. The rude versions were said in situations where either the kids did not know I was around (in which case they acted horrified when they realized I'd just taped them), or knew me well enough not to care that I was hearing them say those words. For example, at P.S. 2, two five-year-old girls counted out to Ip Dip Dog Shit, but while I was listening, the first time they did it, the girl doing the counting out simply fell silent at the place where the dirty word belonged. After the first rendition, she actually said the word "shit," perhaps confident in my lack of censure after the first round.<sup>11</sup>

Some counting out is done in complete silence, with the child doing the counting out saying the rhyme to himself or herself as the rest of them count along. It is obvious that the others do keep track, because occasionally there would be disputes about who should really be out.<sup>12</sup> The "silent performance" of a counting-out rhyme allows for "closet" rudeness, where all know that the forbidden rhyme is being used, because it is called beforehand (for example, "Ip Dip!"). Kids can then enjoy the knowledge that they are violating adult interdictions even while they are protected by their overt silence.

### *Among the Peer Group: Rudeness as a Means of Testing Loyalty*

As I witnessed this process of assessing tolerance for the forbidden as applied to me, I began to realize that children applied this to each other, as well. Kids regularly used rude materials as a sort of test, not just of me, but of their peers, as a way of determining who was more loyal to friends, and to children's notions of conduct and propriety, than to abstract adult standards of same (Bronner 1988; McCosh 1979).

Many issues of belonging and identity are invested in who one's age-mates are and how loyal they are. Loyalty to friends is expressed in a variety of ways, including tolerating (and not interrupting) particular jokes or, alternatively, tolerating someone's interruption of a joke, and even accepting corrections (or at least accommodating them). It is also expressed in a toleration of rudeness, and very specifically, in not reporting it to adults in authority. In telling me dirty jokes (starting at a low level and progressing

to a higher level), kids were assessing my trustworthiness and therefore my eligibility to be included in some way in the group.

For instance, invariably, at every school, the first even slightly off-color joke I was told was the following:

Knock knock  
[Who's there?]  
Bear  
[Bear who?]  
Bare bum!

Generally this joke would come after one or two "why did the X cross the road" jokes, or some other equally innocuous piece. My reaction to the "bare bum" joke was inevitably closely scrutinized, and when I encouraged them to tell more, the kids would usually continue, not necessarily immediately following with an even more off-color joke, but usually throwing one or two into the subsequent mix.

And no wonder they were curious how I would react. The joke is actually quite provocative. One P4 girl at C.S. 1 followed her performance of "bare bum" with:

Knock knock  
[Who's there?]  
Bear  
[Bear who?]  
Bare Clare!

In making herself bare as a part of the punch line, Clare revealed, so to speak, that the bum in the original joke is not just anyone's behind, but is in fact that of the joke teller. The joke allows the teller to (in American argot) "moon" the listener without actually doing so, a masterly substitution of words for action.<sup>13</sup>

Kids did the same among their peers. In a "joking relationship," as traditionally defined by anthropologists (Radcliffe-Brown 1940, 1949; see also Basso 1979, 67–75; Thomson 1935), individuals tolerate impropriety within the frame of play (Bateson 1972) as an expression of trust. Although peer groups at the schools I visited were predominantly age groups, they were also cross-cut by gender. Therefore, if a girl wanted to emphasize her dif-

ference from boys, she might exaggeratedly disapprove of their fart jokes as “disgusting.” If she wanted to emphasize how much older she was than a group of boys and girls, she might do the same; or she might even impress or bewilder them by upping the ante from toilet humor to sexual references.

Sometimes the testing incorporated a catch question as well as some kind of dirty reference. For instance, an eleven-year-old boy at P.S. 2 asked me:

What do you call a wee man made out of cement?

A wee hard man.

He then moved on to:

Knock Knock

[Who’s there?]

Bear

[Bear who?]

Bare bum. [giggles]

And for the finale:

Guess what?

[What?]

You guessed.

As I was laughing, the boy exclaimed, “This is cracker!” meaning, “this is great,” and I tried to get him to say even more jokes by telling him I knew he was “full of them.” In the above exchange he tests me, seeing how I will react to the mild dirtiness of the bare bum joke and then catching me with the “you guessed” joke. He shows his pleasure with “this is cracker,” which might be an indication that he’s pleased with my positive reaction, or lack of a negative one; I laughed, rather than scolding him for tricking me or for mentioning bare bums.

Catch questions like “Guess what” were frequently used by boys to mark the boundary of an in-group from an out-group.<sup>14</sup> The person caught in the catch is made to appear to say, do, or be something embarrassing. Those who fall for the catch could be: (1) not in the age group of the person executing the catch, (2) not in the peer group of the person executing the catch, or (3) actually in the peer group, but the person “catching” you is



“only messing,” and in so doing, is emphasizing your friendship. The third option is seldom the case, because if you are firmly a member, you do not fall for the catch—primarily because it is not done to you in the first place. A more likely scenario is that you learn the catch from witnessing a member of your in-group doing it to a nonmember.

Children’s rules for appropriate behavior—much like those employed among adults—are not hard and fast, but rather are guidelines that allow kids to use language in fluid, complex ways to suit their own purposes, and not just those of the adults in their world. It is because the rules are variable and context dependent that kids relied on a “testing” strategy to evaluate a person’s trustworthiness. In my experience, children would seldom come right out and be rude first thing. They went, as a rule, through very measured stages of evaluation, observing my reaction to mildly risqué material before escalating to something more explicit. For instance, *Cinderella* was an immensely popular skipping rhyme at P.S. 1, and the versions I invariably heard on the playground were some variety of:

Cinderella  
Dressed in yellow  
Went upstairs to see her fellow  
How many kisses did she give him?  
1, 2, 3 . . .

This was an extremely popular rhyme, not least in part because of the reference to kissing, which is assumed to be engaged in by the skipper. The more skips the skipper successfully carries out, the more kisses she “gives,” making the truly skilled skippers into extremely experienced “kissers” in one fell swoop. The embarrassment of being a “kisser” thus tempers the joy in skipping, and might even discourage some skippers from monopolizing the rope. Those waiting their turn to skip frequently sing along, which allows them to enjoy the potential discomfort of the current skipper/kisser.

One day, a couple of months into my field season, I was taping a group of P5 girls “cold,” that is, taping them singing without their skipping, and one girl, Amy, led the group into the following version:

Cinderella Dressed in yellow  
Went upstairs to kiss her fellow

When she came down  
Her knickers busted  
How many people were disgusted?

I had never heard this version before, but the rest of the girls clearly had, and were initially quite giggly and nervous that Amy had chosen to sing it for me. I asked them to repeat it for the tape, however, and with that all of the girls chipped in, singing quite loudly.<sup>15</sup> The sexual nature of Cinderella's actions (resulting in her "knickers busting") was what both attracted the girls to the rhyme and made it such a risky thing to chant in the presence of a real adult—that is, one who could punish them for uttering it in the first place. Although I did have that potential power, I had never exercised it. I had successfully made the transition, distancing myself from "real" adults and becoming a fit, potentially appreciative audience for the rhyme.

Much later in the year, at I.S., a small group of P3 girls were skipping, and one girl in particular, Kira, insisted that I record the following version of Cinderella. I had already recorded the "usual" version, the first one listed above, many times at this school.

Cinderella dressed in blue<sup>16</sup>  
went upstairs to do a poo  
how many poos did she do?  
1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20

These much younger girls had hit upon a particularly rich vein of adult disapproval—any mention of excretory functions, in particular "doing a poo," but also including farting or making fart noises. The girls who chanted this rhyme were particularly pleased that Kira managed to skip as high as twenty times, maximizing the number of "poos" they could refer to in the rhyme. Notice as well that the obscenity for the younger children, in this case about six years old, concerned excretory functions, while the older children, eight or nine years for the ones who sang the "knickers busted" version, are using sexual images.

Where there was no gradual buildup to outright dirtiness, it was because I asked for it first thing. The only time I did this in my fieldwork was when I specified to the kids that I wanted "rude Christmas carols." These were

almost inevitably parodies of “Jingle Bells,”<sup>17</sup> and I had discovered that if I did not specify that I wanted the rude ones, that I would be left with several minutes worth of the regular Christmas carols on my tapes. Direct inquiry yielded songs such as the following, from I.S.

Jingle bells, Jingle bells  
Joker smells  
A thousand miles away  
He let a fart  
Behind the cart  
And blew up the IRA.

This is rude not only because of the mention of farting, but also because of the reference to the IRA. I collected this Christmas parody from Protestant, Catholic, and Integrated school pupils, all of whom appeared delighted to be singing about farting *and* blowing up the IRA, a lethally funny combination of forbidden subjects: bodily functions and sectarian violence. Children were not supposed to mention the paramilitary organizations around adults, and were often shushed for doing so in my presence.<sup>18</sup> After that rendition, which is a combination of a parody involving Batman and one involving Santa Claus, several kids<sup>19</sup> remembered that they knew the one about Santa, so I got a group version:

Jingle bells  
Santa smells  
A hundred miles away  
Let a fart  
Behind the cart  
And blew up the IRA—Ho!

Similar stuff was to be had at C.S. 2 from some of the older girls, ranging in age from nine to eleven:

Jingle bells  
Santa smells  
A thousand miles away  
Let a fart  
Behind the cart  
And blew up the IRA!

The only non-Jingle Bells parody I collected was the following, from C.S. 2, sung right after a version of “Jingle Bells, Batman Smells” and probably inspired by the reference to farting:

The Addams Family started<sup>20</sup>  
When Uncle Fester farted  
He farted through the keyhole  
And  
Par-al-ysed the cat  
The cat got all excited  
And shouted, “Man United”<sup>21</sup>  
And Man United shouted  
“The Addams Family!”  
Duh deh deh DEH  
thpph thppph [two farting noises]  
Duh deh deh DEH  
thpph thppph [mad giggling at all this farting noise]  
Duh deh deh DEH  
Duh deh deh DEH  
Duh deh deh DEH  
thpph thppph

Much could be said here about the image of Uncle Fester “starting” the family by farting, reminiscent of Freudian theories of male appropriation of birth through images of defecation (Dundes 1987a). In this particular performance of the rude song, what were clearly most important at the time were all of the farting noises, which inspired gales of giggles and laughter. The girls were having so much fun that they had no hesitation at all in repeating the song for me, so that I might capture it on tape. Once it was recorded, the girls insisted that I play it back for them, and they thoroughly enjoyed hearing—and occasionally sang along with—their voices on tape.

At C.S. 1 I frequently held “recording sessions” with a particular group of P4 girls who, once they figured out I wanted to hear from them, were happy to provide me with materials. The girls would crowd around me and my tape recorder, and would often simply sing or chant the rhymes. It was far easier for them to remember the words to counting-out and clapping rhymes if they were actually doing the counting out or clapping, so I would

encourage them to “say it like you’re doing it,” if their memory failed them as I was taping them “cold.” A series of materials they gave me in November, still fairly early in my field season, began with a counting-out rhyme containing no risqué material.

One potato, two potato, three potato four<sup>22</sup>  
 five potato, six potato, seven potato more  
 [This] spud’s OUT!

The next volunteer (“Can I say one?”) proceeded to a rhyme in which the main character has her “knickers [underwear] in the air and her jumper [sweater] inside out,” suggesting improper if not outright obscene behavior. The performer initially forgot how the entire rhyme goes, but clearly remembered the important part, that of the knickers being in the air. A nearby friend took over the recitation of the rhyme. For these girls, the part of the rhyme that made them giggle appeared to be the very mention of the word “knickers,” and not so much the implied situation that would have resulted in the knickers being in the air in the first place. Again, the mere mention of bodies, especially those improperly exposed or engaged in private and often gross functions, was quite amusing for these younger children.

There is a party on the hill  
 would you like to come?  
 [Yes]  
 {pause} . . . with your knickers in the air . . .  
 {interruption} [No!]  
 {someone else takes over}  
 There’s a party on the hill  
 would you like to come?  
 [Yes]  
 Who’s your very best chum?  
 [Martina]  
 Martina will be there  
 with her knickers in the air  
 and her jumper in-side-OUT!<sup>23</sup>

A series of knock-knock jokes was started at this point, and toward the end, one girl told the following joke.

Knock Knock  
[Who's there?]  
Paddy  
[Paddy who?]  
Paddy Irishman.

This joke signaled a whole new turn in the joke telling, which led to a series of Paddy jokes, three in all. They went from mild to rude, with the last one actually having the word “shit” in it. A different girl started the series with a Paddy Irishman, Paddy Englishman, and Paddy Scotsman joke:

Paddy Irishman, Paddy Scottishman, and Paddy Englishman were in this big haunted house. And they were starving, and Paddy Irishman went down until the kitchen, and he—he went 'til the cupboards and he got a cup of tea, right, and he was looking in the fridge and he sees a big thick slice in the fridge and he . . . and he hears this voice, [makes her voice deep] “I told you once I told you twice I told you thirty times not to eat that thick slice.”

This is an unfinished joke, cognate with several others I collected involving a ghost protecting something, usually food or money, that the various characters want.<sup>24</sup> The last character to go in and try for the object is usually the one to get it. This joke speaks to a desire to ignore edicts about what you can and cannot have—adult restrictions on children's desires—and allows for that desire to be satisfied within the joke, with the usual punch line allowing the final protagonist to get away with the desired object. In this version of the joke, however, the teller leaves us with the edict “not to eat that thick slice” unchallenged by any of the characters, perhaps indicating less conviction about the possibility of defying such a command from a figure of authority.

Another girl joined in the session with the following contribution:

Paddy Englishman, Paddy Scotchman, and Paddy Irishman were all in a haunted house and they brought guns and that and they heard somebody go “Whooooo Whooooo!” And one of them shooting and banged the door open and went and knocked the door in 'til the toilet and there's a wee girl in there picking her nose going, “Whooooo Whooooo!” [the teller mimics the blissful smile the girl in the joke would have had].<sup>25</sup>

This joke maintains the thematic thread of the “Three Paddys in a Haunted House,” but introduces the mention of a rude action—picking one’s nose and, furthermore, enjoying it. The girl telling the joke was explicit both in tone of voice and in expression that the girl in the joke was having a wonderful time both picking her nose and perhaps in scaring the three (adult) Paddys, who were probably expecting a ghost.

This session ended with the following:

Paddy Irishman, Paddy Englishman, and Paddy Scotchman were all on this flying carpet, right? Whatever they wished for they got. And Paddy Irishman wished for a pot . . . Paddy Englishman [she gets help here—Wished for a pot of gold!]—at which the teller says “No,” the corrector says, “He did!” and I say to let her tell the joke her way for now] Paddy Englishman wished for a big thing of . . . you know . . . pot of [corrector says, “Money!”] . . . GOLD. Paddy Scotchman wished for a big bottle of Scotch. And Paddy Irishman, didn’t know what to wish for, and he tripped and said, “Shit” and landed in a big pile of shit.

The theme has shifted again here; this is still a Paddy joke, but it belongs to the set of jokes involving wishes (see Bronner 1988, 141). The joke was hurriedly told, and to some extent “by committee,” with help from the audience, indicating a desire to get to the punch line, which contains not only the word “shit,” twice, but the terribly funny image of Paddy Irishman landing in a big pile of it. Not only does the joke itself violate adult standards of proper children’s conduct, but the image of landing in a pile of shit runs rather contrary to adult admonitions, regularly heard on the playground, not to get dirty, to be careful with one’s clothes, and so on. These jokes were told in November, and while it rains frequently throughout the year in Northern Ireland, it is particularly rainy in the fall and winter. Supervisors at this school and at others had been particularly vigilant about not letting the students into the grassy areas near the playgrounds, so that they would not get muddy.

This was a long session, involving rhymes, jokes, and songs, and I had been careful not to act shocked or disapproving of any of the materials the girls gave me, so as to make them feel at ease. Just as the bell was about to ring for them to return to class, some of the girls wanted to give me “a funny song,” and a large group of them sang very loudly:

Mummy Mummy Mummy!  
There's something in my nappie  
It's big and brown  
I can't sit down  
And if I sit and squash it  
You will have to wash it  
It's not a joke  
The washing machine's broke  
There is no soap  
My dolly's head's broke.

This song is funny because of the reference to shit-filled diapers, the “big and brown” “something in my nappie.” It is also an exercise in control, with the child, in the nappie, lording over the mother the fact that “if I sit and squash it, you will have to wash it.” The seriousness of that threat is exacerbated by their apparent poverty, or at least temporary down-and-out status. “The washing machine’s broke, there is no soap, my dolly’s head’s broke” can be read not just as a statement of the way things are, but as a protest by the child of the conditions in which she has to live. She is blaming the parent—in this case, the mother—for the situation, and is threatening to make it worse if it doesn’t get better.

The girls were reveling in their sense of control, as expressed not only in the text of the song, but also in the context in which they were singing it: they were singing a very rude song, very loudly, while standing in their classroom, traditionally the site where they are most assuredly not supposed to be singing rude songs. The performance was a triumph over perceived limits set by adult sensibilities, and an expression of solidarity among the girls against those who would censor them.

### *Children Challenging Adults*

There is a distinct discourse within rude jokes concerning challenging authority, as embodied in a variety of different adult characters (see discussion of these sorts of jokes in McCosh 1979, 86–93, and examples in Bronner 1988, 133–136). The challenge comes not just in the act of telling an inappropriate joke, but in the texts of the jokes themselves. Occasionally the jokes were relatively subtle, as was the case with one told by Carly,



a ten-year-old at P.S. 2. She had been listening to a series of jokes told by ten- and eleven-year old boys, and joined in at the level of obscenity that they had worked up to, after they had walked away for a few minutes.

Right, Paddys Englishman, Paddy Scotchman, Paddys Irishman, seen this devil. So [laughs], Paddys Englishman goes, I betcha I can sit in his hand for ten seconds. He goes, 1, 2, and then he jumps off. Then he goes, I'm away for a cold bath, because it was warm. Then he runs off, comes back, Paddys Englishman [*sic*], Paddy—said, I bet I can sit on it for ten seconds, so he goes, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and then *he* jumps off and says, I'm away for a cold bath. And so he goes into the cold bath and comes back again. Paddy Scotchman says, I'll be able to do it, so he got on, and he goes, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, and got off. Here they were, how'd you do that? And here he was, Chocolate melts in your ha—no, chocolate melts in your mouth, not in your hand. [repeats it for my benefit, and to make the punch line that she nearly messed up more clear] Chocolate melts in your mouth, not in your hand.<sup>26</sup>

The listener has to think about the fact that the “chocolate” in the punch line is actually excrement.<sup>27</sup> This, combined with the famous M&M's slogan (“melts in your mouth, not in your hands”),<sup>28</sup> allows Carly to indulge, in a very roundabout way, in the image of someone eating shit. At the very least, the joke involves someone who takes a shit in the hand of a devil, perhaps even The Devil, a powerful image indeed. Carly knows it is not obvious, and because I had a previous record of not always understanding their jokes on the first try, she “explained” the punch line to me by repeating it.

Jokes involving rude names for the main characters reveal a great deal about children's perceptions of hypocrisy in a social world that does not allow them to participate in the dirty discourses that they witness adults engaging in. It is indicated in the following pair of jokes told to me by a small group of P7 girls at C.S. 1.

*Annie:* Right, there was these three people, called Shutup, Manners, and [someone prompts her, “Dog's Dirt”] Dog's Dirt, right? They were all walking along, and then Dog's Dirt falls down the hole, and then the policeman comes over, and then Manners goes to pick him up,

and then here he goes—[her friend interrupts]—no, you go like this, he picks him up and then walks on, and then this policeman comes up, and he goes, what's your name, and he says, Shutup, and then the man goes, the policeman goes, I'll ask you again, what's your name, and he says [with more emphasis] Shutup! And then he says, where's your Manners, and then Shutup says, um, down the hole, picking up Dog's Dirt.<sup>29</sup> [laughs]

*DML:* And where did you learn that one?

*Annie:* [Someone] told me it.

*Mary:* Right this joke's called Sit down, Dick out, Pee in the Corner [shocked laughter]

*Mary:* Right. [There were three kids . . . ] one called Sit, one called Dick, and one called Pee, right, and they were all in school, and they were all throwing papers at each other and being mad, and the teacher comes in, and goes, right, Sit Down, Dick Out, Pee in the Corner! [some silence] Pee in the corner! [for emphasis]

On the face of it, the kids seemed to enjoy telling these jokes because they provided the opportunity to engage in forbidden, obscene language, and to make their peers laugh simply for that reason. The girls described the jokes to me as “dirty,” and they were learned in this case (I found out later) from an older, male cousin. But a closer look at the jokes' content reveals further elements that may feed kids' interest in and enjoyment of these narratives. In the first joke, the policeman, a convenient symbol for parental authority, questions the children about what they are doing, and is rewarded by what could be interpreted as a string of obscene words and images in the children's answer. That string of words is also an accurate description of what is going on. Herein lies the children's dilemma. When asked, they are perfectly capable of representing the world as they know it, warts and all. But all too frequently, the adults either do not know or do not want to know about this level of awareness among their children. For a child to rupture this parental illusion is to invite a variety of potential punishments, from simple silencing (“You mustn't say that”) to actual censure (“You're a bad girl for saying that”) and occasionally physical reprimands or threats (“You say that again and I'll give you a smack”). In the jokes above,

however, the adult is never allowed to punish the children; the joke ends before that is possible, and the punch line is the child's getting to say what is really going on.<sup>30</sup>

In the second joke, the adult, this time a teacher, is forced to be obscene when she punishes the children, Dick and Pee. In engaging in an activity that usually warrants punishing (saying obscene words or phrases), while in the act of punishing, the teacher reveals herself to be like many adults who tell children to do one thing while they themselves do another.

The jokes that kids tell are told in very particular contexts, usually within a body of other jokes, and the sequences that build up are especially revealing. In one session at P.S. 2, girls segued smoothly from telling jokes about big phones (adults) telling wee phones (children) what to do to a mildly obscene knock-knock joke. They therefore were inspired to do and say rude things by a joke about older figures forbidding younger ones from doing things. During the same session, older boys at P.S. 2 continually upped the rudeness ante with each successive joke, building on the jokes told before, and inspired by them, too. This sequence of jokes also reveals the implicit association of the violent with the dirty, a theme I will return to later in this chapter.

One finds frequent representations in jokes and rhymes of older/bigger people/objects telling younger/smaller people/objects what to do. The following two Wellerism jokes are about "big and wee" conversations.<sup>31</sup> They were told to me in the context of an extended joke-telling session with a number of kids, ranging in age from eight to eleven, at P.S. 2, after school. William and Mike floated in and out of the session, as they were frequently distracted by the indoor football game that was happening nearby.

*William:* What did the wee [his cousin Mike cuts in, and they both say] What did the big chimney say to the wee chimney?

*DML:* What?

*Both:* You're too young to smoke.

*William:* [fast on the heels of the last punch line]: What did the big phone say to the wee phone? [he answers himself] You're too young to get engaged!

These jokes reference notions of what one should do, and being told so by adults (the big chimney and so on), in the face of what kids actually do—

smoke (I knew at least one of the boys smoked regularly), act as though they are “engaged” (or at least sexually active). These jokes also invoke adults saying that children shouldn’t do things that they (the adults) themselves clearly do. The chimney is a thing that by definition smokes, the phone is a thing that by definition becomes engaged (in use); the implication of the characters in these jokes is that they are going to, and indeed have to, do precisely what they are told not to. This is more than simple resistance; it is a complex representation of a certain sense of inevitability held by both parents and children: people in Northern Ireland do have families (if not get engaged) young, and they do smoke,<sup>32</sup> also starting quite young. In so doing kids are reproducing their own parents’ patterns of behavior, something that makes it that much more difficult for a parent to condemn the behavior, however much they might wish their children would do differently.

Ambivalence and concern about authority are displayed particularly well in a series of jokes about doctors. When told by adults, they undoubtedly plug into a series of anxieties about health, the authority of doctors, and the National Health system, but with children there is additional resonance in the fact that doctors are another kind of adult, telling them what to do.<sup>33</sup>

Doctor, Doctor, everyone thinks I’m a liar.<sup>34</sup>  
I don’t believe ya’.

Doctor, Doctor, I can’t get to sleep at night.  
Well, lie at the edge of the bed, and you’ll soon fall off.

Doctor, Doctor, I feel like a pair of curtains.<sup>35</sup>  
Pull yourself together!

Doctor, Doctor, I feel like I’m invisible.  
Next, please!

Doctor, Doctor, I feel like a dog.  
How long have you felt like this?  
Since I was a puppy.

Doctor, Doctor, I feel like a bridge.  
What’s come over you lately?  
Two trucks and a car.

There was this man who went to the doctor's, and he said, "Doctor, Doctor, I keep fartin' and I'm stinkin'!" The Doctor goes out and comes back with a pole with a hook on it, and the man says, "Doctor, Doctor, what's that for?" "T'open a window, you're stinkin'!"<sup>36</sup>

Doctor, Doctor, I feel like a deck of cards.<sup>37</sup>  
Shut up and I'll deal with you later.

Doctor, Doctor, I feel like a spoon.  
Sit down and don't stir.

Note that the doctor's responses are singularly unhelpful. The patient (child) is asking for help for frequently serious conditions, some social, some physical—not being able to sleep, being stigmatized as a liar, smelling awful because of uncontrollable flatulence—but the doctor (adult) is flippant and uncaring, making a joke at the patient's expense. In several of the jokes, the patients/children likens themselves to an inanimate object—a pack of cards, a bridge—something to be played with or run over by cars, a thing without agency, without exercisable power. The doctor/adult answers with a line confirming the patient/child's initial feeling: "I'll deal with you later," to the pack of cards. Although the laughter generated by the joke is frequently at the patient's expense, occasionally the joke seems as if the patient is getting back at the doctor, as in the case of the patient who feels like a dog, and has done since he "was a puppy." The doctor looks foolish here.

The unhelpful advice from the doctor is in contrast to the advice given in the following, which was used in this case as a counting-out rhyme. The kids are directing advice and sanctions of their own to adults, and even seem to be assuming the voice of a doctor.

Put your fags in the box sir<sup>38</sup>  
Yes sir  
Let me hear you cough sir  
[cough cough]  
Very bad indeed, sir  
And you are not On It for the rest of the game.

Here the child performing the counting-out rhyme takes over the role of doctor, and the reference to "sir" indicates an adult is being addressed. The

doctor appears to be giving “sir” a physical: the “let me hear you cough” line suggests the “turn your head and cough” portion of a male physical, wherein the testicles are held by the doctor. For the purposes of the rhyme, this gives the child/doctor even more power over “sir”/the adult.<sup>39</sup> At the end of the counting out, the person identified as the smoking adult is not On It for the game. The child thus gets to put the adult in his place, controlling “him” physically, and judging “him” (I observed this counting-out rhyme as performed by girls), and not only for the unhealthy practice of smoking. Ultimate playground power is finally exercised by not allowing “sir” to play the game.

### *Persistent Association of Rudeness with Violence*

G. Legman (1979) has argued that the association of obscenity with violence is a result of adult injection of violent materials as a substitute for sexual ones. What I found in the field does not appear to support that argument; dirty words and violent references are put into association by the children themselves, most often in their following a sexual piece with a violent one during a performance, or vice versa. The kids I observed were fairly consistent in following an obscene reference with a violent one. For example, the C.S. 2 version of Ip Dip Dog Shit was swiftly followed by a version of:

My mummy and your mummy<sup>40</sup>  
 Were hanging out the clothes  
 My mummy hit your mummy  
 A punch on the nose  
 What color was the blood?  
 [the person picked says:] Red  
 R-E-D spells red  
 And you are not On It  
 For the rest of the game

Violent and dirty references were also occasionally united in the same piece of folklore. For example, the following was sung by a large group of girls at C.S. 2. The giggling when they say “underpants” indicates that they know they’re not supposed to be saying anything about it, but they can do it in groups and it will be safer.

My boyfriend gave me an apple<sup>41</sup>  
 My boyfriend gave me a pear  
 My boyfriend gave me a [kiss noises, hand to mouth as if blowing a kiss, three times]  
 And he kicked me down the stairs  
 [I kicked him]  
 I kicked him over London  
 I kicked him over France  
 I kicked him over U-S-A  
 And he lost his underpants! [giggles]  
 I made him do the dishes  
 I made him do the floor  
 I made him do the baby's bum  
 And I kicked him out the door!

Starting after “underpants,” the two P3s who started the rhyme were joined in their singing by five to six other girls, who lent their voices—loudly!—to the last part of the rhyme, even though they were not clapping. There was also some dispute over whether the boyfriend was doing the kicking, or being kicked (as indicated in brackets, above); some girls sang one version, and some sang the other. The version where the girl is kicking her boyfriend took over at the next line.

Also at C.S. 1, the girls sang the following parody right after their lusty rendition of Mummy Mummy Mummy, just as the bell was ringing for them to return to class activities. The fact that it concerns a television show, “Barney and Friends,”<sup>42</sup> that is explicitly intended for children and is insistent in its emphasis on love and sharing, makes the parody even more striking in the mouths of the very children supposedly targeted by the show.

I hate you<sup>43</sup>  
 You hate me  
 Let's get together and kill Barney  
 With a big axe through Barney's head  
 Aren't you glad that Barney's dead?

On the surface, this association is in the folklore, and made by the kids in their performance of the materials, because obscenity and violence are

clearly things not approved by adults for children. If kids are going to indulge in one, it is a small enough leap to indulge in the other as well. On a deeper level, obscenity and violence, though perceived by the adults in their society as dangerous and antisocial, are being used by the kids as a kind of social glue. Those who choose to participate in the obscene or violent moments, in word or in deed, are united in their shared defiance of adult edicts concerning appropriate thoughts and behavior.

This engagement with violence is not unique to children. Violence within the frame of play is frequently cited as an arena for male bonding in Western European societies (Van Rheeën 1998); in Northern Ireland, as in much of Europe and in the United States, this occurs at football, rugby, and other team sporting events. Using casual obscenity among friends is a way of indicating your level of comfort with them, and is characteristic of the “joking relationship” much cited by anthropologists in their descriptions of behavioral roles and expectations, especially among family members (Basso 1979; Radcliffe-Brown 1940, 1949). So on the one hand, children are no different from adults; they indulge in obscene and play-violent behavior as a way of bonding with particular groups of friends. On the other hand, they are still learning just where the boundaries of obscenity and unacceptable violence lie, and the variable nature of standards of obscenity, depending very much on social context. It is in the testing of these boundaries and standards within the frame of play (Bateson 1972) that we can see that learning process taking place. I observed cases on every playground where the play violence shaded into actual violence; the nearly universal condemnation of such a shift by the kids who observed and were victimized by it speaks to the consensus among children that play violence is, in fact, “only playing.” They know the minute it stops being “play,” and when it becomes unacceptable.

Perhaps what disturbs adults the most is the revelation in children’s folklore of potentially violent behavior, especially among boys. Adult concerns about children engaging in violent acts came out in the complaints of a group of playground supervisors at P.S. 1; they were all mothers with children at the school. They remarked that all the older boys ever did was fight, if they didn’t have a football to play with. Even then, the suggestion was made that boys would fight over football games if the supervisors did not intervene. Although I did see conflict over scoring and rules among the older (P6–P7,



mostly) boys at P.S. 1, the most violent conflicts I saw were a result of interactions between the supervisors and the kids themselves. When a supervisor took a child out of play and the child resented the reasons (or simply resented being taken out), that kid would often reenter the game, against the commands of the supervisors. This would generate a verbal tug of war that commonly ended in the kid's being banned from playing at all. That kid would then act up on the sidelines, throwing things at those still allowed to play, in protest. Many times, adult worries about violence, and a reluctance to let the kids work it out for themselves because the adults perceived the kids to be at risk, seemed to do more harm than good.<sup>44</sup>

It is this implicit association of rudeness with violence, seen so clearly in the folklore materials, that also feeds adult anxiety about "dirtiness" among children. This fear is particularly pointed in a society like that in Northern Ireland, where children are only too likely to have quite personal experiences with violence. Parents may wish to protect their children, limiting their exposure to forbidden language and folklore, because of this perceived link with violence. At the very least, parents can try to maintain the illusion that they are protecting their children from the one (violence) by limiting their children's expression of the other (dirty materials). Dirty words themselves are potentially violent; if they are used to hurt or insult others, they can have an impact often just as severe as physical violence. Children fling words at each other far more often than they fling their bodies (Lurie 1990), and they are aware of the power they have to make each other feel bad, simply with words. In this case, conventional rudeness doesn't even have to be used—intent is key, and if someone wishes to hurt another person, he or she can call that person a "melon" and have it hurt, because hurt was intended.

Adult anxieties about child obscenity are not just a result of generalized cultural constructs dictating proper childlike behavior, of course.<sup>45</sup> Parents in particular can be concerned because such language can be interpreted as "fighting words," and lead to violence. In a place like Northern Ireland, where the threat of violence is quite real and frequently affects children both directly and indirectly, such worries are not idle, and reflect actual dangers. It is this adult impulse to protect children from violence, and to prevent their participation in it, that also may be behind adult censure of child rudeness. Rudeness is more than just a violation of some abstract model of a proper

childhood; it is a very real warning sign that children might not be as safe as adults would like them to be.

One can see in the folklore of kids about and within performances of rudeness an acute awareness (and frequent rejection) of the protected roles prescribed by adults for children. In the next two chapters, in discussions of the children's folklore concerning gender and sectarian categories, I highlight what boys and girls think they know about men and women and about Protestants and Catholics. The tensions and difficulties inherent in gender and sectarian identities in Northern Ireland once again place strains on the performance of Innocent Childhood. Children's folklore continues to reveal the extent of kids' engagement with "adult" issues. Kids' exploration of conflicting notions of what children should and do know leaves open the question of whether they can ever truly be protected from harsh realities.

### *Three*

## Masculinity and Femininity on the Playground

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The playground practices and folklore texts of Belfast primary school children reveal much about their perceptions and representations of family and domestic life. Such practices and representations are highly gendered: domestic and family roles are omnipresent in girls' play, but conspicuously absent in that of boys. Likewise, family references in folklore texts, such as the rhymes that accompany clapping and skipping games, are regularly chanted or sung by girls, but are seldom if ever engaged in by boys. When boys do enter the domestic sphere of the playground, it is to disrupt or to mock. What do these representations say about the domestic realities of these Belfast children? How literally can we take them? What can an examination of the domestic as enacted on the playground tell us about gender identity among Belfast boys and girls?

On the playground, notions of gender are situated in two particular spheres: in that of spatial delineation and the practices of their performances, and in the folklore texts themselves. As in other ritual social dramas, the action of gender requires a performance that is *repeated*. This repetition is at once a reenactment and [a] reexperiencing of a set of meanings already socially established; and it is the mundane and ritualized form of their legitimization . . . this "action" is public action. . . . Gender [is] . . .

instituted in an exterior space through a *stylized repetition of acts*. (Butler 1990, 140, emphasis in original; see also Ortner 1996a)

At least some of these “stylized repetition of acts” occur within the folklore performances on the playground, which reveal a great deal about the conflicted nature of gender identity among the Belfast children I met. The tension between what is expected and what is desired is never resolved, and in their folklore the children reveal their awareness that such tensions can explode into domestic strife and violence, which are also imitated or referred to on the playground.

In the categorization and inscription of space in their play practices, the children are using the tactics of their play (de Certeau 1988, xix) to reinscribe space that has already been defined and controlled by adults. The playground, which to adults is simply “where children play,” can thus become a variety of venues in the kids’ play, controlled by kids in their redefinition of playground space as something far more specific, and not always what adults realize or intend.

Central to the thoughts behind this discussion is the concept of mimesis, especially as it is presented and used by Goldman (1998). In contrast to Platonic mimesis, which is “*mimesis* as impersonative art” (Goldman 1998, 19), Aristotle’s mimesis

became much more than veridical reproduction. It now incorporated the innovative, hypothetical reasoning of ‘as-if’ thinking. . . . Aristotle thus foreshadowed the notion that the mind in presence is interpretive rather than replicative, that play is transformative not just simulative of reality. . . . [he] bestowed a new critical edge on the notion of myth as phenomena ‘shaped afresh’, not the original material but the specific act as an act of mimesis. . . . [T]he fictionalizing modality of child pretence is both culturally and socially iconic. Such performances are never intended as veridical representations, real-world documentaries. Rather, they present as distorted simulacrum, not copies but editorialised caricatures incorporating embellishment and exaggeration. (19–21)

We should not look to child’s play, then, for perfect mirror images of the adult world, in a variation of the Boasian culture-reflector method of

interpreting folklore materials (Dundes 1984, 193). Rather, play becomes an editorial of sorts, picking up on the generalities and exaggerating them for (especially) comic effect. The picture of “the Family” embedded in the folklore of the playground is iconic; it represents particular interpretations of family life, filtered through the actual experiences of children, and their perceptions of the experiences of others, and distilled into a rhyme, a song, a set of rules. The potential of folklore to be many-layered, both literal and symbolic, allows for many truths to be found in the same piece. Thus even though two girls are not living exactly the same lives, folklore is flexible enough to accommodate their different perspectives on their experiences. So when, for example, the play of girls is supersaturated with images of family wherein the mother is omnipresent and powerful, the father distant if not absent altogether, and the siblings alternately companions and pains, this is not a simple imitation of their lives. It is a specific representation of exaggerated tropes, which contain the truths of one-parent homes, domestic abuse, large families, and so on. These representations efface the variation in the children’s actual lives—the families that have daddies with jobs, without many siblings, even those without mothers, or dominated by extended female kin such as aunts or grannies—in favor of a picture of what is generally the case as far as they can perceive. The folklore reveals a distillation of experiences, both those of the self and those of others, which are then incorporated into the production of gender performance.

*Spatial Aspects of Gendered Play:  
Separation and Mixing on the Playground*

The playground is not a space that is completely defined by the kids. It is first and foremost a space circumscribed by adults, for adult-set agendas—even if some of those agendas do refer to the needs the kids have for exercise and a break from the far more strict order of the classroom. On the street, children’s play is limited by a variety of factors. In the Northern Ireland I studied, of course, the Troubles were a major reason that children had stopped playing so much outside. Ubiquitous “No Ball Games” signs on the gable ends of houses indicated that children were only supposed to play where adults permitted. In public parks, areas for kids were set aside from the main parts by way of low fences and gates.<sup>1</sup> The assumption that the ultimate definition of public and private kids’ spaces re-

mains within adult power underlies this chapter's discussion of kids' agency in defining and describing gendered spaces.<sup>2</sup>

At all schools with co-ed student bodies, there was a clear separation of the genders into "activity spaces."<sup>3</sup> Those of the boys tended to be larger, to accommodate their running/chasing/ball games. Some schools had separate football pitches (fields), where the older boys in particular would group. At P.S. 2, there was no discrete area for football, but the boys who played during their breaktime separated themselves from the main playground; older (eight- to eleven-year-old) boys would go around the corner, achieving separation via a visual break with the rest of the kids, especially the girls. Younger footballers (six- to eight-year-olds) would gather in one corner of the asphalt play area, putting as much space between their game and the others as was possible without actually leaving the playground.

In some cases, policies enacted by the school staff encouraged the separation of genders in play space. During an after-school program at P.S. 2, there was a distinct feeling of "boys' time" and "girls' time," fostered by the headmaster's explicit organization of the afternoon's schedule. He came into the hall and announced that the boys could play until 4:15, and then they had to go to the homework center, after which time the girls could play.<sup>4</sup> Some students fought the tendency for "all boys" or vice versa while they were playing in the hall, but once the segregation started, it tended to be continued. At one point, when P6 Walter came back from doing homework, and asked the girls if he could play, he was answered with a resounding "No!" The girls continued to rebuff him while other boys came in to the hall, making it a more equally mixed crowd, with neither gender having a significant numerical advantage over the other. At that point, the boys took over the main part of the hall, and the girls retreated to nearby tables. Numerical equality, in the end, did not translate into the girls' continuing to be able to choose where they wanted to play.

At the co-ed schools I witnessed some girls playing football, or running or chasing games, with the boys, especially while they were under the age of eight. Unisex games tended to coexist with these mixed ones, however, and in my observations of large groups of older kids, I noticed a marked toward unisex play. That is, the girls would play one kind of game, for example, skipping, and the boys would play another kind, for example, football. This included times when the play of one group involved disrupting

the play of the other group, as happened when boys would run through the skipping game of their girl counterparts, as described in Chapter 1. In addition to what I observed, the kids' own representations of game gender composition tended to be quite rigid. When I asked them direct questions, I was more likely to get statements to the effect of, "boys don't do X," or hear about how girls are not allowed into a football game by boys.

I did regularly witness gender-specific exclusion in practice. For example, at I.S., one particularly proficient P2 skipper denied a boy access to the game she was running (it was her skipping rope): "No! Boys don't skip." The boy, after trying one more time, ran off to try to join another kind of game. This disallowance by a girl of the boy's skipping must be seen in the larger context of a more general exclusion of girls from activities dominated by boys, such as football. Even younger boys would frequently exclude girls from their running games, not necessarily in the explicit terms of the girl just quoted, but in their actions. When a girl would ask to play, and the boys were intent on excluding her, they could just run away, leaving her to try someone else. Girls who attempted to join in Chasies games would not be chased, or if she claimed "On It" status, she would be ignored, and a boy would be accepted as On by his playmates. "Boys don't skip" thus becomes at least in part a defensive statement, an attempt by the girl to keep her turf, on a playground where she and her gender-mates were often denied access to activities.<sup>5</sup>

This appearance of fairly rigid gender separation on the playgrounds was not always consistent, upon further observation of what the kids were actually doing. I witnessed the kids reach out across gender lines. Once at P.S. 2, William asked if Janine was playing football, as an implicit invitation to play. Another time I heard Janine say, "Sure it's okay if the boys play" a skipping game the girls had started. Janine was one of the few girls at that school who always acted on her desire to play football, and so if she wanted the boys (who controlled the football games) to allow her to play, it behooved her to let them into games she was playing.

Some mixed games on the playgrounds were explicitly encouraged by adult staff members. Such was the case with the football game at P.S. 1. P6 and P7 boys had monopolized the football pitch for years, according to the principal of the school, and when he arrived at his post, he made it clear to the boys that the girls should be allowed to play as well. There were

a few girls who wanted to play, primarily P7s. Even though the principal's policy of mixed football games had been in place for several years by the time I visited the school, the boys were still resistant to the presence of the girls; the girls were picked last, for the most part, when teams were chosen, and girls only received the ball if it was accidentally kicked their way by a boy, or if it was passed to them by a girl. By the age of ten or eleven, the learned roles that separated girls from boys had been well established, and were hard to overcome simply by the headmaster's fiat.

The space available to the kids on their playground determined just how much they could physically separate themselves from one another. At C.S. 1, with its very small playground, girls separated themselves from girls they did not want to play with via a combination of tactics. These included turning their backs to the undesirables, not letting them into the circle of a ring game, verbally denying them access to the game ("No, not you!"), or running to the other end of the playground. I saw such tactics used by boys and girls at the rest of the schools. Where there were crowded playgrounds, such as at C.S.1 and also at I.S., running away was less effective (as there were few places to go), so the other strategies were usually employed, often in combination. Furthermore, this exclusion of certain people from games did not fall exclusively along gender lines; cliques of friends were ubiquitous at all ages, and some pairs would only play with each other. Girls excluded other girls from skipping in much the same way, if not with exactly the same words, that they excluded boys, especially if the rejected girl was not seen to be particularly good at skipping. Likewise, boys shunned other boys who were not perceived as being particularly good at the game they were playing; this was especially true in football. One could argue that particular skills are inherently gendered, given the bias adults pass on about what are girls' and boys' activities, but the blurring of the gender-skill boundaries allows for individual choice and even agency in the kids' determining whom they would and would not play with. Kids did not always obey accepted gendered norms.

Boys and girls did mix while playing at school, depending on a widely varying number of circumstances. Important variables included: the number of people available to play, perceptions of skill (as in football or skipping), friendships, and enforcement or suggestion of mixing by teachers/supervisors/school principals. For example, in the following statement,



a girl at I.S. makes it clear that the gender imbalance in the game they were playing led them to move on to do something different:

We were playing Cops and Robbers, and then Michael went off because there's too much girls, so we went off, because we were best friends. So then we went off to play with [gives a list of names] . . . we went off to sing and dance.

Girls were also aware of some of the dangers and tensions inherent in "mixing." They knew of some boys' displeasure at their wanting to play games like football, especially those girls who just wanted to play "for fun," among boys for whom the game was (nearly) deadly serious. During lunch at P.S. 2 one day, I asked the P7 girls if they didn't want to play football. I rarely saw them even try to get into games. They told me that they would, but that the boys first of all really didn't want them to, and were just "too rough" in playing for the girls' tastes. One of the P7 girls finally told me about a time when one girl was playing and had the ball, and one of the boys wanted it. He got mad at not getting the ball when he wanted it, and "kicked it right in her face!" the girl said, with an exaggerated expression of horror and sympathy on her face.

### *Family, the Playground, and "the Domestic"*

The family was literally present on the Belfast playgrounds I visited; children were at school with siblings, cousins, and even in some cases aunts and uncles. Playground supervisors at the schools were frequently mothers and aunts (never, in my experience, fathers or uncles), and in one case, a grandfather was the school custodian. On another level, children, girls in particular, brought family structures into conversation and into their play. Family roles are widely represented both within the texts of girls' play as well as in the play practices of girls, and reveal the discussion they are having within the frame of play (Bateson 1972) about family life and gender. Boys as young as six years old appeared to have removed their play—and, by association, themselves—from the family sphere altogether, both in their play practices and in their infrequent discussions about what boys and girls do on the playground.

In discussing representations of gender and the family, I rely heavily on the concept of what I am calling the "domestic sphere," and draw upon a

long anthropological history of practical and theoretical concern with the public/private split (Dyck 1990; Rosaldo 1974; Sacks 1974; Sanday 1974; Yeatman 1984). Particularly relevant is the gendered nature of that split. By "domestic," I mean those activities and people associated with the home: activities such as child care, housecleaning, cooking, shopping, and laundry. In Belfast, as is the case in the rest of Northern Ireland, Ireland, and indeed the rest of Europe, the people traditionally associated with the home and its related duties are women (Beale 1986; Curtin, Jackson, and O'Connor 1987; Evanson 1991; Ilich 1982; Ingram 1997; Roulston 1997; Sales 1997). The proportion of women working outside the home has increased significantly during the recent Troubles in Northern Ireland: under 37 percent of women were working in 1971, and that percentage rose to over 47 percent by 1991 (Montgomery 1993, cited in Morgan and Fraser 1995). At least part of this increase has been linked to a combination of a decline in traditional areas of male employment (that is, industry/manufacturing) and the correspondingly high percentage of male unemployment (Morgan and Fraser 1995). A large number of the working-class women I encountered in Belfast who were fortunate enough to have jobs (and in the still-depressed economy of the neighborhoods I was working in, anyone who had a job was fortunate; see Rolston and Tomlinson 1988) did "domestic" work outside of the home: they worked as cleaners, as playground supervisors, as clerks at supermarkets or shops, and so on (this distribution is also reflected in the Equal Opportunities Commission for Northern Ireland 1993 report on women and employment, cited in Morgan and Fraser 1995, 83).

"Domestic," then, is not limited to the private sphere of the home, but rather is a realm that travels with the person(s) also classified as "domestic." Space becomes domestic far more because it is inscribed as such by the presence of the female gender in that space, rather than because of any inherent qualities of the space itself.<sup>6</sup>

Schools, though definitely public when seen in the traditional public/private dichotomy, in that they are outside of the private home, would fall nowadays under the domestic because of their preoccupation with children (who are associated with the home) and because it is primarily women who teach. The association of "school" with "domestic" makes the predominance of female teachers, especially in primary schools, consistent with the gendered associations of "domestic," and additionally makes sense

of the suspicions that surround male teachers of the very young.<sup>7</sup> Even within the home, some spaces are more domestic than others; the kitchen is more so than the living room, and so on. "Domestic" is therefore different from "private," because the kitchen is domestic space, but not necessarily private in the sense that a bath or bedroom might be. "Domesticity" is something that can be enacted and participated in, in specific locations within the so-called public spaces of society; in Belfast, that could be at the corner shop, the supermarket, the shopping center, or the laundromat. Men are not supposed to be domestic, even if they are at home; those who show signs of being domestic, by doing the cooking, cleaning, or child care, do not fit traditional models of masculinity, and are disruptive. In addition to disturbing any routine that is established by the women of the house regarding domestic chores and the like, men who engage in domestic activities disturb societal expectations about what "real men" do in their everyday lives.

This is not to say that men do not ever do cooking, cleaning, or child care, but rather to point out that it remains rare for it to be full time. In Belfast, some neighborhoods, especially those of the working class, have had many of their men in and out of prison, directly or indirectly because of the Troubles since the late 1960s and early 1970s (Aretxaga 1997; Evanston 1991). Other men have been absent from their traditional role as breadwinner because of the crash in the manufacturing economy in Belfast (especially shipmaking), or because they were barred from employment because of their religious identity (Howe 1990, 1998; Rolston and Tomlinson 1988). Work outside the home has shifted from "male" blue-collar work in manufacturing and other industry to "female" work in service sectors, like shops, restaurants, and child care. Working-class Protestant and Catholic men alike, upon finding themselves at home, are in a situation where women have been doing all of the work, domestic and otherwise, where no (traditionally male) jobs are forthcoming, and their presence in the household is intrusive on many levels: the men resent being there with "nothing better to do," while the women frequently resent having to change the routine they have finally settled upon and that has worked in many cases for years.

The problem is acute among former prisoners. With the cease-fire that began in 1997, prisoners have been released as an act of good faith by the British government, and the population of male ex-prisoners is ever-growing.

Several journalists have reported on the problems generated by the return of these men:

[Ex-]prisoners say that the problems in going back into a house where the woman has become more assertive, in what is traditionally still a patriarchal society, can be a source of deep depression. . . .

'Everything was done for you. You never had to worry about bills, and your meals were there three times a day. Now you have to work out what you can afford and when. I drink once a week at most.' Each prisoner has something he finds particularly odd. Adams finds the traffic much heavier; Matt Kincaid, 38, another ex-UDA [Ulster Defence Association] prisoner, found himself mad on gardening after release, having always hated it; and ex-UDA inmate Sam Hinton, 33, found stairs unusual. Hinton, who served eight years of a 12-year sentence for attempted murder, is desperate for a job. His wife stood by him while he was inside, but now the relationship has foundered. He found it difficult to cope coming into a house where she made the rules. (Mullin 1998)

Seven out of 10 of those who went into prison married will return to homes where they are no longer wanted or which have been abandoned by their wives. So says Robert McClenaghan, another ex-IRA man who served 12 years of a 20-year sentence for carrying explosives, and now runs a group for ex-prisoners who build new homes for themselves. Long-term prisoners lucky enough to find a woman waiting for them may have to accept that their wives have borne children by other men.

There is much debate about what is to be done for such men. "We have to ask ourselves," says McClenaghan, "whether we are going to leave them on the margins of society, as outcasts. If we do not provide them with security and support, they will drift. You will have living time-bombs walking around. . . . They need help getting their relationships together. Everyone has changed. The women have become stronger; they have been forced to deal with the finances and bringing up the children on their own. There is anger that easily spills over. I get men crying down the phone to me at two in the morning. They don't know how to cope." (O'Sullivan 1998)

Lorraine Dowler notes, in her research among Catholic ex-prisoners and

their wives, that the shift to women working outside of the home and the redefinition of women's public space "[have] not been mirrored by more participation for their husbands in the home. Many men, especially in the case of former prisoners, who would find it particularly difficult to find employment, spend their days and nights in Nationalist clubs" (2001, 67).

Dowler (2001) describes the creation of what she calls a "third space," distinct from public or private, masculine or feminine, by Republican ex-prisoners in Belfast: the Nationalist club. These private (usually unlicensed) drinking clubs are places where the men, after years of spatial separation from women in prison, and the exclusion of women from politics, can recreate the men-only, nurturing friendships they formed while in prison. Private clubs can become these men's "home away from home," allowing for the creation of a space that is intimate, almost domestic, but not influenced or inhabited in any way by women. These spaces allow men to affirm their masculinity in the face of a stark absence of such affirmation at home or at work. Such masculinity transcends traditional machismo, and can incorporate more nurturing relationships among men, at least in part because of the exclusion of women.<sup>8</sup> These close friendships are defined by the men as familial, and indeed became more familylike than the relationships they had with their "real" families, the women and children waiting for them outside of the prison walls. "Ironically, the men of Long Kesh adopted a sense of the prison as 'homeplace', as a site of resistance; however, they did so at the expense of the breakdown of the 'real' home" (Dowler 2001, 63). Unable to continue such friendships in public spheres that demand narrow interpretations of the masculine, the ex-prisoners retreat to their third space, where they can "simply be themselves" (Dowler 2001, 53). There they can enact both hypermasculine and intimate ways of relating to each other, away from the (potentially) disappointed eyes of the public, who expect only the former from heroes and criminals. For men who are not ex-prisoners, the pub can play a similar role, providing a safe space for male-male relationships to develop, away from the domestic sphere ruled by women that appears to have no place for men.

What, then, can be seen of the masculine on the playground? To what extent does boys' play reflect this disengagement with the domestic, with women and girls? One can see the active construction of masculine identity in the self-directed play of boys, especially the free-form imaginary chas-

ing games such as Cops and Robbers, Power Rangers, or martial arts play, described in Chapter 1. Such games are characterized by a complete lack of family roles. The roles that boys take on are instead from television, movies, and comic books. These boys are bonding and socializing as men among men, not as members of a domestic unit. In boys' play, action figures become indelibly attached to iconic stereotypes of maleness and masculinity in working-class Belfast, of being strong, nondomestic, and ready for a fight, and are by definition separate from the domestic sphere of the family (Jenkins 1982, 1983; see the discussion of domestic space in Aretxaga 1997, 69ff.; Evanson 1991; Sales 1997). In their play, boys taught each other these exaggerated models of masculinity.

Gary Alan Fine has described a similar process among preadolescent Little Leaguers in the United States. He notes that "[in their desire to be] 'men' in the 'moral' sense of the term, [preadolescents] select from among the repertoire of behaviors that they perceive that men (particularly media men and other role models) display. They select those behaviors that are congruent with their own needs for independence and separation from the world of girls and younger children. They must show themselves not to be part of these protected classes. For this, the stereotyped role of the male . . . serves admirably" (1987, 185–186). The boys I met in Belfast were at the early stages of the processes recorded by Fine among American boys, separating themselves from the "protected classes" of girls, women, and young children by adopting exaggerated male behavior on the playground, and by eschewing any behavior that could be interpreted as female. William Pollack (1999) calls this behavior the Boy Code, a code whereby anger is the only acceptable emotion to express, and femininity and nurturing behavior are defined as not-boy. The end result of the Boy Code is "hard men" (Pollack 1999, 45).

Ian Turner (1978) has pointed out that child psychologists attribute the high frequency of girls' engagement in so-called dramatic (as opposed to competitive) games to girls' developing verbal skills earlier than boys. Turner additionally refers to *The Games of New Zealand Children* (Sutton-Smith 1959), in which Brian Sutton-Smith suggests that it is girls' earlier awareness of their future roles that accounts for their more frequent dramatic play (also see Sutton-Smith 1979). I would argue that boys' lack of engagement in heavily scripted dramatic play does mirror their future

roles, as they can currently conceive of them. In avoiding girls' dramatic games, boys both avoid the feminine and domestic on the playground and act consistently with the exaggerated male behaviors they seek to emulate in their play.

This active construction of masculinity was particularly apparent at P.S. 1, the day the P4s (the oldest segment of the younger kids) were put out with the "big kids," to accommodate a trip they were going to make that afternoon. That day the playground was far more chaotic than usual, and more fights broke out, both between age groups and within. P4 Michael was riding on his classmate Jonathan's back and Michael bumped his mouth on Jonathan's head, fell off, and started to cry. Jonathan shrugged and walked away, saying, "He's not bleeding!" Samuel, another P4, stood over Michael, at first seeming to check if the boy was OK, but he soon switched modes, mocking the boy's crying with big braying noises and "Yer not bleeding!" and then adding, "Crybaby!" Michael got up and wiped his eyes, and Samuel continued teasing and provoking him, "Crybaby! Waaah! Oh NoooooO!" Samuel kept twisting, wiggling, and pushing and backing away as Michael went from hurt to angry and finally started chasing Samuel. The next time I saw them they were involved in a game of Chasies with two or three other boys.

Samuel was made uncomfortable by Michael's tears (Jonathan avoided them altogether, suggesting that if Michael wasn't bleeding, it wasn't worth noticing), and so turned to mockery and an appeal to conventional masculine notions of strength ("big boys don't cry"). It worked, and Michael's anger at being mocked was easily transformed into the energy for a subsequent game of Chasies.

Boys' association of strength with masculinity was paramount. During lunch at P.S. 2 one day, I sat with a table of boys, and they regaled me with descriptions of their fathers. "My dad," bragged Stuart, "could beat my *whole* family!"

"Why?" I think at the time I was interested in motive, but the answer addressed ability.

"Because he has muscles *this* big!" He showed me on his biceps the difference between his arm and his dad's. Frankie, sitting across the table, couldn't let this go unanswered: "Well *my* dad has muscles *this* big!" he said and demonstrated, as well.

After that was settled, Stuart spent most of the lunch talking about farting, and cracking himself and Frankie up in the process. "See my dad, he farted, and my mum smelled it!" or "See me, I farted, and blew all my teeth out!" (he was missing all his front teeth at the time). When a teacher's new baby was mentioned, Stuart said, "See, she farted, and the baby flew out!" All of this was, of course, hysterical, and they laughed for most of the lunchtime.

During breaks in some of the fart talk, we compared earrings. Stuart showed me his stud, which had a stone in it, unlike my plain gold one. He told me it was blue, "Because I'm a boy!" "So if you were a girl it'd be pink?" I asked, and he nodded. Then he turned around and checked the plastic nuts on the back of our chairs. Some were blue, some are yellow, and Stuart exclaimed, "I'm a boy! They're blue!" Frankie and Nathan also confirmed that they were boys, and then checked my chair. Nathan said, "She's a boy, too!" Then the hiatus ended, with Stuart making a massive fart noise with his hands to his mouth.

In this case, the boys' expression of masculinity involves physical strength and the potential for violence, and is reinforced by their gross behavior while eating at the table (something that does not fit into the female stereotype and is therefore useful in determining "who is a boy"). This was followed up by an inspection of plastic nuts on the back of the chairs we were sitting in. That I got to "be a boy" during lunch allowed me to witness (if not exactly participate in) all of the fart and muscles talk, without their having to worry that I would condemn or tell. I got to be not only a boy, but a particular kind of boy, one who would be loyal to the group.<sup>9</sup> The boys at this school had particularly strong expressions of this "hard" masculinity,<sup>10</sup> and I think it was at least in part because of the strong paramilitary presence in their home neighborhood. Several of the boys (and some of the girls) had close male relatives, mostly fathers or uncles, who were members of the local Loyalist paramilitary group, and so the kids were intimately familiar with those hard man standards of masculinity. While that image was particularly strong at P.S. 2, it was at least a familiar one to the kids at other schools.

One does not need to posit a paramilitary family background to suggest that boys are told that "hardness," a particular kind of physical strength, and potential for violence are masculine, and in fact necessary to be successfully male. The hugely popular football star Paul "Gazza"



Gasgoine was accused of beating his wife, and the story was reported all over the tabloids during the time I spent in Belfast. Gazza was quoted in the *Belfast News Letter* (Chapman 1997) as saying: "We all give the wife a smack once in a while." In universalizing his behavior ("we all do it"), Gazza, as a football star and (whether he liked it or not) role model for young boys all over Ireland and the United Kingdom, set yet another standard of tough, violent masculinity.<sup>11</sup>

The stereotypes of strong, (literally) gross masculinity are complemented by jokes girls told me at C.S. 1.

Didja hear about the man who ironed his shirt?  
He burned himself.

And about the man who ironed the curtains?  
He fell out the window.

Male ineptness in the domestic realm accompanies and may even be caused by male strength. These jokes indicate that it would weaken them as men to be apt at the traditional domestic chores. To attempt to iron something is to risk injury, possibly death; that is, to injure perhaps beyond recall of one's masculinity.

In those cases where boys were incorporated into the domestic spaces of girls' play (usually only those boys under the age of six), their insistence on the proper assignment of gender roles was strict. Such was the case when a group of kids at P.S. 2 of mixed ages and genders, with two P5 girls leading the game, started to play *The Farmer in the Dell* (or, as most kids called it, cutting to the chase, *Farmer Wants a Wife*). They circled around, singing:

The farmer in the dell  
The farmer in the dell  
High ho the merry-o  
The farmer in the dell.

Verse two was sung, with the repeated line, "The Farmer wants a Wife." The Farmer in this game was a little girl, and she tried to pick a boy to be the Wife. He absolutely refused, saying, "I'm a boy!" very forcefully. The fact that the Farmer was a girl, and that it would make sense for her spouse

to be a boy, did not override his sensitivity to the label “Wife.” An opposite case is described in Chapter 1, where at P.S. 1, Matthew refused to be anything other than the Farmer, because he was a boy.<sup>12</sup>

### *Creating Domestic Space on the Playground*

We can see, then, a construction and protection, sometimes through physical or verbal violence, of masculine space on the playground.<sup>13</sup> Feminine domestic spaces are also constructed and protected, in a slightly wider variety of games than those employed by boys. The space created by a skipping game, for instance, has striking overtones of domesticity, which are reinforced by one particular rhyme, performed at several of the schools. Two versions are presented below. The skipper is the one “in the kitchen” (skipping the rope), and when the “robber” (the next skipper) “pops” in (enters the skipping space), the original skipper has to hop out.

Mary in the Kitchen doing a bit of stitching<sup>14</sup>  
 In popped the robber  
 and out popped Mary  
 “Oh” said Mary, “That isn’t fair”  
 “Well,” said the robber, “I don’t care.”  
 How many times did he push Mary  
 5, 10, 15, [etc.]

When I was in the kitchen<sup>15</sup> [skipping]  
 Doin a bit of stichin’ [mime sewing]  
 In came a burglar man [another skipper in]  
 And pushed me out. [first skipper pushed out]

It is telling that within the rhyme, the disrupters are male: a robber, a “burglar man,” and in some versions, a wolf or boogie man. When other players come into “the kitchen,” it is a part of the game, and so the disruption remains solely in the text, contained by play. But when boys ran through the skipping game, as they frequently did, they were disrupting the domestic space and the girls’ play. For the boys, it was play, but such an interruption came too close to the disruption described in the game text, and so, for the girls, was not “play,” and they would shout, scream, and protest. I

did witness girls interrupting other girls' games; they seemed to do so if they had been rejected from the game, usually that same day. As a category, boys had a history of being rejected from girls' games, either by the girls who were playing or by the supervisors or boys who labeled such games as "only for girls." Many times, the only way for them to enter that space was as an invader. Again one is struck by the similarity to the actual place of men in Northern Ireland, who continue to be suspect if they are comfortable in the domestic spaces of home, like the kitchen.

Assertions to the effect that "boys can't do it" were most often leveled in and around skipping games, and were as much a statement of fact and evaluation of skill as a presentation of predetermined gender roles.<sup>16</sup> Some boys really weren't all that good at skipping, which was hardly surprising given their few chances to practice. For example, one day at P.S. 1 a group of P5 boys set up a skipping game of their own. It was the first really big (seven or eight boys) all-boy game of skipping I had seen at that school. The trouble was the ones turning the rope weren't very good at it and the one skipping was also fairly amateur, so the skipping was very start and stop. The game ended up in a fight between two of them (with a third occasionally contributing). The fight seemed to be about each other's general ineptitude at skipping, with several exclamations of "Fuck's sake!" escaping from the boy trying to skip. One boy stalked away after a few blows were exchanged, and the remainder carried on for a bit before girls from a nearby chasing game came around the boys' skipping game and things changed. Later on that rope was being used in a boys versus girls tug o'war game.

There were boys who were good at skipping, although when I questioned them about it, they generally made reference to a male relative teaching them, "for boxing" or some other unambiguously masculine sport. Just as there were men who performed domestic tasks, for example, fathers who made lunch for their kids before taking them to school, so too were there boys who skipped, who participated in the "domestic" space created by the skipping rope on the playground. Again, practice did not mesh exactly with the ideal expectations expressed by those (girls and boys) who said, "Boys don't skip!" With that lack of correspondence comes tension, as it does in real life, when men are unwilling or unable to fulfill the requirements of masculinity.

In *Witches*, the elaborate chasing game with assigned roles and discrete sides to which the players—invariably girls—each had to belong, lead players frequently assigned roles according to a sense of family. “OK, you be the sister, and you be the other sister, and I’ll be the Mummy, and we’ll run away from the witch.” Or: “I’m the beautiful princess, and you’re the sister, and you’re the auntie, and the witch has got me, and you have to run around that tree and come back and rescue me.” It is not difficult to leap from the symbolism of folktales inhabited by witches and ogres, princes and queens, to representations of family life, where parents take the place of imaginary creatures that appear to thwart as well as grant children’s desires. The girls would assign various spaces on their playground to particular roles in their game; two especially important spaces were the Dungeon and the Den. The Dungeon was where the witch put captured players, and the “Den” was where players were safe from the witch. “Den” is a homey word, associated with informal domestic space, and in the game, if you left the Den, it was only to try your best to return to it.<sup>17</sup> In combination with the familial roles assigned in the game, the entire *Witches* complex is steeped in domesticity. That domesticity is laden with potential danger, as well. The mummy is as much on the run from “witches” as are her children, and the safe Den can also be interpreted as a much more sinister lion’s or wolf’s den, a space from which one cannot so easily escape.<sup>18</sup>

Girls would often dispose of the frame of *Witches* or other fantasy figures altogether and simply “Play Mummies,” with one or two girls volunteering or appointed as the Mummies, and the rest of the group lying on the ground, rolling helplessly and demanding the Mummies’ attention. Sometimes the game was just a brief allusion. This was the case with three P3 girls at I.S., who walked by me on their way out to the playground for morning break one day, giggling madly, with their stomachs stuck far out, declaring, “I’m gonna have a baby!” and cracking each other up. Another time, on that same playground, a huddle of P4 girls played at being babies: the game seemed to consist mostly of being helpless, making “baby noises,” being helpless, sucking thumbs, and clutching at the two designated Mummy figures. One Mummy, flanked by two crouching “babies” turned and said to the other Mummy, “Right, which baby do you want to take?” Just as that decision was being made, a couple of P4 boys ran over and

“invaded” the “babies” place, near the school building. The “babies” all squealed and turned into besieged girls, and the boys ran away after they made the screams happen—mission accomplished. In this case, the boys were disrupting the created domestic space of the girls playing Mummies, in a striking mimesis of what can happen among adults, and taking a certain joy in the disruption that “in reality” can cause so much pain and trouble. Once again, domestic space is not represented as absolutely safe; both in real life and on the playground, it can be invaded.

Belfast girls in the late 1990s were being raised surrounded by women who had been required to be strong and alone, that is, without men, but not to say without the support of other women. Many men were in prison, driven out of the city or country, or were simply not, for a variety of reasons, active participants in their ex-wives’, -girlfriends’, or daughters’ lives. Belfast girls also continued to live within the restrictive ideas about the potential role of women in society, and especially with continuing notions that tie women to the domestic. The journalist Suzanne Breen explored this with some teenage girls on the heavily Loyalist Shankill Road, who were aware of the demand for their domesticity, as it were, but resisted it in light of their realizations about their goals for themselves as individuals:

The young women are ambitious—and skeptical about their relationships with men. Tina is a full-time worker in a women’s centre; Debee has a job in a business centre on the Shankill; and Paula works in an open-learning centre.

“Before I became involved with the project, I had romantic ideas about getting married, wearing a beautiful dress and driving to church in a carriage pulled by six white horses. Now, I want to stay single,” says Paula. “Even if I have kids, I wouldn’t want the father around. I like my freedom too much.”

They are determined not to repeat the mistakes of the previous generation. “Many of them got pregnant when they were very young and had to get married,” says Tina Wallace. “I got pregnant when I was 16 and the father didn’t want to know. I was really scared but now I’m glad I did it on my own. I have far more choices than if he was still around.”

They all left school with qualifications—Paula with nine GCSEs,

Debee with six. "These days, girls leave school with more qualifications than boys—they don't seem to be interested," says Paula.

Debee has a boyfriend who paints murals. But she says that most young men on the Shankill still don't respect women.

"They still think they're it, they act like they're really hard men," says Paula.

"It's still the case on the Shankill that the wee girls do the dishes and the Hoovering and mind the kids," says Tina. "If you ask the boys to help, they just laugh and walk away." (1997)

Sherry Ortner has described a structurally similar situation among Sherpa women, who "are encouraged to be competent, self-assured, independent actors, but they are also hemmed in by distinctive structural constraints, and burdened by negative ideology" (1996b, 128). I saw this tension between restriction and a sense of power and independence enacted repeatedly on the playground in Belfast; it is the negotiation of that tension which constitutes the girls' performance of gender.

### *Representations and Truths(?) in Texts*

For all the ubiquity of the domestic on the playground, many girls resist its implications. Kathy, at P.S. 1, revealed this as she was telling me what she was going to do with her Christmas and birthday money. She had decided on buying a Rangers jersey (a shirt with the logo of the Rangers football club, from Scotland), "Because when other people buy things for you they get you these porcelain dolls that just sit there and I don't want that!" She made a face, gesturing at the uselessness of dolls. Kathy knew that "other people" wanted her to have feminine things like dolls, but she wanted none of that; she was especially fond of playing field hockey.

Likewise, the folklore texts on the playground reflect a deep ambivalence about what awaits or is at least expected of girls in the domestic sphere of real life. They witness the domestic in the lives of their mothers and aunts, and are frequently enlisted (unlike boys) to help with domestic labor such as child care, shopping, and cleaning. This real-world experience makes girls' use of the texts particularly pointed.

For example, the clapping game *When Susie Was* spells out the roles

and associated duties for girls, from baby to granny.<sup>19</sup> The performance of this rhyme also gave some hints regarding propriety and what was considered dangerous or forbidden knowledge for young people. In particular, these girls refused to perform the “sex” part (see below) for me so that I could tape it. They trusted me to hear it without judging, but did not trust me with the tape, which could have been played for anyone else.<sup>20</sup> In the song, *When Susie Was*, the trajectory of the girl’s life is fixed and linear, tied to performing particular family roles (Mummy, Granny), upon reaching adulthood. Notice too, that in this performance, there is no “when Susie was a child” verse; there appears to be no representation of the stage at which these kids were currently living.

When Susie was a baby  
A baby  
A baby  
When Susie was a baby  
She went  
Like  
This  
Waaah! Waaaah! [trailing fingers down cheeks, as if crying]

When Susie was a toddler  
a toddler  
a toddler  
When Susie was a toddler  
She went  
Like  
This [sucking noises as if drinking from a bottle]

When Susie was a grownup  
a grownup  
a grownup  
When Susie was a grownup  
She went  
Like  
This [moan, moan, as in having sex]

When Susie was a mummy  
a mummy

a mummy  
When Susie was a mummy  
She went  
Like  
This  
Shhh! Shhhh! [rocking arms as if there's a baby in them]

When Susie was a granny  
a granny  
a granny  
When Susie was a granny  
She went  
Like  
This [moans as if tired or in pain, then one girl turns back to  
other, and falls back, arms crossed over chest, as if dead]

In a different version of the same rhyme, Susie's roles at each stage of life are expressed in phrases more than noises, but the overall message is still the same.<sup>21</sup>

When Susie was a baby,  
A baby Susie was,  
She went [suck thumb]

When Susie was a school girl  
A school girl Susie was  
She went, "I must do this and I must do that" [shake fist with  
determination]

When Susie was a teenager  
A teenager Susie was  
She went, "Ooo Aaa I lost my bra" [covers chest with hands]

When Susie was a teacher  
A teacher Susie was  
She went, "Do this, Do that" [shakes finger and scowls]

When Susie was a wife  
A wife Susie was



She went, "A kiss, kiss here and a kiss, kiss there" [kiss motions]

When Susie was a mother,  
A mother Susie was  
She went, "Don't touch this," and "Don't touch that" [shakes fist and look angry]

Susie's life goes swiftly from being a child with ambitions, to a sexual young adult, to a mother and wife with responsibilities that turn her into someone who can only try and control the lives of others, and no longer her own. Even when she is a professional, she is a teacher, and is presented as telling others what to do rather than being able to do things herself. While she is allowed words in the second rhyme, in the first, Susie can only express herself in inarticulate, nearly infantile noises. Even when she does have words, she doesn't get to do very much at all.

The rhyme *Anna Piano* is another striking expression of the nature of stereotyped female existence. It is repetitive in practice, and Anna's life is repetitive in the text. As described in Chapter 1, The clappers chant:

*Anna Piano*  
plays her piano  
twenty-four hours a Day  
Splits!

At "Splits," the girls jump and land with their legs slightly far apart. The more they repeat, the farther they have to go down into their splits after they jump. The game ends when the players fall down. It is not just the repetitive nature of the rhyme—poor Anna plays her piano all the time—but also the occasion when it was performed that was telling. Girls would do *Anna Piano* most often in line, when they were supposed to be standing perfectly still and quiet, according to their teachers, or when they were stuck inside because it was raining, or unable to move around much on the playground because space was particularly crowded. The clapping game was a way to do something when you weren't allowed or supposed to be doing much. *Anna Piano* in particular is a pithy comment on the rebellion against traditional restrictions on women's activities, restrictions that

women continue to have to fight against in the political sphere, for example (Aretxaga 1997; Whitaker 1998).

Girls are supposed to want “a nice young man” to care for them and give her a home (as sung in the “On the hillside” verse attached to the skipping rhyme Miz Brown, in Chapter 1), but the consequences of getting a nice young man were not presented as very attractive, as in the following variant of Cinderella:

Cinderella dressed in yellow  
Went upstairs to kiss her fellow  
When she came down[stairs]  
Her knickers busted  
How many people were disgusted<sup>22</sup>

The specter of Cinderella busting out of her underwear is a sexually loaded and very attractive (at least in part because it is forbidden) image to the children who sing this rhyme. It is possible to interpret the “busted knickers” as the result of a particularly passionate bout of sex with the boyfriend upstairs—or, more ominously, as a result of having her knickers ripped off by the boyfriend, whom she initially intended only to kiss.<sup>23</sup> In either scenario, Cinderella herself (never the boyfriend) provokes the disgust of the onlookers.

That either sequence of events could result in a pregnant Cinderella, is supported by a version that is well known in the United States:

Cinderella dressed in yellow  
Went upstairs to kiss her fellow  
Made a mistake and kissed a snake  
How many doctors did it take?

Cinderella’s need for doctors after kissing the phallic snake (even “by mistake”) during a visit to her boyfriend bolsters the idea that her knickers have “busted” because she has done something (sex)—or had something done to her (rape)—that will make her pregnant. Such pregnancy would, in these times of modern medicine, require the presence of doctors, as stated in the rhyme.

Thus getting a boyfriend is expected, but not always desirable. In the skipping rhyme Jam Tarts (see Chapter 1), a long sequence of predictive

rhymes details the minutiae of the skipper's future life. Whom she will marry, what she will wear at the wedding, what sort of home she will live in, how many babies they will have—all verses indicate the material wealth possible, but dependent on chance unless one is a skipper of skill. Whichever option is chanted when a skipper trips on the rope is the one that “will happen.” Even a skillful skipper can be tripped up by friends, who might deliberately try and foul the rope on a less desirable option, such as living in a pigsty after getting married, or being married in a see-through dress. The entire sequence centers on what might be thought of as the beginning of the domestic cycle: courtship, marriage, and having children. But one's success in this cycle (and it is assumed that one wants to be successful) is dependent as much on chance and the goodwill of others as on individual skill.

According to playground lore, domestic life means severe restrictions on your freedom. In the clapping game See See (see Chapter 1), the protagonist cannot go out because her baby has the flu. The playmate could be a girl or boy, it doesn't really matter, because the main point is she can't go out. Often in this rhyme the baby is a “dolly,” substituting a child's toy for the real thing.

See see my playmate  
For I'm in love with you  
My baby's got the flu  
Chicken pox and measles, too  
So shut the  
door  
and say no  
more! [players turn around and hit rear ends together at end]

In the following song, which I collected at both C.S. 1 and I.S., a girl brags of her abilities, but takes on a cautionary tone in the line “But my boyfriend's in town,” suggesting that his presence makes her less likely to do all of the things she is capable of. Her dismissal of the “guy over there” because his “hair doesn't curl and his shoes don't shine” highlight the importance for males of at least appearing to be materially well off. The line also turns on its head the usual trajectory of objectification, this time from the female gaze to the male body. In the end, however, the gender identi-

ties are clear and the roles are strict. Boys are strong, girls are sexy, and teachers (who are neither, and therefore asexual) are smart.

Texas Texas Texas Girl  
I come from a land so far away  
I can run I can shoot  
I can do the hula hoop  
But my boyfriend's  
in town  
There's a guy over there  
and he's winking his eye  
He says I love him but  
he's telling a lie  
His hair don't curl  
and his shoes don't shine  
He ain't got the money and  
he ain't got mine  
Firecracker Firecracker boom buddy boom  
Firecracker Firecracker boom buddy boom  
The boys' got the muscles  
The teachers got the brains  
The girls got the sexy legs  
and we won the game  
Yoh!

Reflected in this rhyme is a fun-house image of the reality girls can expect to find themselves in very shortly. They continue to be expected to "do it all" (run, shoot, do a hula hoop), but remain tied to the expectations of men, who used to be the strong providers. In Northern Ireland, it continues to be difficult for working-class men to get any kind of job, let alone a high-paying one that would allow for a curl in their hair and a shine to their shoes. The men "ain't got the money," and many women simply see no point in keeping men in their lives ("he ain't got mine"). In tension with these images of strong women and poor men, though, is the second part of the rhyme, wherein boys have muscles and girls are sexy. This song contains many of the conflicting gender images boys and girls have to contend with, on the playground as well as in real life.

Acting sexy was approached quite ambivalently by the girls in their games. The Spice Girls, the band and general popular culture phenomenon, dogged my field season, and most of my initial conversations with the girls at each school invariably came around to the Spice Girls, especially discussions about who was their favorite Spice Girl, and which mine might be. Each Spice Girl had a particular personality: Geri was the sexy Ginger, Mel B was the outrageous (and Black) Scarey, Mel C was Sporty, cool Victoria was Posh (who never smiled), and pigtailed Emma was Baby, whose song “Mama” was especially popular during part of the year I spent in Belfast. The girls were particularly fierce about condemning Ginger Spice for being a tart (“Didja see her fall out of her dress at the Brit awards?!”), and enthusiastic about how much they loved Baby Spice.

At C.S. 1, a game called Land Sea Air exposed a number of gender stereotypes that provide an interesting comparison with those embedded in the discussions the girls would have about the Spice Girls. In Land Sea Air, players were required to perform at the demand of the person who is On It.<sup>24</sup> On It would call out roles such as “Captain’s Daughter,” or “Captain’s Wife.” For either of those, the players would either wiggle their bums, or preen themselves, hips cocked in an exaggeratedly “sexy” way.<sup>25</sup> The players would clearly be mocking the figures they were performing, enacting sexual and airheaded stereotypes to make fun. They were doing, in their play practices, what they also did during their conversations about the Spice Girls. Of course, often during the same play period, many girls would enact at least one of the Spice Girl songs, complete with sexy motions, so the discussion about being “sexy” was not a monolithic or uncomplicated one. The girls would sometimes seem quite two-faced about sexuality, thus playing along quite effectively with the hypocritical nature of societal expectations around their gender.

### *Domestic Violence*

On the playground it was possible to read another level of meaning into “domestic”; a common way to refer to family violence is to call an episode “a domestic,” as in, “They had a domestic last night,” or, “The police wouldn’t want to be involved; it was a domestic.” There are violent consequences for girls, and occasionally their boyfriends, and even their brothers, in the course of their interactions with each other, according to

many playground rhymes. For example, in the following version of the clapping rhyme *Under the Bramble Bushes* (see Chapter 1), the relationship of Johnny to the girl narrating the story is unclear. What is clear is that Johnny gets her blamed for what he has done, and she is punished by her family.

Under the bramble bushes  
down by the sea  
boom boom boom  
Johnny broke a bottle  
and he blamed it on me  
I told my Momma  
I told my Po-ppa  
They hit me with a stick.  
Ooh-ah  
cha cha cha  
How many fishes in the sea?  
twelve and twelve makes  
twen-ty-four  
Shut your mouth and  
say no more!

More clarity comes with the following variant, wherein Johnny is smacked by the parents for lying, implying that he is probably the girl's brother:

Under the bramble bushes  
down by the sea  
boom boom boom  
Johnny broke a bottle and he blamed it on me  
I told my Mama  
I told my Papa  
And Johnny got a smack on his  
B-U-M—Bum!

I collected several different versions of this very popular rhyme, and in some cases the line "boom boom boom," is directly followed by "We're getting married, in California, and having babies."<sup>26</sup> These versions suggest that the Johnny here is a boyfriend, as well as hinting at more sexual

meanings behind the “broken bottle” of the first variant.<sup>27</sup> The “getting married” Under the Bramble Bushes variants frequently ended with the following:

... and having babies  
and singing  
Row, row, row  
your boat  
gently down the stream  
Tip your teacher overboard  
And listen to her scream  
AAAAAAh!<sup>28</sup>

The need to be rid of the teacher (a stand-in for authority figures, including parents) so that girls can get married and have babies and sing reflects the general awareness that girls (especially girls in primary school) are not supposed to be going off with boys and having babies. The popularity of a rhyme predicting precisely that suggests that the messages are mixed, however, and while girls are aware they aren’t supposed to be doing it yet, they are also aware that they are expected to do so eventually.

In the regular and enthusiastic performances of the clapping game *My Boyfriend* (see Chapter 1), girls switched from being initiators of punishing violence, as in:

My boyfriend gave me apples  
My boyfriend gave me pears  
My boyfriend gave me [kiss kiss kiss]  
And I kicked him down the stairs.

I kicked him over London  
I kicked him over France  
I kicked him over the USA  
And he lost his underpants!

To being the victims of violence:

My boyfriend gave me an apple  
My boyfriend gave me a pear

My boyfriend gave me a [kiss kiss kiss]  
And he kicked me down the stairs!

Frequently that violence would be met in kind, as in:

I gave him back his apples  
I gave him back his pears  
I gave him back his [kiss kiss kiss]  
And I kicked him down the stairs

While triumph was usually the rule in *My Boyfriend*, with most rhymes ending with the boyfriend's being forced to do the washing up and clean the baby's bum, there is a clear awareness of the drudgery of much domestic labor. It comes through in the following rhyme as well, which was collected in rural County Omagh:<sup>29</sup>

I wish I had a nickel  
I wish I had a dime  
I wish I had a lover-boy  
Who loved me all the time

My mother took my nickel  
My father took my dime  
My sister took my lover-boy  
And gave me Frankenstein

He made me do the dishes  
He made me scrub the floor  
He made me do most everything  
So I shoved him out the door

One day as I was walking  
I heard my boyfriend talking  
With a pretty little girl with golden hair  
And this is what he said to her

I L.O.V.E. , love you  
I K.I.S.S, kiss you  
He fell in the lake and swallowed a snake  
And now he's got a tummy ache



This Frankenstein, who makes the girl do everything, to such a degree that she finally can't stand it and makes him leave, is close cousin to the boyfriend in *My Boyfriend*. In this case, we see the wooing of another girl, this time with love and kisses rather than the more material apples and pears. The listener can be gratified in the end (for the sake of the girl narrator and protagonist) that Frankenstein eventually falls in the lake with a tummy ache.

The last two rhymes point to a fantasy—that men who are domineering, and even violent will simply go away—that resonates with real-life situations in some Belfast households. There are suggestions in newspaper stories and national statistics, however, that not all unhappy domestic situations resolve themselves with one party leaving quietly.<sup>30</sup>

During the five years between 1991 and 1995, 21 women were killed by their partners. In 1996, the RUC [Royal Ulster Constabulary] recorded more than 15,000 incidents of domestic violence, in 90 per cent. of which cases the victims were women. In the same year, 2,293 interim orders, 994 full personal protection orders and 993 full exclusion orders were granted in Northern Ireland courts. Almost 1,500 women sought emergency protection in women's aid refuges.<sup>31</sup>

A report into domestic violence, published at the end of October . . . has revealed that more than one in four 'non-political' murders in Northern Ireland come as a result of abuse in the home. And it is three times more likely that a woman, rather than a man, will be the victim of such a fatal attack.

The . . . statistics come from a research report—*Taking Domestic Violence Seriously*—compiled by University of Ulster academics Lynda Spence and Monica McWilliams.

They reveal that women living with men who have ready access to firearms can easily find themselves staring down the barrel of gun. It is thought that Northern Ireland's obvious gun culture is a possible factor in the startlingly high number of domestic murders.

Figures show that during 1990–94, 21 women were killed by their partners. This compares to 7 such deaths of men in Northern Ireland domestic incidents.

Over the same period in the Republic of Ireland there were only 10

such killings—a third of the total north of the border. The researchers think that most incidents of non-fatal domestic abuse are still going unreported but revealed that police are called to about 3000 incidents of domestic violence every year.<sup>32</sup>

The second report reveals a slippage between political/paramilitary violence and domestic violence in Northern Ireland, blaming what it calls the “obvious gun culture” of Northern Ireland for the high number of fatal incidents (see also McWilliams and McKiernan 1993). This slippage is intimately familiar to the children living in working-class neighborhoods. The people who are shot or beaten for political or sectarian reasons are members of families, and children therefore experience political or sectarian violence as domestic violence. At one point in my field season, a Loyalist feud resulted in home invasions and beatings at the homes of some of the kids I knew at P.S. 2. A few boys were kept out of school for several days after the attacks, which were carried out on their uncles and fathers. A man shot in his own home near the Falls Road, while feeding his baby daughter, was also the father of a girl who attended C.S. 1. The kids cannot help but personalize the violence, make it domestic, because that is precisely how they experience it, as it takes place within the spaces associated with home and nurturing and safety. School bomb scares additionally violated “domestic” space, again making political violence personal for the kids experiencing it. The fact that the vast majority of the violent images expressed in the folklore of girl children were “domestic” should not be interpreted to mean that children are unaware of political violence. Rather, it is an indication of the particular ways that they experience that violence, and how it is situated in their everyday lives.

One girl at C.S. 1, while explaining the chasing game *Witches* to me, suggested that the bad people chasing the players could be “soldiers, bad men, or the IRA,” as well as witches. That the game occasionally involves assigning “mummy” and “auntie” roles to the people trying to escape the “bad ones” further suggests the combination of domestic and public violence in the lives of children. The playing of a game like *Witches* not only enacts that combination but also allows the kids to try and control it, to circumscribe it within their play practices.

It should be no surprise that the most common representations of

violence in children's folklore are those that occur in symbolically domestic settings. Some of these representations take the form of narratives, as was the case with scary stories that some girls at I.S. told each other on a rainy day. The tales make vivid the potential results of domestic conflict:

There was three children and their mummy and daddy went out for the night. And ah—had a childminder. And the childminder was going upstairs to put the children to bed, but she couldn't find them. So she tried to call the mummy and daddy, but somebody else answered the phone and said, "Che-e-ck the children, che-e-e-ck the children," and so she went upstairs and checked, they were all right, they were sleeping, and she and she phoned the police cause something weird was going on. And it said the same thing again, and she went and checked them, and they weren't there. And she phoned the hospital, and said the same thing again, she went and checked, and they weren't there, and she looked in their bed and there was blood all over the bed.

They were dead, and the husband had come home and killed them and before he went out again he killed the childminder as well.<sup>33</sup>

In this variant of "The Babysitter and the Man Upstairs" (Brunvand 1981, 53), the mother is punished for leaving home—however briefly—and, even more cruelly, is punished with the death of her children at the hands of her husband, the man she was out with. Even the babysitter is apparently complicit in the wife's "crimes," and is punished in the end. The husband, after the carnage, gets to "go out again." In contrast to the American versions recorded by Brunvand (1981, 53–57), the man upstairs is not a stranger, but is the husband and father of the family. The danger, in this legend, comes from within the home, from the man of the house, completely violating the safety of domestic space.

That narrative was followed in close succession by two others. The first is a similar tale of sinister men who kill women and children in their own homes. In this case, it is not the father who kills the children, but it is a man (or at least, the specter of a man) whom the mother has served tea—as part of her domestic duties. In this story, as with the previous one, domestic space is turned into a dangerous death trap by a male presence.<sup>34</sup> In the second, the mother is the key villain; the father subjects the daugh-

ter to benign neglect more than anything. While the father is punished by the dead girl, the mother is punished by the father.

*Nicola:* [settling in] Oh, I know this one, it's brilliant.

*Carrie:* Right, there was this here lady, she was in the house, someone came knocking at the door, and he says, can you give me a cup of tea? So she invited him in, and then she went out and got him a cup of tea. And then, when she was out there, she thought, "something's weird going on," she got a knife, and she put it in her . . . just in her dressing gown, and then she came in, and then he was gone. So she just drank a cup of tea herself, and then she . . . the moment she sat down to drink her cup of tea, the phone rang. And it said, "This is the man with the bloody finger." [do you remember this one, Nicola? Nicola says no] And then, then she set the phone down, and then the door came knocking again. And it was the same man, he says, "Will you get me some soup?" So she went out and she made him some soup. She came back in, and he was gone. And there was three kids upstairs [what? says someone]. There was three kids upstairs. And he went upstairs, and he'd managed to take the knife from her dressing gown, and then, the phone rang again, and it says, "This is the man with the bloody finger, go and check on the kids." She went upstairs, one of the kids was dead. So then she put the kids into a different room. and then she went back downstairs, and the man was standing there, and he was drinking the soup, and he was watching TV. Then . . . a man came out from the kitchen, and it was . . . they were twins, there was twins of them, and then, another one came down from upstairs, so it was triplets. So then, all three of them came around, had three of the same knives, and they killed the woman, they went upstairs, and they killed the rest of the three kids. They killed the other two kids.

*Jen:* One day there was this wee girl and her mother and father. And she had these four new dresses, she had a purple one, a pink one, a blue one, and a yellow one. And she asked her mummy could she wear the blue one, and she said, "OK, but [Nicola chimes in, "You better not break it"] you better not break it." And she wore it out and started skipping, but this other girl came along and tripped her up and she

said, "Mummy I broke my blue dress, can I wear my pink one." She said, "OK, but you better not break this one," so she was playing hopscotch, she fell and broke her pink one. And then, the purple one, she asked her mummy to wear, and she went out and broke it, 'cuz she was climbing a tree. And, the yellow one, and her mummy said, "You better not break this or [someone interrupts, "Or I'll kill you!"] or I'll . . . I'll really kill you." And then, she broke it, and she said, mummy I accidentally broke my dress, and she said, "you're only joking," and she said, "I'm not," and then -'cuz they were glass dresses—and her mummy went out and looked, 'cuz they were—'cuz all her dresses were all scattered all over the place, and when her father was just coming from work, her mother murdered her, and [interrupted, "Put her in this jar"] no!

*DML:* What do you think she did?

*Jen:* She murdered her and her father came home and said, "Where's our wee girl?" [more attempts to help can be heard], and her mummy said, "She's staying in a friend's house." And then the daddy said . . . "it's time we went to bed." And the girl said, [chanting]

"Daddy I'm on the first step,  
Daddy I'm on the second step  
Daddy I'm on the third step  
Daddy I'm on the fourth step  
Daddy I'm on the fifth step  
Daddy I'm on the sixth step  
Daddy I'm on the seventh step  
Daddy I'm on the landing  
Daddy I'm at your door  
Daddy . . . in your bedroom  
Daddy . . . in the bed  
Daddy you're dead!"

And then her mother said, well, she thought that her husband had gone for bed, but then she saw blood all over the bed, but then she said, oh that must be false blood. And then, the other night, her father and her . . . her wee girl said, [confusion]

Mummy . . . and Darlin' I'm on the . . . no  
The man, the daddy said,

Darlin' I'm on the first step  
 Darlin' I'm on the second step  
 Darlin' I'm on the third step  
 Darlin' I'm on the fourth step  
 Darlin' I'm on the fifth step  
 Darlin' I'm on the seventh step  
 [interruption: "no I already said it! Where was I?" We help: On  
 the seventh step]  
 Darlin' I'm on the landing  
 Darlin' I'm in your bed—I'm in your bedroom  
 Darlin' I'm on your bed  
 Darlin' you're dead!<sup>35</sup>

It is not necessary for every child who tells these scary tales or sings *My Boyfriend* to be the victim of domestic violence or to have a mother who is, for the folklore to be meaningful. Violence of many kinds saturates the lives of children living in working-class Belfast, including "traditional" domestic violence, political and paramilitary violence, criminal violence ("common thuggery"), and the violence of television (Cairns 1990). There are also children whose parents manage to shelter them for the most part from all of these threats; this is where both the multilayered potential of meanings in folklore and the concept of mimesis (Goldman 1998) become so useful. The violence can also be a metaphoric expression of children's powerlessness in their society. If their mum or dad really think they "broke the bottle" instead of Johnny, there is not always much to be done to clear their name. Violence can also be part of the device of inverse projection, wherein the children resent the controls put on their lives by their parents, and so want to justify their rebellion against them by saying that their parents hurt them first. That way, if they end up, in the course of their storytelling and joking and rhyming, telling of mummies and daddies who are hurt, it is only in narrative self-defense.

There is a risk, as researchers and as people concerned for others' welfare, of our clinging to the notion of mimesis as a way of distancing what we think we observe from reality. To what extent do I find the notion of mimesis as "editorial exaggeration" attractive, simply because it is difficult for me to accept that the children among whom I worked were intimately

familiar with hard realities like domestic violence? These violent pieces coexist with a general tendency on the playground to gender separation and even antagonism, in some settings. They exist in a time when domestic violence rates in Northern Ireland as a whole are high, and when gender relations among adults in Northern Ireland are increasingly contested and complicated. The political situation and the history of violence as a means of problem solving (not that the latter is unique in any way to Northern Ireland) are a part of the children's everyday world. It would be naive to say that these materials are purely symbolic, with violence standing in for other sorts of discontent with children's place in the world. Perhaps this sort of interpretation is attractive because it allows distance between the real violence and trouble of children's public and domestic lives, and permits the anthropologist to present the rhymes as healthy and even harmless.

To do so across the board would be to do a disservice to the observational skills of children in general, and to the children I worked with in particular. Many of them seemed, as far as I could tell, to be well adjusted and happy in their family and school lives. Some seemed troubled. Part of Goldman's use of mimesis, however, lies in its allowance for representations in play of acts and actors that, while not a part of any individual's life, are recognizable tropes for one's society, and are important themes that require familiarity. Gender separation, domestic violence, and female dissatisfaction with the current state of "the domestic" and women's and girls' role within it are all major themes in current research on gender in Northern Ireland and are clearly important to the adults who live there. The textual and enacted violence that disrupts the safe space of the domestic as created on the playground is a good example of children engaging with that which adults would rather they didn't.

### *The Eruption of the Real World into Play*

The messages about gender roles and gender expectations are not situated in an abstract "society," but rather are found in face-to-face experiences with people. Parents expect girls to help around the house and with younger siblings. Teachers expect proper (which often means quiet) behavior and appropriate performance at school. The expectations of teachers are, in turn, often formed by previous experiences with siblings or even parents,

and so vary according to their own face-to-face interactions. Boys expect girls to be bad at football and also to be “sexy,” as they see in magazines, on television, and hear from their older male relatives. Girls expect boys to reject them in many circumstances, as in football games, but also to pursue them (even if boys do not live up to the latter expectations until rather later than girls begin to have them). The gender representations we see in the folklore speak to all of these potential face-to-face situations and help kids to process the messages they receive.

Strict separation of boys from girls, and the explicit enactment of hypermasculinity by boys, occurred in mixed settings, where it was necessary for the boys over the age of six or seven to demonstrate beyond a shadow of a doubt that they were not girls. The kind of nurturing masculinity described by Jay Mechling among American Boy Scouts (2001), Susan Faludi among cadets at the Citadel (1999), and Lorraine Dowler among prisoners in Long Kesh (2001) was not available to my eye, because I did not do research in all-boy schools. It is entirely possible that a wider range of masculine behavior is available to boys in single-sex schools. Such a range is not possible (or, not easily so) for boys in co-ed environments, subject to the pressures of conventional masculine behavior, combined with the penchant for exaggeration that comes with all role play (age, gender, and other) at this time in their lives. I witnessed, therefore, the enactment and construction of the Boy Code as described (and lamented) by William Pollack (1999)—hard, aggressive masculinity, with little room for flexibility or change.

What we can see in the enactment of male gender on the playground, especially the complete removal of boys/men from the realm of the domestic, has its parallel in the lives of the men described by Dowler in her discussion of the “third” space created by prisoners, then perpetuated within private clubs after their release. Prison is not the determining variable in the absence of men from domestic lives, but it does exaggerate and contribute to that phenomenon. Catholic and Protestant working-class men have been affected by the downturn in the Northern Irish economy, the loss of industrial jobs, the violence of everyday life that disproportionately involves and is perpetuated by men. In their lack of domestic imaginary play, the boys on the playground are reflecting a very real part of the working-class male experience. Boys and girls enact the separation and antagonism



between men and women in their play. We see it in the careful construction of a male-free domestic space by girls, and in the violation of that space in the play of boys, the only way that they can legitimately (as boys) interact with the domestic as seen on the playground. Narrative and verse present domestic violence as overwhelmingly male in origin, but also as disrupting the lives of boys and girls alike.

Among working-class girls, constant negotiations must take place among what they want to do, the set of societal expectations that require them to be domestic workers, and the other set of societal expectations that require them to be sexy and attractive in distinctly undomestic ways, à la the Spice Girls. All of these expectations and desires are playing out in a situation where, for at least the past twenty-five years of the recent Troubles in Northern Ireland, working-class women, both Protestant and Catholic, have had to take on most, if not all, of the responsibilities traditionally associated with men (for example, earning money outside the home, providing domestic discipline). Women have taken up positions of power—at an informal, neighborhood and domestic level—in the absence of men, many of whom have been in prison for paramilitary activities or who were driven out of Northern Ireland for their refusal to participate.<sup>36</sup> Now that more prisoners are being released, the accommodation women had reached with their circumstances has been disrupted, making the negotiation of gender roles and expectations particularly volatile. But it is the very presence of ambiguity within the folklore texts that provides a sense of options for girls, of ways to resist and reconstruct femininity to suit their own purposes.

Such ambiguity is not present in the play of boys, in terms of masculinity. Working-class boys struggle with the occasional disparity between what they may want to do and what is expected of them. But in this case, societal expectations of masculinity are generally more consistent than those for femininity, and are also more narrow. Boys are expected to be strong, unemotional, and physically capable. They are expected to be in charge, which is particularly difficult given the recent developments that have sent them to prison or out of their homeland. The expectation among boys that to be a successful man, they must effect a total and abrupt separation from anything feminine can be seen as quite harmful. Such harm is obvious in the situation of adult ex-prisoners in Northern Ireland, returning to a home

they no longer recognize, where their wives or partners are making the rules now, a home to which they cannot contribute. The definition of “real man” in working-class Northern Ireland (indeed, in much of the industrial West, to slightly greater or lesser degrees) is so narrow that men cannot function as men within the socioeconomic confines that currently surround them. The lack of “proper” masculine jobs, the lack of a domestic role that could substitute for work outside the home for men, the history of separation from the women in their lives, both personally and politically, profoundly isolates men and leaves them vulnerable. The isolation of men from women and children gives little outlet for the kinds of stresses living in contemporary Northern Ireland produces, and does little to help boys learn alternative ways of being masculine.

## *Four*

# Exploring the Protestant/ Catholic Divide

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The last of the three social categories that I identify as particularly important to Belfast children in the course of their everyday lives is related to the sectarian divide in Northern Ireland. It was sectarian divisions that I thought, prior to beginning my fieldwork, I would be spending most of my time dealing with on the school playgrounds. Contrary to those expectations, I found the kids at all schools far more involved in exploring differences based on age or gender categories. Aside from the occasional sectarian epithet, like “Orangie” or “Fenian,” little was made of the Protestant/Catholic divide in the everyday play practices that I could observe at school.<sup>1</sup> Jane Hubbard (1995a,b) also noted a lack of sectarian folklore on the playgrounds she visited during her fieldwork in Derry, and suggested that school principals might not allow or encourage “political” material in the schools, “perhaps hoping that their school might be seen as a healthy alternative to, or even a safe haven from, the world outside” (1995a, 242). She further suggested that when sectarian lore does show up on the playground, it is as an intrusion, rather than as an intrinsic part of the playground tradition (242).

My field experiences taught me that the lack of sectarian lore on the playground makes sense, especially for the schools that are situated within homogenous neighborhoods; the children are surrounded by people who are all from the same “side,” so conflict along those lines is not regularly

an issue. The lack was also characteristic of the pupils at the Integrated school, who were in a deliberately cultivated atmosphere of tolerance and understanding. When conflicts arose or differences were emphasized while the children were in school, they focused primarily on differences in age or gender, and occasionally both.<sup>2</sup>

But sectarian categories most certainly are important in the everyday lives of these children. The society within the school differs significantly from that outside of it; children told me regularly about dealing with sectarian categories in a variety of ways when away from school. So I do not interpret the dearth of sectarian references on the playground as evidence that the kids were unaware of such differences. Rather, I had to confront the importance of context in determining the relevance of particular identity categories.

The situated nature of sectarian categories became most clear to me one day as I accompanied the football team of P.S. 2 to a mixed tournament across town. We were all on the bus, being driven by one of the teachers, and the route we had to take to the tournament required that we pass through the Falls Road area. As we got nearer to that well-known Catholic road, the teacher had to stop at a nearby Protestant/state school to pick up another team. Once he got off the bus, Billy, a P7, said, "There's Taigs<sup>3</sup> around the corner, Let's sing Party Songs!" All broke out singing:

There lies a soldier  
Of the U-V-F...!<sup>4</sup>

Once the teacher came back, they quit. As we headed once again toward the intersection with the Falls, Steven, a P5, made a "Fenians" remark, and the same P7 Billy said, "Don't be talking about Catholics that way, they're nearly the same as us." This sudden display of tolerance for Catholics, previously maligned as "Taigs," seemed to me to be for the benefit of the teacher, who had been preparing the boys all day for the prospect of attending this mixed tournament.

David, also a P7, was sitting next to me, and he ducked down in his seat as we headed toward the intersection, "David, what are you doing?" I asked. "They'll brick me [throw a brick at me] with my Rangers kit [jersey]!" he said. I tried to assure him that "they" would do no such thing, and besides, everyone was at school. My confidence did not convince

David, who chose to keep his head low and his jersey away from the window.

Once we arrived at the tournament, I saw that there was only one Catholic school participating, whose players were identifiable by their green jerseys. Most of the hostility seemed to involve P.S. 2 kids and those from the host (Protestant) school, however, and it primarily manifested in side-long glares and under-the-breath comments about “them kids are fighting with us!” and mutters about the “girls looking at us!” I heard some players from other schools making comments like “You dick!” or some such insult as one of the P.S. 2 kids would run (accidentally?) into them. As for the team from the Catholic school, they were not even looked at by the P.S. 2 kids. The indifference of the P.S. 2 kids toward the Catholic kids while at a tournament at which Protestants were the majority contrasted significantly with their heightened awareness of “border issues” during their trip through far less familiar territory. At the tournament, their more immediate concern was invested in their rivalry with a school from “their side,” and the Catholic kids simply were not important enough in that context to make a fuss over. The fact that the Catholics were, in the context of the tournament, clearly in the minority, also made them less of a threat, and so less worthy of attention.

Sectarian concerns do not constitute the most important category on the school playground, or even within one’s own neighborhood. In the course of their everyday lives, however, working-class children in Belfast are regularly forced to confront the implications of sectarian divisions within greater Northern Irish society.<sup>5</sup> Given this situation, the kids have come up with strategies that not only allow them to teach each other about the continuing relevance of sectarianism, but might also permit them to feel as though they are coping effectively with the situations caused by those divisions. The catch question at the center of this chapter constitutes one of those strategies.<sup>6</sup>

“Are you a Pig or a Cow?” My husband, who occasionally visited the schools with me, was asked this about three-quarters of the way through my field season, at P.S. 2. He was still relatively new to the children, who by this time knew me fairly well, and so he was a more likely target for such a query. The questioners, a group of P5, P6, and P7 boys, teased him for several minutes, before they finally told him that they were really ask-

ing if he was a Protestant or a Catholic; the “P” in Pig represented “Protestant,” and the “C” in Cow represented “Catholic.” After hearing of this interaction, I asked the children at all the schools if they knew what the question meant. This resulted in several interesting encounters, two of which I present here.

*First Example: At I.S.*

As I was eating lunch at I.S. with a group of P5s one day, I asked them if they knew the Pig or Cow question. All in that group, about five kids altogether, seemed to know, especially Timothy. He said, “That’s them asking if you’re Protestant or Catholic.” Timothy went on to say he could “just tell by looking” what someone was. “I can definitely tell, if I ask them where they live, then I know what they are.” He went on to list some examples, ticking them off on his fingers: one area was all “Prod” (Protestant), another, the area where Timothy lives, is Catholic. I asked about another neighborhood, and Timothy thought there were a few Catholics there, but Naomi, a Protestant girl, said, “No! It’s [all] Protestant!” When they were asked about a street that marks a contentious border between Protestant and Catholic neighborhoods, they each thought it belonged to “their own.”

Timothy went on to say that if Protestants went into a Catholic area, they’d get beaten up, and furthermore that it would not do any good for them to lie and claim that they were Catholic. According to Timothy, “You can tell by their eyes! You can just tell if they’re lying, if they stare at you real hard, and they’re shaking!” Then, presumably, you know what they “really” are.

Sitting next to us, and listening intently to our conversation, was a P2 girl. When I asked Timothy if there were any other “P or C” words that you could use to ask the question, she volunteered, hopefully, “A pear?” “No!” Timothy scowled, then smiled at the apparently silly suggestion. I asked Timothy how young he was when he knew the Pig or Cow question, and he said that he was about seven when he was first asked it, when he was a P4. He shrugged when I asked if he thought that anyone younger would know.

In a later conversation, Timothy discussed further his personal experience with the Pig or Cow question. We were once again eating lunch

together, and he was asking how often people in the United States saw movie stars or other famous people. “Bill Clinton was over here for when there was peace—see there was peace here, for a while,” Timothy said, referring to the cease-fire that had ended with the IRA bombing of Canary Wharf earlier that year. He then asked me if anyone had yet told me what the Pig or Cow question meant, and explained it to me again.

Well, it’s asking are you Catholic or Protestant. Well, see, where I live, there’s this street, and see up here [indicates with his hands] where I live it’s Catholics, and then you go down and there’s a dotted yellow line, and then down there [indicates different area] it’s Protestants. And there’s one shop here, and another shop there, and I wouldn’t go to the shop there [in the Protestant part].

So where was he when he was asked the question? “I was at the line,” he said. “On the border?” I asked. Yes. Who asked him? “An older boy.” Was he from the other side? Yes. How did Timothy know?

I saw him walking up the road from there [Protestant area] so I knew. I said it didn’t matter what I was, but he said go on give us an answer, so I said “A Cow,” and he said, “I’m gonna beat you up you Fenian.” But then my friend—he came out and he had this dog, and he turned the dog loose, and the boy ran away.

This narrative is not typical, in that it concerns a stranger asking Timothy the catch question. Nonetheless, it is representative of the other narratives I was told in its presentation of the issues involved in being asked, and in the evident need to answer such a question.

Timothy’s discussion presents the functions and meanings of “Are you a Pig or a Cow,” in particular those associated with *telling* to which group a particular individual belongs, as Timothy insisted he could. This complex and terribly important process of *telling*, discussed in detail by Frank Burton (1978) and by Allen Feldman (1991), is what children are being taught through the use of this catch. More general methods of *telling* include observing at which bus stop people get on and off, what school uniforms they wear, and which football team paraphernalia, especially jerseys and scarves, they are wearing. Given names are also clues; names that are stereotypically “Irish,” such as Patrick (or Pádraig) or Seán, would indi-

cate a Catholic boy, as names like Máire and Siobhán would be for Catholic girls. Billy and Sammy are stereotypically Protestant boys' names, but it was less clear which girls' names would be unambiguously Protestant. Of course, these clues do not always come together in neat clusters, which is why *telling* tends to be a complicated process.

In Timothy's case, he knew which side the boy asking him the question was from, because he saw him coming over from the Protestant part of the road. Timothy could have chosen to lie and attempt to represent himself as a Protestant, but did not. This may have been not only because he was right on the border of his home neighborhood, but also because he knew his friend with a dog was nearby. Recall that Timothy started out his exchange with the boy (or at least represented himself as doing so to me) by stating that it didn't matter what he was—the party line of the Integrated schools movement. But he then proceeded to state what he was; the practical necessities of the moment overruled the ideals he had been taught at home and in school.

In his narrative, Timothy foregrounds the threat of physical danger if the question is answered incorrectly. The age-specificity of the Pig or Cow question is also made clear, not just in Timothy's presentation but also in the P2 girl who did not quite understand what we were talking about. It is apparent that although nearly all the children who had been asked the question were asked it by siblings or older children at their school, there is a fear that the question will be asked by strangers. For Timothy, that fear became reality on the border of his home neighborhood. This fear was also expressed by kids at other schools, as is apparent in the next example.

### *Second Example: At P.S. 1*

At P.S. 1, one group of children in particular was eager to explain the Pig or Cow question and the situations that might inform the asking of such a question. They were all P5s. When I originally asked them if they knew what the Pig or Cow question meant, they replied as one: "Yes!" Lisa then mumbled, "It's asking if you're Protestant," and Emily and Ann chimed in as well. Said Ann, "The Cat is Catholic, and the Pig is Protestant." "The Cow is Catholic," Emily corrected, but the "cat" reappeared when I asked if anyone ever actually got asked that question, and once again got a chorus of "yes!" "My brother!" said Lisa, "My big brother asked which I liked better,



and I said ‘a cat,’ and he said, ‘Ha! You’re a Fenian.’ So I told my mum and I kicked him.” What did her mum do? “She spanked him.”

“We have to go on trips with Catholics, so we do!” said Ann.<sup>7</sup> “Before we saw them, we thought they’d have horns on their heads,” Emily laughed. “Like cows,” added Ann. “And they musta thought we had snouts! [snort snort]” Emily continued, making convincing pig noises.

We had more time to talk about it after lunch. I precipitated the following conversation by asking, “So tell me again about this Pig and Cow thing.”<sup>8</sup>

- 1 *Carrie*: Well, um, a pig means a Protestant, and a “C,” a cow means a
- 2 Catholic, and so if you pick a “P” you’re a Protestant, if you pick a cow,
- 3 you’re a Catholic.
- 4 *DML*: When would somebody ask you that question?
- 5 *Carrie*: When a Catholic or somebody came into the town.
- 6 *Emily*: My brother asked it.
- 7 *DML*: Your brother asked it of you?
- 8 *Carrie*: When a Catholic comes into the town . . .
- 9 *Scott*: And then he would hit you!!
- 10 *DML*: Who would try and hit you?
- 11 *All* [loudly]: The Catholics!
- 12 *Carrie*: The Catholics.
- 13 *DML*: Would the Catholics ask *you* that question?
- 14 *All* [loudly, overlapping]: Yes!
- 15 No!
- 16 Sometimes.
- 17 *DML*: Sometimes?
- 18 *Ann*: If they were right here like us.
- 19 *DML*: Tell me what your brother asked you. Your brother said . . .
- 20 *Emily*: Me?
- 21 *DML*: Yeah.
- 22 *Emily*: Ahm, he says, would you pi—which one would you pick, a pig
- 23 or . . . a cat, and I picked a cat, and he says, ha ha ha, you’re a Fenian.
- 24 [laughter from other kids]
- 25 *Carrie*: A Fenian means Catholic!
- 26 *DML*: Right, OK.
- 27 *Scott*: And that is the end of our program!

- 28 *Ann:* [mumbles something about her sister]  
29 *DML:* What does your sister do?  
30 *Ann:* Just annoys me . . . [here's her, "Are you a] cat or a pig, and here's  
me,  
31 I'm a cat, and . . . [she says] ha ha ha, you're a . . . Catholic.  
32 *DML:* Is it Cat, or is it Cow?  
33 All [overlapping]: Cat  
34 Cow  
35 *DML:* Is it Cat?  
36 *Some:* Cat!  
37 *Carrie:* It could be both! It could be . . . or are you a porkypine [por-  
cupine] and a, a  
38 cabbage!  
39 [laughs]  
40 *DML:* So, as long as you pick the P or the C or whatever.  
41 *Carrie:* Yeh!  
42 *Ann:* It could be a cabbage or a parsnip! . . . It could be a carnation and a  
43 plant!  
44 *Emily:* It could be a school or a house.  
45 *Ann:* No it couldn't—school is with S!  
46 *Monica:* A church or a chapel.  
47 *DML:* A chapel or a church, what would that be?  
48 *Monica:* A chapel's for Catholics and a church is for Protestants.  
49 *DML:* Right [as in, "Oh, I see."].  
50 *Ann:* Everyone at this school is a Protestant, including you! [points to  
51 Carrie]  
52 *Scott:* I am a pickle!  
53 *Carrie:* Mostly all the Catholics go to chapel, or . . . and sometimes  
54 Protestants want to go to Catholic churches, and so they say they're good  
55 Catholics, and then they get in. And then—  
56 *DML:* And then what happens?  
57 *Gemma:* And then there's a big row once everybody finds out that they're  
58 Protestant, and then they're brought, and then they have to get this wee  
59 machine to change what religion they are.  
60 *Ann:* [in response to some other child] I don't! [rejoins our conver-  
sation]

- 61 It's all a load of rubbish if you ask me!  
62 *DML*: What is?  
63 *Ann*: It's not fair! See Catholics—they take over Ireland, they take  
over  
64 Sandy Row, they took over . . . they took over everywhere! [she and  
other  
65 children list off the streets they think have been “taken over”]  
66 *Scott*: And we've just got a little piece of space!  
67 *Someone*: It's not so bad!!  
68 *Ann*: This [holds arms wide] is our country, right? We've got that  
size of  
69 it. [pinches fingers together very small]  
70 *DML*: I see.  
71 *Ann*: And all round us . . .  
72 *Someone breaks in*: You could be Catholic . . . You could be a Catholic!  
73 [several pushing on different people, messing about]  
74 *Ann*: I'm a Protestant!  
75 *All*: I'm a Protestant! I'm a Protestant!  
76 *Scott*: [in a deep, silly voice] I'm a Prrrotestant!  
77 *Emily*: So m'I!  
78 *Ann*: [comes close to the camera, speaking in low tones] People  
calls 'em  
79 Taigs.  
80 *Carrie*: [heard what Ann said] Oooh [also close to the camera] [it]'s bad,  
81 eh!  
82 *Emily*: [also heard Ann] [It's] bad!

The Pig or Cow question strikes important chords of association with this group of Protestant children. Once again, they present the two possibilities for who might ask the question: strangers or family (especially siblings). Carrie begins the discussion by asserting that “When a Catholic or somebody came into the town” (line 5) the question would be asked, implying that the kids would be asked it by strangers. Scott adds to the discussion by saying that after the question is asked, “he [a Catholic] would hit you!” (line 9)—thus introducing the threat of physical violence. Emily volunteers that her brother asked the question of her, and the teasing that

resulted from her incorrect answer, “Ha ha ha, you’re a Fenian,” had clearly stuck in her mind. Ann has a similar story about her sister (lines 19–31).

A small confusion in the terminology—is it Cat or Cow?—generates a discussion about how the question could be asked, and the consensus of these kids was that the code words for Catholic or Protestant matter far less than the meaning behind those words (lines 32–45). The mention of “church versus chapel” differences—as Monica says, “A chapel’s for Catholics and a church is for Protestants” (line 46)—brings them to more substantial issues of difference. Ann asserts that “everyone at this school is a Protestant, including you!” This seems to inspire quite an introspective turn in Carrie and Gemma, who suggest that there might be Protestants who want to attend Catholic church, but who cannot, because “there’s a big row once everybody finds out” (lines 50–59). At P.S. 2, there were kids—I never knew precisely which ones—whose parents were in mixed marriages. Ann’s declaration of an entirely Protestant school was certainly true in terms of the majority, but several kids were undoubtedly struggling with “wanting to go to Catholic churches,” as Carrie describes.

This line of discussion is derailed by Ann’s initiating a list of complaints against Catholic takeovers of Protestant areas of Belfast, especially those near to these children’s homes, and those that have come to symbolize Protestant Belfast for many, like the Sandy Row (lines 60–71): “This is our country, right? We’ve got that size of it [pinches fingers together very small].” This is a neat articulation of the feelings of being under siege that they and many other residents of their neighborhood harbor, not to mention Protestants in other neighborhoods in Belfast.<sup>9</sup> The kids end by playing with the categories, jokingly accusing each other at one point of being Catholic, thereby encouraging those accused to declare their Protestant nature (lines 72–77). The forbidden nature of this entire discussion is encapsulated in Ann, Carrie, and Emily’s revelation of a particularly bad word for Catholics (“Taig”); they additionally reveal that they know it is bad (lines 78–82).

Scott’s apparent discomfort with the range of topics manifests in his repeated attempts to draw attention away from the discussion with silly interjections (“And that is the end of our program!” on line 27). He eventually gives up and participates, but maintains his mocking air (“I am a pickle!” on line 52).

### *Pigs, Cows, Function, and Meaning*

I found that at least some of the students at all but one of the schools knew what the question was asking, and some even knew variants (for example, “Are you a cup or a plate?”). C.S. 2 was the only school where there appeared to be no knowledge of any variant of the question. This may have been because the pupils lived farther away from the city center and used more local (and Catholic-run) services; thus they did not go “down the town” quite so often as children at the other schools. They were not as likely to be in situations where people from “the other side” would be around, and the “training” implied in the uses of the catch were perhaps not as necessary as they may have been elsewhere.

A colleague who was raised in Downpatrick, County Down, which is about an hour or so by bus from Belfast, was familiar with this question in the version, “Do you eat Rice Crispies or Porridge for breakfast?” (Rice Crispies = RC = Roman Catholic, and Porridge = P = Protestant).<sup>10</sup> The Pig or Cow question is clearly traditional (in the classic folkloristic sense of having multiple existence and variation) and has some time depth, as well as some geographic span beyond the schools in which I was working. It is, in fact, a classic example of a *catch*, absolutely “designed to embarrass the unwary” (Brunvand 1986, 97). In this case, the answer is “Pig” if you are expected to identify yourself as a Protestant, and “Cow” if you are supposed to claim to be a Catholic. Those who do not know the right answer are punished in some way, usually by some form of mild to severe verbal, and sometimes physical, abuse. Catches were a popular genre among older primary school children in Belfast, especially boys. They are a quick, easy, and often effective way of both determining if someone is in your group (however that group is defined) or, alternatively, of demonstrating that an individual is not a member of your group. This particular catch was applicable in both communities, Protestant and Catholic, because the right answer depended on who was doing the asking. It is important to emphasize that the “right” answer is not dependent on the true sectarian identity of the answerer. Rather, the correct answer depends just as much on the perceived identity of the asker, perhaps even more so than it does on the actual identity of the person being asked.

This catch was age specific, with knowledge of the “right” answer (and

the likelihood that you would be asked the question in the first place) becoming far more likely at about the age of eight. Younger children did not seem to be familiar with the question when they were asked about it, and the older ones who were familiar with it did not remember having to deal with the question before they were seven or eight. Older kids were often fairly forceful in their denial that the “wee ones” would know about the catch. When they were asked who would usually ask the question, a number said older siblings, and some also said older kids at their schools. Overall, the kids presented me with two specific scenarios in which the question would be asked. The first, the one most familiar to those who had been asked the question, was that of older siblings and older kids at school asking them the question. The second was nearly always presented to me in the abstract: in response to my question, “Who would ask you this?” I would occasionally get a general answer like, “The Catholics . . . in the town.” The possibility that strangers might ask the question was far overshadowed by the number of children who named siblings and other children they knew as the inquisitors.

In directly asking if the children knew what “Are you a Pig or a Cow” meant, I was creating a space where the boundaries between Protestant and Catholic were relevant at school, and so could be explicitly articulated. I was also going against one of the original intentions of my field research, that is, not to elicit material that I had not already observed at the schools. I took liberties with my methods here because I felt it was worth pursuing such an important issue. I was careful not to suggest what the question meant in my queries, and was rewarded by the wide range of kids in most of the schools who were familiar with it. Because the space to talk explicitly about sectarian difference does not usually exist “naturally” at any of the schools, my questions generated several interesting discussions about sectarianism that would not have spontaneously come about otherwise.<sup>11</sup>

Kids in Britain, Ireland, the United States, and elsewhere, as well as in Northern Ireland, divide themselves along several different axes. Gender, race, class, and other “interest groups” serve as dividing lines, whereby they can easily identify potential friends and enemies. The principal at P.S. 1 made this point to me when I asked him about the apparent lack of sectarian lore on the playground. He noted that there were secondary schools, one from

each community, that, because of their close geographic proximity, have staggered release times, to avoid conflict among students. But then, he said, the same kind of conflict situations occur when a grammar school and a secondary school are located close to each other; in that case, conflict arises between the two student bodies based on the perceived (economic class-based) differences between secondary (college track) and grammar school (non-college track) students.<sup>12</sup> His argument was that to some extent, kids will fight with each other, categorize each other, and make judgments on the basis of those categories, and what kind of category they use varies with time and place; Catholic and Protestant are only two of many, and not always the most important ones. Although I agree that the structural phenomenon of separation, per se, is not unique to Northern Ireland, it is not a coincidence that one set of categories the kids in Belfast choose to confront within their folklore is sectarian.

On the surface it is clear that “Pig” and “Cow” are both potential insults, and neither would be a term that people would be expected to voluntarily call themselves—yet another tricky part to the catch. There is no way to guess the right answer by picking an attractive option, enforcing the necessity of knowing the answer to the question before it is ever asked. Indeed, there were several children, in particular girls, at all of the schools, who when asked about the catch, gasped and threw their hands up to their mouths, saying, “They’re trying to be mean!” about anyone who would ask the catch question. When pressed, one girl said, “They’re trying to trick you into saying you’re a Cow, you know, a fat Cow.” So the meanings that were apparent to her in the question were the more conventional insults, and not the coded queries about sectarian categories.

The Pig or Cow question, however, is more than just a play on conventional insults. The different contexts in which children are made to, or anticipate having to deal with the question reveal several concepts that they are teaching each other. First, it is important to know “what you are” and to be thinking about it even when the question that you are asked does not seem to be referring to Protestants or Catholics.

Second, it is important to know “what *they* are,” and to be able to effectively “pass” for the “other side” if necessary. The question is not just simple information gathering, but is rather a kind of performance that elicits another performance from the person being questioned. Throughout the

course of my fieldwork, I was told stories, and read even more accounts in the local papers, of children from one “side” getting beaten up by the “other side,” presumably because they were easily identifiable as “other.” In one case, a parent at I.S. told me of a nephew who was on the bus and wearing a Celtic jersey. Celtic is a Scottish football team, and its fans in Northern Ireland are exclusively Catholic.<sup>13</sup> The boy got beaten up taking a bus that went from a Catholic area to another Catholic area, through a Protestant area.<sup>14</sup> He had a coat on over the jersey, but it was zipped down so that the Celtic colors and insignia were visible. His mother scolded him after, saying, “You should never have had it on, you knew where you were going.” This catch is a complicated test, to see not only if you are capable of telling, but furthermore if you know the consequences of being identified as a particular category, and additionally if you are capable, if necessary, of masquerading as “the other” when challenged by “the others” themselves.

The fact that the question is in code, asking if one is a Pig or a Cow rather than a Catholic or a Protestant, points up a third important concept. It is important to “know what people are,” but one is not supposed to ask about it directly. The kids I was talking to about all this made quite sure that there were no adults about when we had these discussions, and extracted series of promises from me that I would not “tell on them” to teachers, parents, or school principals. In fact, I was reprimanded by some of those same children from P.S. 1 quoted earlier when I told them about a week later that I’d been asking other children about the “Pig or Cow thing.” Carrie and Ann were particularly horrified to learn that I’d been asking other children about it. “You’ve been telling them we said it?” cried Carrie in dismay. I tried to reassure them, “No, I was just asking if they knew about it—and they didn’t!” “Well, don’t do that anymore!” they scolded me. One is neither supposed to ask the question, apparently, nor ask *about* the question.

Many children know which questions and topics of conversation are appropriate, and those who do not know are taught this by their peers as well as by the adults in their lives. Any time a child asked me about my religion, another child would invariably admonish, “That’s none of your business!” I witnessed adults silencing children who asked me questions about personal topics, and had conversations with several adults who were shocked, or at least dismayed, at the existence of the Pig or Cow question among “their kids.” I have already noted that awareness of the Pig or Cow



question was age specific; several eleven-year-olds (P7s) I asked were familiar with the catch, but some rolled their eyes and said, “Oh, that’s *ancient!*”—thus indicating the catch’s fading currency as they came closer to secondary school age. Once people reach the age of about eleven, certainly by the time they are in secondary school, they have gone beyond the thinly masked directness of “Are you a Pig or a Cow,” and have learned far subtler ways of *telling* without asking any direct questions (even those in code). The issue is not that one stops *telling*, but that one does so in appropriate, polite ways.

In insisting, even if only in play, on choosing sides, these Belfast kids were engaging in a practice not unfamiliar to adults. Several of my acquaintances spoke to me on occasion of the relief they felt when, in a conversation with a stranger, they hit upon the tidbit of information that told them what side the other was on. “After that,” one friend remarked, “you can relax, you know where you can and can’t take the conversation.” In the rather less polite circles of politics, the need to know what side someone is on has equally serious implications. As Robin Whitaker (1998) has shown in her work with the Northern Ireland Women’s Coalition, the attempt by the women to exercise their vote on the basis of issues, rather than across a particular Nationalist or Unionist ticket, has roused the suspicion of male politicians on both sides. Whitaker suggests that the Nationalist and Unionist politicians who object to the Women’s Coalition’s practices (or attempted practice, in these new days of the National Assembly in Northern Ireland) are threatened by the possibility of what Whitaker calls “political drag”: someone who is “really” a Nationalist masquerading as a Unionist, or vice versa, and taking some of the certainty out of the voting process.

If one wants to be rude, of course, there is no more perfect question than one that refers to the sectarian divide.<sup>15</sup> A colleague of mine was on the receiving end of such a question one day when he was walking down a main road not far from P.S. 1. Two boys of about eight or nine years of age were walking in front of him, both wearing Manchester United football jerseys. Suddenly, they wheeled around and confronted Anthony: “Are you a Prod or a Taig?” they demanded. Anthony thought for a minute before replying, “I’m a Man United fan!” The boys regarded him slowly, shook their heads, pronounced, “You fucking Taig,” and walked off. Anthony’s avoidance of the question was answer enough. Had he been on the right side,

he would have answered without evasion, with the correct answer. Although this question was not in code and was indeed deliberately and quite explicitly rude, it resonates perfectly with one of the intents behind the Pig or Cow question, that is, patrolling the divisions between Protestant and Catholic.

### *Symbolism of the Pig and Cow: Are You a Pig . . . ?*

Although the children at P.S. 1 asserted repeatedly that “it didn’t matter” what words you used in the question, as long as they involved the initial consonants “P” and “C,” it was clear that the predominant traditional form was in fact standardized as “Are you a Pig or a Cow?” The common connotations of both words indicate that some deeper symbolic digging might result in greater insights into the implicit meaning of the Pig or Cow question. The conventional insults conveyed by the terms “Pig” and “Cow” have already been mentioned. Both “Pig” and “Cow” carry connotations of “fat” even if the adjective is not explicitly stated; “Cow” appears to be a gendered insult, used most often about girls/women and, more often than not, when the person being insulted is not there to hear. “Pig” is unisex, apparently, or was on the Belfast playgrounds I was visiting.

In terms of the Northern Irish context, however, these general insults can take on specific implicit meanings. A “Pig” was one of the first sorts of armored personnel carriers used by the British army at the start of the most recent spate of Troubles, in the late 1960s. For the Catholic Nationalist population, the presence of the British army started as a welcome one, seen as necessary for their protection during their struggle for civil rights. That perception swiftly changed to one of the army as an unwelcome force of internal colonialism, perpetuating the Protestant nature of the polity of Northern Ireland at the expense of Catholics who either wanted their rights under the United Kingdom or wanted a United Ireland, free from British occupation. Although “Pig” does not appear to have become a generic term for any individual associated with the army (and who would therefore be assumed to be British and Protestant), it is clearly associated with the military presence in Northern Ireland, as is evidenced by its use in titles such as *Pig in the Middle: The Army in Northern Ireland* (Hamill 1985). “Pig in the Middle” is a common ball game that involves at least two players trying to keep the ball away from one other player, the “Pig.”<sup>16</sup> The game can also be played with other objects, such as notepads, hair baubles, or any

other item that the “Pig” in the game really wants to get back. “Pig in the Middle” is an effective way of camouflaging the teasing and occasional bullying of a fellow student by arguing, “We were only playing!” Obviously, this game is not always entered into voluntarily, and no one enjoys being the “Pig” for very long.

Recall the brief exchange between Ann and Emily at P.S. 1, where they make explicit the symbols associated with their stereotyping of Catholics, and indeed, of Catholic stereotyping of Protestants:

“Before we saw them, we thought they’d have horns on their heads,” Emily laughed. “Like cows,” added Ann. “And they musta thought we had snouts! [snort snort]” Emily continued, making convincing pig noises.

Friends and colleagues in Northern Ireland tell me that the epithet “snout” is used by Catholics about Protestants, and occasionally just snorting like a pig makes the reference clear. These girls knew of the Pig-Protestant association, and referred to it directly just before the extended conversation discussed above. The “horns” on the Catholic heads could be demonic as well as bovine; some of the most extreme anti-Catholic rhetoric among adults implies that Catholics may not even be Christian.

We can see the intersection in “Pig” of a set of meanings: on the one hand, the implicit association with the British army’s presence in Northern Ireland, and with (perceived) attempts to maintain Protestant power and influence there. On the other hand, in the parlance of the playground, Pigs are the ones stuck in the middle, having to jump for what is rightfully theirs, and are frequently the ones no one really wants to associate with, at least, not as equals.<sup>17</sup> These two sets of meaning directly correspond to contemporary working-class Protestant anxieties about their place in Northern Ireland. Historically, most Ulster Protestants saw themselves as “British,” and furthermore viewed Northern Ireland’s connection to the rest of the United Kingdom as essential for the preservation of their personal and political security. In the late 1990s, however, contemporary Northern Irish Protestants felt caught between Catholic Nationalist and British politicians negotiating for peace. The seriously contested issues in those negotiations have included a United Ireland, a political solution seen by many Protestants as fundamentally threatening to themselves and their “way of

life,” discussed in many Unionist political publications in terms of their heritage and culture (McCoy 1998). Many working-class Protestant political parties perceive their constituencies as struggling to maintain what they have, in the face of machinations to take it away. They are the Pigs in the Middle, and they do not like it.

One can see this anxiety vividly in the words of the children. Recall that we have already seen a good example in the words of the P.S. 1 children:

*Ann:* It's not fair! See Catholics—they take over Ireland, they take over Sandy Row, they took over . . . they took over everywhere! [she and other children list off the streets they think have been “taken over”]

*Scott:* And we've just got a little piece of space!

*Someone:* It's not so bad!

*Ann:* This [holds arms wide] is our country, right? We've got that size of it [pinches fingers together very small]

Even though there was a voice of dissent, arguing that the situation was “not so bad,” the most passionate voices (as is the pattern in adult Northern Ireland) were those of anxiety and dissatisfaction. Confusion about “what they are” was particularly prevalent in Protestant children I met, again reflecting general anxieties in Protestant Northern Ireland about their political and cultural identities. During one lunch break, sitting with P5s at P.S. 1, one of the boys wanted to know what my husband's name was, and if he was English. This provided an opportunity to note that there were several people from other parts of the United Kingdom at that school; one boy was from Liverpool, and another from Scotland. Since the topic had been brought up, I asked Carrie and Ann, who were nearby and had heard the conversation thus far, “If they're English, and Scottish, what does that make you?” “English!” was the first word out of Ann's mouth. “British!” corrected Carrie “But they're [indicating English and Scottish] British too!” pointed out Ann. “Well, I just don't know then,” said Carrie. “We don't know!” echoed Ann, looking at me, shrugging. These kids are echoing sentiments expressed by adults in their community, and experiencing a similar confusion. Can they be British if the British government doesn't really care about them? Or if they don't trust the British anymore? How can they be Irish if the Irish are Catholic? What does it mean to be from “Ulster,” then?

A German Jumps rhyme, also used for jumping in similar patterns over painted lines on the tarmac,<sup>18</sup> invokes these same themes and questions:

England, Ireland  
Scotland, Wales  
Inside, outside  
On the rails.

I collected this from each school, so the rhyme is not specific to one side or the other. The words indicate a sense of marginality, which could be interpreted as pertaining to Northern Ireland itself as well as to the people who inhabit it. A central tenet of the negotiations for peace has been the need to decide where Northern Ireland “belongs” administratively. This is usually posed as an either/or situation: either it is to be in the United Kingdom or it is to be a part of a United Ireland. While England, Ireland, Scotland, and Wales are all definite political entities, without contested boundaries (except for the northern boundary of Ireland), Northern Ireland is caught somewhere in between, with people in the polity who feel they are in Ireland, and others who feel they are in the U.K. In sum, Protestants and Catholics alike feel they are “on the rails,” on the edge, on the outside looking in, even when they feel “inside” and secure in their sense of community. That sense of community is put at the mercy of politicians from other places, and the political future of Northern Ireland is placed on the scales, hanging in the balance and depending on the outside, because of the fear of what comes from “within,” that is, what comes from Nationalist and Unionist communities.

*. . . or Are You a Cow?*

The word “cow” is often associated with the country, used to epitomize the rural countryside (as in, “we’re way out the country—there are cows and everything!”). One connotation of the country is that the people there, or those who are from there, are slow, stupid, and unsophisticated. The countryside can evoke old stereotypes of Catholics in Northern Ireland as being of uniformly rural origins—even if they currently live in the city. It is further associated with stereotypes of rural Irish as being unsophisticated (for example, Kerryman jokes), and with broader assumptions that the Irish in general are slow and/or rural (Paddy jokes) (Curtis 1984).

One can see the stereotypes played out in the following Paddy joke, collected from a P4 girl at C.S. 1.<sup>19</sup> Notice that what Paddy Irishman falls into is a product frequently associated with cows.

Paddy Irishman, Paddy Englishman, and Paddy Scotchman were all on this flying carpet, right? Whatever they wished for they got. And Paddy Irishman wished for a pot . . . Paddy Englishman [she gets help here—"Wished for a pot of gold!" Teller says "No," the corrector says, "He did!"—I say to let her tell the joke her way for now] Paddy Englishman wished for a big thing of . . . you know . . . pot of [corrector says, "Money!"] gold. Paddy Scotchman wished for a big bottle of Scotch. And Paddy Irishman didn't know what to wish for, and he tripped and said, "Shit" and landed in a big pile of shit.

It is interesting that the Paddy jokes, as I encountered them, did not follow the expected pattern of the Protestant kids "slagging off" (making fun of) Paddy Irishman, and of the Catholic kids ridiculing other Paddys (Scotchman and Englishman). Even when the same teller told the joke, the important part didn't appear to be demonstrating the stupidity of whichever Paddy as much as getting to the punch line, which often involved getting to say a dirty word, the truly "cool" part of the joke. So the function of the jokes among children is not primarily to insult a specific Paddy, but to exercise their performance expertise and in some cases raise or maintain their status within their peer group through clever uses of forbidden language. Nonetheless, these jokes are permeated with stereotypes and prejudice, and the very presence of them in the repertoires of children indicates that a framework for awareness of sectarian stereotypes is being laid. Many of the children were learning the jokes from each other; my recording sessions instigated joke-telling sessions in which five or six children would contribute in a given session, listening carefully to each other and often correcting each other if they thought the joke wasn't being told properly. Children would often foreshadow a particularly good joke (in their opinion) by exclaiming, "Oh, I love this one!" as they recognized the joke from the teller's beginning. Other times I was told that they'd learned the joke from family members, most often older siblings. They rarely if ever named parents as the source of their jokes.

Catholic Nationalists also cultivate positive associations with the countryside, emphasizing their ties to the land in their iconography, which is particularly visible in the murals that dot the urban Nationalist landscape (Rolston 1992, 1995) and in their collective remembrance of the Catholic Irish heritage. But such memories generate ambivalent feelings about the countryside, especially those concerning the history of rural disenfranchisement, following English colonization, among the native Irish in the north and the south, and of the impact of the Famine on their community, and the British/Protestant landowners' role in the millions dead from An Gorta Mór (the Great Famine). The history of loss of land, and famine, transforms the countryside from a source of strength to a site of victimization.

Emasculated images of the "other" are invoked in the feminine connotations of the insult "Cow." If all Catholics are "cows," they are all somehow female, and can therefore be made less powerful—and perhaps less threatening, at least institutionally, than their Protestant neighbors. If Catholics, as the minority population in Northern Ireland, are the "other," this feminization directly corresponds with broader trends in European discourses of difference and dominance (Brandes 1980; Dundes, Leach, and Özkök 1987). A Catholic calling himself a "cow" could be acknowledging the historical lack of Catholic institutional power in Northern Ireland; a Protestant calling a Catholic "cow" could be trying to assert power by appealing to that same history.

### *Pigs and Cows Together*

On another and equally important level, pigs and cows are fundamentally the same kind of creature: a barnyard animal. Variants of the Pig or Cow question reveal a similar pattern: the cup and plate are both dishes, the porridge and Rice Crispies are both breakfast cereals. Even some of the nonsense alternatives proposed by the articulate children at P.S. 1, include kinds of vegetables or animals: any two examples of things that it can be argued fall into the same category. The Pig or Cow catch, while forcing a choice and implying difference, is simultaneously indicating the essential sameness of those choices, divided far more by what is on the surface than by any sort of essential categorical difference. One can see this in the Paddy joke cycles as well, wherein all three characters, Irish, Scottish, and English, are classified as "Paddys," indicating an awareness in the folklore

of the essential sameness of these groups of people when compared with each other.

This awareness of, and indeed an apparent need by some children to insist upon, such sameness was clear in the conversations of the children as well as in their folklore. One day at P.S. 2, I was suddenly accosted by Jane, an eight-year-old, who fairly shouted as she grabbed my arm, "Catholics are just the same as Protestants, ain't they?" I was so startled that I did not answer right away, and it soon emerged that she wanted me to take her side against her classmate and peer Daniel, who leapt in with, "Nah, they're just Fenians! If I ever saw a Catholic Fenian I'd just get a gun and shoot them!" It was clear that Jane was upset by his saying this, and this seemed to goad him into further declarations: "I'd just get a knife and r-r-r-rip their throats out!" he said with the appropriate gestures of garroting and gouging.<sup>20</sup> At that point Daniel's friend Chris distracted him from the throat cutting, and I had the opportunity to ask Jane if she knew any Catholics. She told me about a girl her sister met at Irish Dancing class, "and my sister introduced her, this girl, to me, and now she's my friend!" Jane said the girl had even come over to her house, no small thing in that fiercely Loyalist enclave.

Jane's insistence that Catholics were the same as Protestants against the violently aggressive protestations of her peer was initially surprising to me, given her background as a child raised in a staunchly Loyalist community permeated with paramilitary presence. But she was far more typical than I had realized, and in fact more children sounded like Jane when they spoke of the "other side" than like Daniel, in all of the five schools I visited. Across the board, even those kids who had at times expressed prejudice against the "other side" had at other times pointed to similarities between the two communities. Kids at all of the schools sounded the same theme: "We're all just people." "We shouldn't be fighting." "They're just the same as us." Many of these sentiments were expressed in the same breath with complaints about what the "other side" had done or was willing to do to them, and so could be cynically explained as kids saying what was expected of them. But a cynical interpretation is not appropriate in the vast majority of cases. I saw a sincere desire by many of the kids to be able to move from one community to another, or at least to be able to move within their own community without fear for their safety or even for their lives.



I do not want to deny existence of prejudice, or even the presence of prejudiced acts among children, but rather to facilitate a more complex reaction to representations of prejudice among kids while in their peer groups. Both “Pig” and “Cow” contain meanings that are internal and external; that is, some Pig associations are from Protestants about Protestants, some are from Catholics about Protestants, and vice versa in terms of Cow and Catholics. Part of the “catch” is an implicit internalization of negative stereotypes, both those imposed from without and those that come from within their respective communities, in the self-association with “Pig” or “Cow” in the catch. It is a self-deprecating catch, one that reveals the ambiguities inherent in claiming such an ambivalent identity as “Protestant” or “Catholic” in Northern Ireland. The many levels of implicit meanings—and furthermore, the potential for the active bearer of the catch tradition not to think consciously about such meanings—is part of the appeal of this traditional question. Each individual can invoke negative or positive associations with his or her group, or with the “other” group.

### *What Is at Stake*

Among children growing up in working-class regions of Belfast, many interactions in their everyday lives continue to depend on their knowledge of and familiarity with the Protestant-Catholic divide. The threat of violence underlies much of the children’s discourse about the Pig or Cow question—not a threat from the kids themselves, but from “strangers” from the “other side” who will hurt them as the kids are aware others have been hurt before. The punishment that kids imagine would happen to them if they answer the catch question incorrectly is only hypothetical for the moment—it could and does become real for a significant number of kids. Even if the Pig or Cow question specifically is not employed in this serious game of *telling*, the implications remain the same: pick a side, the children are teaching each other, even if you’re not sure what that means. Make a stand, or you will be hurt. This knowledge that sides must be taken coexists with a desire that taking sides was not so necessary, or even that being on one side or another was not grounds for giving or receiving physical violence.

As we saw in the case of gender categories and of violent images in folklore that evoked the domestic, violence in words does not necessarily mean violent acts. The persistence of violent references within and around sec-

tarian folklore is an accurate reflection of the preoccupation with violence that surrounds the kids. The Pig and Cow question, for example, is a way to process violence, a way to comment on violence as a strategy, and a way to avoid violence if possible. The use of the catch can lead to a discussion of what kids know about sectarianism—discussions that I deliberately provoked as a part of my research, because of the lack of overt references to sectarian issues on the playground. The relative silence regarding sectarianism on the playground is not, I found, reflective of the importance of these issues in kids' everyday lives. Rather, it speaks to the effective compartmentalization of sectarian concerns from other areas of their lives like school.

The awareness of and interest in Protestant-Catholic differences by the children does not have to be interpreted as a matter of prejudice, although that is certainly involved in some cases—it was presented by the kids as an issue of survival. Adults do not generally want children to discuss issues such as sectarian categories in their presence, and they frequently silence children that do so as “rude” or “bold.” This makes the child peer group one of the prime locations for the exchange of information about how to function effectively in society at large, not to mention in the society at school. Because it asks, albeit in code, about one's sectarian allegiance, the Pig or Cow question is a personal one, and while it is bad or bold to ask it, it might yield important information. Even more important, the practice of using the catch among siblings and peers is a sort of training in the importance of sectarian categories, in the face of adult disapproval. When it comes to those categories, children are aware early on that what they are being taught by peers and siblings is vital if they are to avoid getting harassed, ridiculed, or at the extreme, seriously hurt, both physically and mentally.

Those who ask the Pig or Cow question are simultaneously accepting and subverting sectarian categories, in tricking the children who do not know any better. Accusing your younger sister of being an “Orangie,” when you know good and well she is not, pushes the definition of the category, but only so that it is, ultimately, reinforced. Even if children do not use those categories with prejudice, and many do not, they must still be aware of them. Although there are certainly instances where children are playing with sectarian categories, and in some cases rejecting them, there are also

many where the categories are just as unquestioned as the tarmac on their playground: a part of the scenery, a part of the understood landscape of their lives.

When adults and scholars look at children, we need to resist the nostalgic notion that we are looking into our own past. We also need to avoid seeing children as “the future.” Regardless of aspirations for a better future, children live in the present. The Belfast children I met in 1996 and 1997 were not yet living in the future their parents envisioned for them—for the most part, one of peace and better lives. They were living in a situation where the ideals aired in the rhetoric surrounding the peace process had yet to completely infiltrate the everyday lives of people, especially those in so-called working-class neighborhoods. The Pig or Cow question was a diagnosis by children of the continuing problems in their society. They were struggling to learn and understand, and they frequently misunderstood—in much the same way that adults do—macro- and micro-scale political processes in Northern Ireland. The lives and words of children give us a different window through which to observe these processes and allow us a different understanding of just what is at stake. It is not simply the future of the people of Northern Ireland, but their present.

# Conclusion

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## *Children as “Kids”: Em-personating the Abstract*

The flurry of interest around Childhood as a cultural construction, while originating in the 1930s with the work of scholars like Margaret Mead (1928, 1930) has fluoresced particularly since the work of Phillipe Ariès (1962). Such constructivist perspectives have focused on the separation of children's lives from those of adults, as well as the imposition of innocence (defined as ignorance of the “real world”) onto the young via the concept of Childhood. Such a notion of innocence requires a complementary construct of monstrousness, of Bad Children who are, on the basis of their behavior, banished from the kingdom of Childhood (Conrad 1999; James and Jenks 1996). These young people either pose a danger to the ones who still manage to stay within the Good Child realm or, more comprehensively, threaten the entire construct of Childhood. As Allison James and Chris Jenks (1996) point out in their discussion of the public perceptions surrounding the 1993 murder of Jamie Bulger in Britain:<sup>1</sup>

... the murder was not just disturbing but was, quite literally, unthinkable. Unthinkable, that is, because it occurred within the conceptual space of childhood which, prior to this breach, was conceived of—for the most part and for most children—as innocence enshrined. In essence, what the British public seemed to have to come to terms with in 1993

was that childhood could no longer be envisioned unproblematically as a once-upon-a-time story with a happy and predictable ending. (317)

Such a reevaluation of the Innocent Child model has been taking place across the Western world, whence that construction originally came. The rash of school shootings in the United States in early 1999, especially the massacre of students by fellow students at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado, was met with two different sorts of speculations. The first suggested that the young people who perpetrated the shootings were not “really” children; those shooters who survived the incidents (the ones at Littleton did not) should be “tried as adults,” a phrase that handily recategorizes them as “not children.” The second reaction was to suggest that children today cannot be protected from the “adult world” in the comprehensive way required by the Innocent Child model. This latter response recognizes the need to adjust notions of what Childhood “really” is, not just for children in war-torn or third world (or both) countries, but for children all over the world.

These speculations about the nature of children and Childhood lack the actual voices of the children. With very few exceptions, the discussions about “these kids today” and what is to be done about them take place in the absence of the kids themselves.

Children as social actors may gradually become visible and acceptable within sociology but in the public world children themselves may still have little opportunity to have their voices listened to. Children’s words may continue to be viewed with suspicion, or indifference, by an adult audience . . . where age, rather than experience, may still often be deemed the more important indicator of a child’s ability to tell, or even know, the truth. (James and Jenks 1996, 329)

This suspicion of children’s words in many ways justifies adult failures to listen, and can be seen in the dismissive attitude toward the everyday utterances of children taken not just by the general public but also by the scholarly community. It is difficult to do research among children, because they interact with each other, verbally and physically, in many ways that are distinctive from those of adults. One cannot interview a child in the

same way one interviews an adult, and not just because of the ethical considerations involved in questioning children about topics like violence and other hard issues. One cannot assume that kids will “just talk to us” about such things, simply because we ask direct questions—and indeed, this is the case for adults as well. Open-ended interview techniques and participant observation are tried and tested ways of getting complex information from adults, and such ethnographic work among children has equal promise, presuming that researchers can overcome the “triviality barrier” (Sutton-Smith 1970) that continues to dog much child-centered research.

The interface between the categories of Child and Adult was one of the first I had to confront in my fieldwork, and it remained enormously important throughout my time in the field and in the analysis of the folklore materials I collected. My ambiguous status, neither completely adult nor completely child, provoked the kids into defining me for their own purposes. In undergoing definition myself, I learned a great deal about what kids themselves think of the imposed distinctions between child and adult in their society. Their status as Children colors all of their experiences in the social world.

It was at least in part because of the aforementioned difficulties, and because of my commitment to gaining access to the voices of the kids themselves, that I turned to folklore collection as a significant part of my methodology. This, too, is fraught with complications, as it is relatively easy to separate the “folk” from the “lore,” and to disembodify the words of kids so that they are disassociated texts, seemingly unrelated to the real lives of the kids who utter them. We should not let the presence of familiar folklore materials lull us into a false sense that we know what these children’s lives are like. The familiarity of traditional materials belies their adaptability; the beauty of folklore is not simply in its endurance, but in its persistent relevance in the face of change. In presenting not only the texts but also the macro- and micro-environments in which they were employed (Northern Ireland, Belfast, the playground), the children in this work are shown as “kids,” people with their own opinions and perspectives on the world in which they find themselves. Kids need to be listened to, and adults need to be aware of the sensibilities children express, rather than acting on assumptions based on abstract notions of a “proper” Childhood or on nostalgic notions of their own pasts or of their children’s future. Belfast

kids are eloquent representatives of their present realities, and deserve a voice in representations of their lives.

### *Of Categories and Kids*

Nothing in this book refutes the reality that there are two very distinct sides to the conflict in Northern Ireland, and that reconciling the differences between Protestant/Unionist/Loyalists and Catholic/Nationalist/Republicans is a daunting, long-term proposal. What the materials presented here do indicate is that these differences are not essentially cultural ones, but were born of economic and political situations that were then adorned with cultural trappings as a part of strategies of negotiation for power and influence in a shifting political landscape. Arguments based on cultural essentialism have been politically expedient, resulting in grant money from the European Union or from local government agencies interested in fostering “parity of esteem” between the two communities. Such arguments consistently obscure the shared experiences of the people of Northern Ireland, especially those of the working class. Discussing categories and traditions that cut across the perceived boundary between Protestant and Catholic, such as those based on age and gender, helps to destabilize any rigid notion of two absolutely separate factions in Northern Ireland. Even the Pig and Cow question, while referring to sectarian differences, was a tradition shared on both sides of the divide. There is space for more nuanced discussions of difference, which recognize the cultural commonalities while continuing to explore the social, political, and economic dimensions that continue to inform everyday acts of boundary maintenance.

The striking similarity of folk traditions among children from all of the schools, Protestant, Catholic, and Integrated, indicates that the ethno-religious differences that are so important to the conflict in Northern Ireland are far more a matter of declared difference than actual difference in cultural content. Protestant and Catholic children alike, both in their conversation and in their folklore, affirm the existence of a shared sensibility, one that needs to be encouraged in sociopolitical arenas. The fact that children in the Integrated schools are encouraged by the adults in their lives to emphasize such sharing explicitly does not change the reality that they go home to largely segregated neighborhoods and continue to confront both institutional and informal separation between Protestants and Catho-

lics in Northern Ireland. Current and past political coalitions have built on this sense of shared experience in moving forward with shared governance of Northern Ireland, even in the face of continuing resistance from factions on both sides.

Just as labeling the differences in Northern Ireland as “cultural” fails either to make them so or to get rid of the economic and political dimensions to the conflict (Rolston 1998), calling the young “children” does not remove them from the real world. Both the folklore texts and the social contexts in which I collected them in Belfast point to a complex interaction of children’s sensibilities and the sociopolitical circumstances of their lives. Kids share many circumstances with adults, but are circumscribed by their position in the “subculture” of Childhood.

The sectarian divisions that color so much of what is written about Northern Ireland in both the popular and the academic press fade in significance when compared with identities based on age and gender on Belfast playgrounds. The shifting, contextual nature of identity is especially apparent in the materials presented here, as age, gender, class, and sectarian identities become more or less important depending on a variety of spatial and social factors that are constantly in flux. Individuals negotiate these categories at all times in their everyday lives, and it is not enough to categorize someone simply as “Catholic” or “Protestant” when there is so much else to be brought to bear.

One can see the intersection of the age, gender, and sectarian categories, especially in the issues surrounding the definition of the “domestic.” Age informs the performance of gender in that below a certain age, girls and boys have a degree of flexibility that fades as they get older. Boys can skip, girls can lead chasing or occasionally even football games. The violence of the sectarian conflict penetrates gendered performances in the form of domestic violence, making the lines between personal and political violence ever more blurry for the kids who witness it. As they get closer to the stage of “adult,” and approach the transitional stage of their teen years, it is apparent that the kids have been putting their time to good use in observing the gendered world around them. Girls are not a little non-plussed at the roles being offered to them, contradictory realities that require them to be sexy and pure, demure and strong, and to defer to men even in the relative absence of men from children’s private lives during the



past thirty years of the Troubles. Boys face difficulties as well, exposed to models of masculinity that do not give them the tools to live in the shifting social, economic, and political worlds that so confound their fathers, grandfathers, uncles, and even older brothers.

Research among kids in the United States as well as in other parts of the United Kingdom affirms the connection kids have with the world around them (Bluebond-Langner 1978; Fine 1987; Foley 1990; Jenkins 1982, 1983; Mechling 2001; Thorne 1995; Willis 1977). Paul Willis, Richard Jenkins, and Douglas Foley's research among adolescents goes a step further in demonstrating the serious rehearsal that adult roles receive among teenagers, providing a sense of teens' economic, sexual, and racial/ethnic identities through their exaggerated performances for their teachers, parents, and most of all, for one another. The teenage performances go beyond the playground and become truly inhabited by older kids, as they try on identities outside the relatively safe confines of games and songs that I collected from younger kids.

### *Kids, Violence, and Folklore*

In attempting to present a picture of Belfast kids' lives, it is important not to interpret their existence as helplessly mired in violence. In fact, the reaction of kids to the violence in their folklore and in their lives, indicates a distinct lack of sympathy with violent acts. This lack of sympathy is combined, however, with practical accommodations to violence, via coping strategies like the Pig or Cow question. Such an accommodation is not unique to children in Northern Ireland; kids throughout the world have to deal with a variety of everyday violence (Scheper-Hughes and Sargent 1998). In the case of Belfast, it was clear that the kids were not just dealing with conflicts between Protestants and Catholics, but also with domestic violence and intracommunity violence, often in the form of punishment beatings. Such brutality has not stopped with cease-fires and attempts at shared government, and remains an important, sobering part of the everyday lives of many Belfast kids (Wallace 2002).

The violence in Belfast children's folklore does not condone such behavior in the real world. Within the texts and practices of playground lore, we can see commentary on the pervasiveness of violence, and strategies for avoiding it, or for mitigating its effects. The fact that Belfast kids have

folklore which includes violence, then, does not mean that they are inherently violent themselves, or that they will become, as Rona Fields predicted (1977/[1976]), morally inadequate, militaristic automatons. Rather, the folklore and the kids' use of it in context reveal an awareness of their reality, as members of a society caught up in particularly violent times, and a commitment to practical strategies for dealing with it. Those strategies are necessarily restricted by the kids' status in their society as Children: they cannot leave, they are limited in their ability to defend themselves physically; they must depend on adults to protect and defend them as best they can. In addition, adults cannot completely protect their children from the physical or psychological effects of violence. Kids seem to know this (even if they are not necessarily happy about it), and this knowledge is revealed in the folklore they perform and pass on among each other.

The textual violence that is associated with rude and "dirty" folklore, is useful to children in the course of their challenging the protected nature of Childhood as defined by adults in institutional (middle-class) power. The threat of violence to the domestic sphere is enacted and commented upon while on the playground. The *telling* strategies engaged in by kids, and the ways they teach other to *tell* who is Protestant and who is Catholic, are important precisely because children are imperfectly shielded from the realities of living in working-class Belfast. The violence of Northern Irish society permeates children's lives, as it does the lives of adults. So they continue to confront it in their folklore, both on and off the playground.<sup>2</sup>

If the presence of violent themes in children's folklore should not be taken as evidence of their irrevocably violent natures, then neither should the violence of the folklore be used to justify additional policing of the kids who perform the material (as Valentine 1996 describes). In the case of Northern Ireland, violence appears to have its ultimate roots in the political struggles that can be traced back as far as the seventeenth-century plantation of Ireland, and so cannot be resolved by measures of surveillance and control of children or of any other subset of the population. The sectarian conflict is an important backdrop to the specific situation in Northern Ireland, and colors much of the perceptions of violence among the people who live there. But other strands of causation run along the trajectories of economic distress, social disenfranchisement, and gender troubles, independent of the sectarian troubles that are so visible now. In addition to

punishment beatings and domestic violence, attacks against nonwhites in Northern Ireland (as in many other places in the United States and Europe) remain a problem.

Violence is not a phenomenon unique to Northern Ireland. The United States has more horrific statistics on both domestic and nondomestic violence. Children in far too many parts of the world are currently living in situations so violent that it is impossible to characterize them as anything but inhuman. As Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Carolyn Sargent point out in *Small Wars* (1998), children are subject to violence, both directed and diffuse, on a daily basis, around the world. Well-meaning adults who care about kids are often hard-pressed not to romanticize children's lives. They tend to minimize, often without much conscious thought, the extent to which kids are aware of and participate in aspects of society involving violence, economic hardship, and social and familial hardships including divorce, death, and injustice. In the course of my research, the words of the kids brought me back time and again to the underlying threat of violence that they were living with in Belfast. The kids I met are complex people, living nuanced lives, but they cannot escape the fundamentals of the broader context in which they live: that of a divided city, in a historically conflict-riven polity. What we are seeing in the folklore of Belfast children are everyday reactions to a variety of different violences, especially those stemming from the Troubles, but experienced by the children through the lenses of different age, gender, and sectarian identities.

It is impossible—or at least, improbable—to avoid living in the world that surrounds you, except in conditions of extreme privilege or extreme denial. The folklore I collected on the playgrounds bears witness to a direct engagement with reality by kids in Belfast. It also reveals intricate defenses against, and comments upon, those parts of reality that did not sit well with the kids. The beauty of folklore is in the intersection between group and individual sensibilities, so that materials that dated back to before the 1890s could still be relevant and become applicable to situations in the late 1990s.

Adults (scholars and otherwise) are not looking at The Future when we look at kids. We are looking at those individuals who will (we hope) be living in the future, and this is a crucial difference. Those interested in the roots of social change should not throw up their hands in despair at the

“unprogressive” nature of what kids do on the playground, especially the behavior that surrounds gender and racial or ethnic categories. What we are witnessing is an exaggerated representation of the reality that kids find all around them. We the researchers are examining the site for potential change, but cannot, in the moment, see what changes the future will hold. Kids’ expressive culture is reflective of the world they inhabit, not necessarily predictive of what is to come. Perhaps the best that adults can do for kids is to give them a sense of possibilities, an awareness of options, even if we cannot give the specifics of what they must be prepared for.

The folklore of contemporary Belfast playgrounds provides a clear picture of kids living in their “now,” not in the future that they will eventually inhabit. It is imperative that adults concerned with changing society for the better through the lives of children have a relatively clear-eyed picture of just what the concerns of those kids are. We can turn to folklore as a way to gain access to those concerns, to build rapport between adults and children, and to communicate across the divide between adult and child.



## *Appendix*

### *Methodology and Description of Schools*

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During nine months in 1996–97, I collected folklore materials in five different primary schools in Belfast. In addition to this first-hand collecting, I had access, during the course of my research, to collections compiled by other scholars. Roger Austin, at the University of Ulster at Coleraine, allowed me access to a large set of materials gathered by student teachers during the 1980s at primary schools throughout Northern Ireland. I refer to those materials as the “Austin collection” in the notes. Jane Hubbard’s Ph.D. dissertation (Hubbard 1995a,b) from Queen’s University, Belfast, contains materials she collected from several different schools in Derry city in the late 1980s. I use both sets of materials primarily to annotate the folklore that I encountered myself, so as to establish their widespread distribution in Northern Ireland; the works of Leyden (1993) and Craig (1994) were additionally useful in this regard. The international nature of the folklore is established through additional annotations as each piece first appears in the text.

The schools who were gracious enough to allow me to visit their grounds and their pupils for a year originally gave their consent via mail. I acquired permission to enter each of the schools by writing to the principals, who then passed on my request to their respective Boards of Governors. I contacted approximately twenty schools, situated in middle- and working-class neighborhoods, with my first mailing. I heard back from six, located in

North, West, and South Belfast. All schools were in so-called working-class neighborhoods, and were local schools in that their feeder populations tended to be in the immediate surrounds of the schools.<sup>1</sup> Once I actually arrived in Belfast to do my research, circumstances and my own schedule forced me to choose just five of the six who had given their consent, leaving me with a sample of two Protestant, two Catholic, and one Integrated school, a school for each day of the working week.

Each school had morning breaks, when the kids were allowed to go outside (weather permitting), and after-lunch breaks. I was allowed to be on the playground while the kids were out, and was also permitted to eat lunch with them in the dinner halls.<sup>2</sup> I spent much of my first days at each school explaining (to adults as well as to kids) that I was not a teacher, not a supervisor, not anything, really, other than interested in what they, the kids, were doing on the playground. Once I felt the kids were more used to my presence, and I was no longer quite the novel play experience myself, I was better able to observe their “natural” play (although I never entirely escaped the “cluster” effect of at least a few kids who dubbed me their primary playground activity for the day). I took rainy days as opportunities to record materials I had previously seen on the playground; in general, I tried not to elicit specific material from the kids that I had not already seen performed at least once. My intent was to get the materials that they would be playing with even if I were not there. So that I might preserve tunes and hand motions to some of the rhymes and games I was collecting, I eventually worked up to recording the kids with a small tape recorder and, in a few sessions, with a video camera.<sup>3</sup> My primary mode of recording my observations, however, was note taking, which I did furiously in the staff room at each school, immediately following each break.

Nearly every school had two different playgrounds. One was for the “wee ones,” ages four or five to seven or eight, who composed the grade levels P1 (“P” for “primary”) through P4.<sup>4</sup> The other was for the rest of the kids, ages eight or nine to eleven or twelve, the P5s, P6es, and P7s. Those schools that did not have a different playground for each grade-level cluster arranged it so that the different groups were out on the playground at different times, staggering the breaks so that the older kids would not run over the younger, more vulnerable ones. In situations with two playgrounds, I had to choose which group I would be with for each break, because to bounce from one

playground to the next would have made what little time I did spend on the playground far too short. I settled on a system of visiting one group in the morning, one in the afternoon, and then reversing that order for the following week. I also did my best to alternate which group I would eat lunch with, so as to get a variety of experiences with a wide range of ages.

Throughout, I retain the use of the grade levels, P1 through P7, as identifiers for the children who provided the materials I analyze here, primarily because that was how they identified themselves to me, after giving their name. At school, age was a less important marker than grade level, when making distinctions among the kids.

In the interest of privacy, I have given the schools rather basic code names. The Protestant schools I visited therefore become P.S. 1 and P.S. 2, the Catholic schools, C.S. 1 and C.S. 2, and the Integrated school, I.S.

### *The State Schools*

P.S. 1 was the larger Protestant school I worked in, and was in one of the oldest school buildings in my study sample. There has been a school at that site since at least the early 1930s; grandparents of children at P.S. 1 recalled the secondary school that was there before the school's latest incarnation and, before that, the original primary school. Because it is an older school, it was also one of the most architecturally elegant, with fine brick walls and two different grassy courtyards in the interior of the school, which were planted with seasonal flowers and other plants by the school caretaker. P.S. 1 is in a traditionally staunchly Loyalist area of Belfast that was in the process of being rather closed in: on one side by the encroaching (mixed) university population, on the other by the motorway, which separated the neighborhood from a nearby Nationalist Catholic area. There was a popular perception that increasing numbers of houses in the traditionally homogeneous neighborhood were being occupied by recent immigrants from South and Southeast Asia, and there was some ambivalence about that. It was the most ethnically mixed school I visited, with a sprinkling of children born to parents from India, Pakistan, and China. The dominant playground culture was staunchly Belfast, however—the presence of those different ethnic backgrounds did not penetrate into that arena. The school was coeducational, and participated in Education for Mutual Understanding (EMU) programs. Under EMU, schools from the two communities would pair up and



go on field trips to heritage sites (like Navan Fort Interpretive Center) and museums (like the Ulster Museum, in Belfast). It is a voluntary program, and not all partnerships last very long. Much depends on the commitment to the program held by the school principal, and to some extent by the parents of the schoolchildren. Parents can elect to have their children not participate in EMU. The children who went to P.S. 1 were predominantly working class, and there appeared to be a higher percentage of parents who actually had jobs than at P.S. 2. So while the children were not terribly well off, they were not, on the whole, in abject poverty either. Some children at this school had parents or close male relatives who were members of the Ulster Defence Association (UDA), one of the Loyalist paramilitary organizations.

P.S. 2 was the smallest school of the five, with only about 110 pupils altogether, in all seven grade levels; it was also coeducational. It was built not long after the completion of the housing estate surrounding it, in the early 1970s, right after the start of the latest round of Troubles in Northern Ireland. The school and its surrounding neighborhood were situated on the edge of one of the Protestant/Loyalist heartlands of Belfast, perched along the Peace Wall separating them from a staunchly Republican neighborhood on the other side. The wall used to be corrugated iron and “temporary” fencing, but had been upgraded within the last few years to a far more permanent brick and metal structure. While I was doing my fieldwork, a new police station was built into the part of the Peace Wall down the hill from P.S. 2. The neighborhood was one of the poorest I worked in, with nearly 80 percent unemployment, and the principal of this school estimated that 50 percent of the kids at his school were from “lone parent,” primarily single-mother, families, and noted that it was those families who had the worst economic need. The vast majority of the school pupils were from the immediate surrounding neighborhood—the small (around 15 percent, according to the principal) number who were not had parents who had attended the school, and grandparents who still lived nearby. Those kids, most of whom lived on the lower Shankill, would be dropped off at school while their parents went to work, and after school would go to their grandparents’ place, until their parents could come and get them.

The teachers at this school had decided several years before that there would be no regularly scheduled morning break; rather, each teacher would

decide when and for how long the kids would go out in the morning, depending on progress through the lesson plan, the kids' behavior, and so on. The lunch break was also shorter than at other schools, to give more time in the classrooms, and so it was initially difficult to observe the kids at play at all. I spent a good deal of my time eating with them, since it was one of the few opportunities I had to interact informally with them. Eventually, I had spent enough time at the school to get a feel for when they would get to go out in the morning, and did get to witness relatively extended jaunts on the playground after lunch. In addition, on Tuesdays and Thursdays after school there was a homework time, for which some kids stayed. Being able to interact with the P.S. 2 kids after school substantially increased my awareness of their play repertoires.

The fact that it was such a small school worked to my advantage regarding contact with the boys—I had a greater chance to interact with each of them more often, and so got “in” with more boys than I did at bigger schools, where they could go off on their own and not bother with me at all if they did not want to. I played football with the older boys at this school once, and that seemed to make me enough of an honorary boy that they were much freer with me than boys at other schools where I did not have that opportunity. This school also participated in Education for Mutual Understanding programs.

Many of the P.S. 2 children had fathers or uncles in jail for paramilitary activities. This school served as temporary army barracks during the 1970s, not long after the permanent building was completed, up until about 1976, when most of the parents of the children now attending the school would have been in primary school. The parents I spoke with, primarily women who now work at the school, remember the days of the army barracks fairly positively. Conversations with the man who was principal of the school during the “army occupation” made it clear, however, that there were at least a few personal conflicts generated by the presence of all the single men in a neighborhood that even back then had a large population of lone women. The children at the school today do not appear to be as fond of the army, perhaps because they associate them with the jailing of their fathers, uncles, brothers, or cousins (I did not hear of any women from this neighborhood being jailed for paramilitary activities). The women may remember the army fondly because back then there was “something to do” locally. Dances were

held, and there was a sense of having social options that simply do not exist anymore; today for entertainment (dancing, going to the pub, the cinema) as well as for basic shopping, one has to go into the city center, or down to the main road, both of which are substantial bus or taxi rides away. Those who do work have to travel quite a distance, because their jobs are nowhere near this neighborhood. There is a community center just down the hill, but it is perceived as belonging to the next neighborhood (also Protestant), and the kids do not feel welcome there. If they do go to a community center, it is one on the Shankill Road, a taxi or bus ride away.

### *The Catholic Schools*

C.S. 1 was an all-girls school. It was one of the most active schools I attended in terms of its folk traditions, and I collected reams of materials from girls of all ages. It was housed in a small but beautiful old brick school building; the school is attached to a grammar school and a secondary school, both of which have excellent reputations, and is therefore full of pupils.<sup>5</sup> The entire complex of schools was associated with a convent, and the buildings were among the oldest in Belfast city. The current principal was the first lay headmistress the school had ever had; all of the previous ones had been nuns. The school was staffed by lay teachers for the most part. It was situated right in the middle of one of the infamous heartlands of Nationalist and Republican sentiment, although the girls at this school seemed to have fewer family connections to paramilitary groups than girls at C.S. 2. The pupils were also more (locally) cosmopolitan than those at C.S. 2, having more regular trips to the city center, probably because they lived much closer to it. Unemployment rates of the “feeder” neighborhood seemed lower than that of C.S. 2; again, while none were terribly well-off financially, the girls at C.S. 1 seemed to have more material and familial resources at their disposal. This school had participated in EMU programs in the past (one of their former partners was P.S. 1, in fact), but did not have any current partners.

I had originally thought to estimate the level of economic need at each school by determining the percentage of kids who were on the rolls as getting free hot dinners, and was surprised to find out that C.S. 1 had only about 30 percent of its pupils on that status. When I asked the principal if this figure was representative of the number of families in economic need at the

school, she said not at all. She thought there were several reasons the numbers might be low. The fact that the kids had to walk all the way across the convent complex to the secondary school to have their dinners meant that they didn't get as much time outside, and they might not get to be with their friends very long during the break. In addition, if it was cold or raining (which it frequently was), that walk could be fairly grueling. She also speculated that the parents or kids might not want to sign up for the free dinners because they were embarrassed or ashamed to be in need. I was intrigued to find out that those families who were on public assistance did not qualify for free dinners—the assistance they were already receiving from the government was assumed to be of sufficient help with getting food for their children's lunches. So free dinners would apparently be for the working poor not collecting public assistance, and not necessarily for the unemployed. The number of children who received free lunches thus only indicated the minimum number of children living in economic need. The bottom line at all of the schools was that a significant percentage of the children attending them were on, or at least qualified for, the free lunch program.

C.S. 2 was also an all-girls school, but it was associated with an all-boys school that shared the grounds with it. It had about 475 girls in it in 1996–97; the principal said that when it originally opened, about thirty years ago, a bit after the surrounding housing estates were built, the population was much higher because of the presence of many high-rise flats, containing more residents. Those high rises have since come down, and many people have moved to newer housing estates in the Poleglass area and other outlying areas of Belfast city. The school primarily serves the immediate area, a working-class neighborhood and, as the nationalist graffiti and Gaelic Irish street signs indicate, one with strong Republican and Nationalist elements.

The teachers are primarily from outside of this neighborhood, as is the case with all of the schools. Indeed, some are from outside Belfast; one woman is from Derry, another from Enniskillen. The school was situated at the far edge of a community near the western outskirts of Belfast city. This community is fairly notorious for Republican activity, as well as high unemployment and lone-parent rates. Many girls had family connections with the Republican movement, both political (Sinn Féin) and paramilitary. This community was closer to services, especially grocery, cinema,

and other shopping, on the Upper Falls Road (a Catholic area) than to those in the city center, so there appeared to be less traveling to “mixed” areas like the city center for these girls. Within the past year, the local community development agency had also completed renovating and expanding a small shopping center at the center of the housing estate, so there was a local butcher’s, a couple of small general “shops,” and a clothing store within easy walking distance of these girls’ homes. The shops at this center were either owned or managed by locals; some of the girls informed me that their uncle, daddy, or, in one case, granny worked there. This school participated in EMU programs.

The boys’ section has its own principal (there is a separate principal for the nursery school, as well). Up until a few years ago, the school was only partially maintained by the state. When the European Community report regarding the state of the schools in Northern Ireland was issued, it was critical of the lack of total funding for Catholic schools, and the funding was subsequently increased to 100 percent. The funding is given to schools in block grants by the Department of Education, and the level is based on a per pupil count: according to the principal at C.S. 2, about £1,200 pounds per pupil. For every pupil the school loses as a result of parents leaving for a different housing estate, children graduating to secondary schools and not being replaced by like numbers of children, and so on, the school loses money. In 1997 the principal was hoping that they had seen the worst of the decline in pupil numbers, and that the downturn would level out (if not slightly reverse) in the next few years.

C.S. 2 was one of the feeder schools for a local secondary school that has been identified as having particularly low reading test scores, and C.S. 2 has therefore qualified for grant money to relieve two teachers of their regular teaching duties so that they can focus on getting particular students’ reading levels up to grade level. Money had also been allotted to the improvement of the library (painting, carpets, new CD-ROM, new books, and so on), as well as a general painting and sprucing up of the school grounds—“because environment is so important,” the principal said.

### *The Integrated School*

Overlooking Belfast Lough in a new and spacious building, I.S. is one of the few Integrated schools in a working-class area of Belfast, and a

large percentage of its pupils were from the local neighborhoods. A nearby middle-class Catholic neighborhood and a mixed lower- to upper-middle-class suburb also supplied students. The school is located in an area of Belfast where the transitions from Catholic to Protestant neighborhoods occur very quickly, within a few blocks or sometimes less. The area is one of the tenser sections of the city, where sectarian clashes are more frequent than they would be in the middle of the more homogenous sectarian neighborhoods (for example, the Protestant Shankill or the Catholic Falls). The school is coeducational and is one of the oldest and largest Integrated schools in all of Northern Ireland—it is in itself an EMU program.

This school had a program, instituted by one of the vice principals, of deliberate organization of some of the playground activities at the school. Fortunately for me, this program did not begin until well into the school year, and so the play patterns of the kids had already been fairly well established by the time adults came in with their suggestions and equipment. The staff were concerned that all the kids would do, especially the boys, was “just run around and fight,” and wanted to provide more structure for the play during breaks. By the time I learned of these adult plans, I had already seen plenty of self-imposed structure in the play, and hoped that it would not be disrupted by this project. In the end, the program took the form of handing out and initially supervising the use of equipment such as jumpropes and hopscotch chalk (the latter was brought out far less frequently, because of the mess it left on the asphalt). Each grade level would have to take its turn with the equipment, so that at the beginning of each break, the cry would go out: “P7s have the ropes!”

In my experience, the action that made the most difference in levels of aggression and dangerous running around was the thinning of the playground population by siphoning off one grade level each day to go down the hill to play football. Younger kids, who had their own playground, did not have this option, but it was really the older (and consequently bigger) kids, among whom the “running around and fighting” reached critical mass, who were the concern. In all, I.S. had a rich playground culture, with many active bearers, and so provided a great deal of folklore material for analysis. It was such a big school, however, that I had to rely heavily on key informants; there were so many children on the playground that they had sufficient numbers of peers to entertain themselves.



## Notes

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### Introduction

1. The acquisition of cultural knowledge that takes place within child's play can be seen in many ways as analogous to the acquisition of language. Both are not simply entire reproductions of what has gone before, but rather a piecing together of disparate parts, encountered by individuals and by groups, within a structure of rules that may also be changed as becomes necessary.
2. The difference between Loyalist and Unionist, and Republican and Nationalist, has been explained in nearly all previous works set in Northern Ireland. It was also explained to me while I was in the field, in terms very like those used in a 1997 article by Gordon McCoy: "*Nationalists* seek the unification of Ireland. *Constitutional Nationalists* wish to unite Ireland by peaceful means. *Republicans* justify, or justified, the unification of Ireland by armed insurrection. *Unionists* wish Northern Ireland to remain a part of the United Kingdom. *Loyalists* are Unionists who believe, or believed, that force should be used to maintain the union with Great Britain. Most Nationalists are ethnically Catholic and most Unionists are ethnically Protestant" (135–136).
3. Not having ties to Irish America was especially important in my interactions with some of the adults (mostly parents) at the Protestant schools. Irish Americans have acquired the reputation of being staunch financial supporters of the IRA, and so are distrusted by many who live in Unionist and Loyalist neighborhoods, as well as by some who live in Nationalist neighborhoods but who do not approve of IRA tactics.
4. Diminished intimacy with a community is increasingly an issue given the ever-shorter periods of time that anthropologists have available for fieldwork, because of funding and other logistical concerns.



5. See also the appendix for a discussion of these issues, in the context of the specific schools in which I conducted research.
6. Iona Opie, in contrast, makes it clear in her ethnography of the playground that it was important for her to “retain [her] adult status at all costs” (1994, 51). It has also been suggested to me that girls might simply be more inclined to talk to adults than are boys; thanks to Noel Smith and Judy Lanclos for pointing this out. See Fine (1995) and Fine and Glassner (1979) for additional discussions of the complexities of doing fieldwork among children.
7. See Butler (1991) for a discussion of gender as performance, as well as Chapter 3. Anttonen (1996) and Tajfel (1982) discuss further the processes whereby group and individual sensibilities encounter one another to form “identity.”
8. Anthropologists have done research among “youths” in Northern Ireland—defined as people who are in secondary school or at least are of secondary school age (over age twelve). See Bell (1990), Irwin (1997), and Jenkins (1982, 1983), among others.
9. I suspect that the lack of analysis of Northern Irish children’s folklore in contemporary times is a result of adults’ desire not to see “real world issues” in the play of children who, many think, have already seen far more than their fair share of the “real world” in the context of the Troubles.
10. See Opie (1994) for an ethnographic sketch of playground interactions. See also Glickman (1984), Lindsay and Palmer (1981), and Pellegrini (1995) for discussions of children on the playground. More general works on play (verbal and physical) include Abrams and Sutton-Smith (1977); Brady (1984); Gomme (1894); Goodwin (1990); Huizinga (1970/[1950]); Kelly-Byrne (1989); Mead (1930); Medrich, Roizen et al. (1982); Opie and Opie (1967); Roopnarine, Johnson, and Hooper (1994); Schwartzman (1978); and Sutton-Smith (1959, 1970, 1995a,b).
11. “Sectarian,” as I use it, refers to the Protestant/Catholic divide, also expressed as the division between Loyalists/Unionists and Republican/Nationalists. A “sectarian killing,” for instance, is one perpetrated by Catholics on Protestants, or vice versa. Although the schism in Northern Ireland is commonly discussed using religious labels, the differences between Protestants and Catholics are actually composed of a complex nexus of ethnic, economic, and political categories, as well as religious ones. There are nonsectarian aspects to the Northern Irish troubles, most notably the punishment beatings, wherein paramilitary groups attack and sometimes kill members of their own group in the course of their unofficial policing of their neighborhood. For further discussion of sectarianism, see Jenkins, Donnan, and McFarlane (1986) and McVeigh (1998).
12. To quote the principal of an Integrated school.
13. What names are given are pseudonyms; this is true throughout.
14. It occurs to me that adults who exclaim in despair, “The children never play games like we did when we were at school!” are misremembering the richness of their own schooldays. There were many days when, because of weather, low energy, or other less tangible reasons, the kids simply did not play very much, or really did do “nothing but run.” But over the course of the school year—even over the course of a few days—it became clear that their play was quite rich and

varied. Hindsight may condense or even edit out altogether the boring days adults may have spent on the playground, and thus give the false impression that they were far more active and creative than “kids today.” Adult nostalgia coloring memories of childhood can be seen in Sutherland (1986), for example.

## 1. A Day in the Life

1. Opie (1994), 218.
2. E. Brady (1984), 144–150, is an entire chapter on chasing games.
3. E. Brady (1984), 52; Bronner (1988), 55.
4. Abrahams (1969), 133; Bronner (1988), 56; Hubbard (1995a), 173, (1995b), 40, 63, 105, 138; Knapp and Knapp (1976), 26; Leyden (1993), 105–106.
5. Abrahams (1969), 47; Bronner (1988), 55; Craig (1994), [18]; Hubbard (1995b), 42, 95, 120, 135; Knapp and Knapp (1976), 5; Leyden (1993), 103.
6. This is clearly a reference to the method of witch killing employed in *The Wizard of Oz*; thanks to Alan Dundes for reminding me of this.
7. Abrahams (1969), 101–103; Bronner (1988), 56; Hubbard (1995b), 77, 100, 124, 137; Leyden (1993), 149; Opie (1994), 147. Knapp and Knapp (1976, 113, 131) record it as a skipping as well as a clapping rhyme.
8. The “fishes in the sea” phrase appears in other rhymes, for example, a long version of Eena Meena in E. Brady (1984, 50). Leyden records, “Birds in the garden, fishes in the sea,” as part of a counting-out rhyme (1993, 107).
9. “Twelve and twelve are twenty-four,” recorded by Iona Opie as the punch line to a “rude” (as characterized by one of her informants) knock-knock joke: “Knock, knock.’ ‘Who’s there?’ ‘Twelve.’ ‘Twelve who?’ ‘Twelve and twelve are twenty-four, Shut your mouth and say no more.’ (1994, 180).”
10. Craig (1994), [49]; Bronner (1988), 61; Hubbard (1995a), 181, (1995b), 92, 125, 137; Knapp and Knapp (1976), 131; Leyden (1993), 150; Opie (1994), 185.
11. Hubbard (1995a, 179; 1995b, 78, 125) records the gifts of the boyfriend as apples, pears, and then Opal Fruits (a chewy fruit candy similar to Starburst in America) rather than kisses; also see E. Brady 1984: 37–38; Leyden (1993), 147.
12. Here they pucker and direct air kisses at their clapping partners.
13. Hubbard (1995a), 167; (1995b), 70, 97, 105; Opie (1994), 103–104. For “dirty kangaroo” as part of an “improper” rhyme, see Opie and Opie (1967), 96.
14. All references to “football” concern the game Americans know as “soccer,” unless stated otherwise.
15. See E. Brady (1984), 27–28, for descriptions of playing house and the game Mothers in Dublin.
16. E. Brady (1984), 101–102; Craig (1994), [13]; Hubbard (1995b), 48, 81, 91; Leyden (1993), 35–36.
17. See In and Out the Windows in Craig (1994), [3], as well as Dusty Bluebells on page [7]; Brady (1984), 120, for Darkie Bluebells; Hubbard (1995a), 207, (1995b), 47, 54, 83; Leyden (1993), 67–68.
18. I think the last syllable is just a syllable, rather than a pronoun.
19. Bronner (1988, 58) records this as Going to Kentucky, probably the original lyric

- that then became garbled among those who do not know where Kentucky is. Also see Hubbard (1995b), 70, 81; Knapp and Knapp (1976), 149.
20. Abrahams (1969), 30–31; Bronner (1988), 70–71; Hubbard (1995b), 130.
  21. Abrahams (1969), 5; Knapp and Knapp (1976), 121; Leyden (1993), 134.
  22. This verse used as a retort to the question “Why,” in Opie and Opie 1967, 51. Also see E. Brady (1984), 15, 75–76.
  23. Abrahams (1969), 12; E. Brady (1984), 11, 83; Craig (1994), [21]; Hubbard (1995a), 198, (1995b), 84, 97, 127.
  24. Abrahams (1969), 9, 15; Hubbard (1995b), 92.
  25. Ground beef. Actually, most of the schools refrained from serving any kind of beef during the BSE scare, which was especially high during the time I spent in Northern Ireland. Any ground meat in the school dinners was usually lamb or pork.
  26. BSE: Bovine Spongiform Disease, otherwise known as “Mad Cow Disease.” See note 25.
  27. I record this here as “copy-*kater*” to reflect the pronunciation used by the Belfast kids (with a long vowel “a”). Knapp and Knapp (1976, 60) record the following similar jeers with a different pronunciation: “Copycatter, dirty ratter, Stick your face in monkey splatter,” and “Copycatter, dirty ratter, Call your mother a base-ball batter.”
  28. Bronner (1988), 136–137. See also Zumwalt (1976).
  29. Opie (1994), 125.
  30. Bronner (1988), 109; McCosh (1979), 147; Opie and Opie (1967), 112; Opie (1994), 196; Knapp and Knapp (1976), 164, 184, 188.
  31. Brady (1984), 139; Hubbard (1995a), 212, (1995b), 69.
  32. Abrahams (1969), 93; E. Brady (1984), 65; Knapp and Knapp (1976, 124) record it as Buster Brown.
  33. This part of the verse has been recorded separately; see Abrahams (1969), 145, 155; E. Brady (1984), 103; Craig (1994), [23]; Hubbard (1995b), 88; Leyden (1993), 14, 132; Opie (1994), 71.
  34. See Abrahams (1969, xvii–xix) for discussion of this section of the rhyme, also known as Teddy Bear, Teddy Bear. Also see Abrahams (1969), 186–187.
  35. Abrahams (1969), 73–76; E. Brady (1984), 90–91; Hubbard (1995b), 77, 85; Knapp and Knapp (1976), 254; Leyden (1993), 135–136; Opie and Opie (1992), 71, (1967), 339.
  36. Bronner (1988), 53; Hubbard (1995a), 172, (1995b), 62, 106; Knapp and Knapp (1976), 25; Leyden (1993), 106.
  37. Opie (1994), 21, 101.
  38. Both of these rhymes have no “natural” endpoint; the players simply end them when they feel like it. The hand motions to these words are nearly identical, consisting of the players starting with their palms together, tips of their fingers pointed toward the other player. As they sing or chant the words, they each take one hand (usually starting with the right), and move it upward, so they clap the palm of their play-partner. Then their palms are returned to the center position, and the reverse of the previous movement is carried out, with their hands mov-

ing down, to connect palms once again. Hubbard (1995b, 125, 127) records another of these, A-B-C Together.

39. Hubbard (1995b), 98. Brady (1984, 149) records a variant of this game, Mr. Fox, and Iona Opie (1994, 43) describes a variant called Please Mr. Crocodile.
40. For a variant of this game, called Colours, see E. Brady (1984), 138. The “Wolf” in the version I collected is a “Devil,” in Brady’s version, and the children are assigned their colors by a “Man,” rather than by “Mummy,” as I observed. Knapp and Knapp (1976, 251–252) record this as either Colored Eggs or Colored Bunnies. Also recorded by Hubbard (1995b, 98).
41. Opie (1994), 108.
42. Knapp and Knapp (1976, 118–119) record this as “Chinese” Jumps in American tradition.
43. Hubbard (1995a), 228, (1995b), 43, 69, 95, 137, 138.

## 2. Rudeness and Defining the Line between Child and Adult

1. See Conrad (1999) for a discussion of how Americans in particular continue to struggle with notions of child sexuality.
2. Such silencing also happens when children bring up other topics adults would rather they not discuss, in particular sectarian issues (see Chapter 4).
3. See Willis (1977), for an economic view of the perpetuation of working-class perspectives among a small group of secondary school boys in Britain.
4. For more on the apparent disqualification of children from Childhood because of their violation of the standards of innocence and dependency, see especially James and Jenks (1996). See also Fine (1988).
5. Foley (1990) discusses this kind of performance among the teenagers of North Town, in south Texas. Mexicano and white teenagers were deemed “good kids” by adults so long as a façade of good behavior was successfully maintained for the adults. Those kids who did not care to maintain such a façade, or who were bad at doing so, became labeled “bad” kids, “troublemakers,” who labeled themselves as “vatos,” “kickers,” or “trash,” outlaws who appeared to care very little about conforming to adult standards of behavior. Says Foley, in talking about popular football players, “these same players were clever ‘tricksters’ who indulged in the private play and hedonism that other ‘cool’ kids idealized. These youth also had to be practitioners of the new consumer-oriented popular culture. Like their successful parents, they worked hard and earned their right to play hard. But unlike the rebellious, deviant kids, who also ‘played hard,’ they were better at convincing adults, as the rebels said, with their ‘goodie-goodie’ acts. Such conformity to older public values of restraint and sobriety solidified their position of social prominence” (60–61). The successful kids on the football team, then, led dual lives, one for the image and success according to the definitions of adults, and one for the image and successes defined by other kids. While the cases Foley discusses are specifically about being a teenager in south Texas, there are striking structural similarities to the situation kids in Northern Ireland found themselves in. They, too, were expected to adhere to adult standards of proper

behavior for Children, while at the same time were required to engage in behavior, among their peers, that would surely invite the censure of most adults who happened to discover them. This dual life is required by the artificial structures of Childhood, in tension with the realities that kids must face in their everyday lives.

6. McCosh (1979), 202–203.
7. For a detailed discussion of definitions of obscenity, especially regarding legal and anthropological definitions, see Clor (1969); LaBarre (1980).
8. Also observed by Opie (1994, 32).
9. McCosh (1979, 134) suggests a similar phenomenon around jokes, that is, that jokes can reveal children's attempts to escape from often adult-imposed ignorance of matters intellectual, sexual, and physical.
10. Knapp and Knapp (1976, 26) record a shorter version of this: "Dog shit you're it. *Out!*" Hubbard (1995a, 170) encountered a different variant in Derry that she calls "more typical of a *boys'* choosing rhyme : Icky dicky dog's dicky, out pops piss!"
11. Hubbard (1995b, 121) also recorded this strategy of simply falling silent where the dirty word came in the rhyme.
12. See Goldstein (1971) on the manipulation of counting out to get a desired outcome, and other strategies employed in these supposedly "random" selections of who will be On It for the game.
13. See Lurie (1990) for discussion of this substitution of words for action as children get older.
14. McCosh (1979, 129) makes the same point regarding jokes, especially rude ones. See also McCosh (217–222) and Knapp and Knapp (1976, 92–99) for other examples of tricks and catches.
15. My colleague Jay Dautcher suggested to me that the knickers bust because of menstruation, and that's why people are disgusted. I think it more likely that Cinderella's knickers bust because of her expanding belly; she is pregnant because of going upstairs to "kiss" her fellow, and people are disgusted at her state. For further discussion of the Cinderella rhyme, see Chapter 3.
16. For other Cinderella rhymes where she is dressed in colors other than yellow, see Knapp and Knapp (1976, 125–126).
17. Also recorded by Bronner (1988, 105–106) and Opie (1994, 31).
18. See Chapter 4 for more discussion of the rudeness of sectarian explicitness among children.
19. This was a mixed group of boys and girls, and while boys were leading most of the songs, the girls present were singing just as loudly.
20. Knapp and Knapp (1976), 213–214. When I recorded this in Belfast, the Addams Family movie had just been shown on television.
21. This is Manchester United, the football team, and one of the favorites of kids from all schools.
22. As described in Chapter 1.
23. Hubbard collected several versions of this (1995a, 174; 1995b, 59, 61, 93, 135) without any mention of knickers: "bring your own cup and saucer and your own cream bun. [Name] will be there with ribbons in her hair."

24. Bronner (1988), 155; McCosh (1979), 241; Opie (1994), 24.
25. Bronner (1988), 156; McCosh (1979), 242–243.
26. Notice that this is a Protestant child in a school within a neighborhood with a heavy paramilitary (UDA/UVF) presence. Paddy Irishman is in the first line, but is effaced in the body of the joke. The Scotsman is the hero here, which resonates well with some Ulster Protestant affinities to and for Scotland as a prime site for heritage and allies (McCoy 1997, 1998). See Chapter 4 for more on what the Paddy jokes may contribute to learning about sides and stereotypes in the Northern Irish conflict.
27. As in the rhyme “Milk, milk, lemonade, around the corner fudge is made,” the symbolic equivalence of things that are brown and potentially mushy makes chocolate a convenient stand-in for shit.
28. See Bronner (1988, 142) for a similar joke told about a black man. In that case, however, the man himself was “chocolate” due to the color of his skin.
29. McCosh (1979), 281; Opie (1994), 14.
30. See also Wolfenstein’s analysis (1978 [1954]) of jokes where names have double meaning: “The child’s name in the joke is thus transformed into its bad meaning. A situation is contrived in which this bad name can be turned back against the adults. When they ask his name, as grown-ups so often ask a child, he retorts with the bad name. It becomes a means of retaliation; the adults’ aggression boomerangs. There is also mocking compliance in the child’s response. In saying ‘Shut up’ to the policeman, the representative of punishing qualities, the child is only answering his question; implicitly he is only repeating the bad name that has been given him” (87).
31. McCosh (1979), 212–213; Bronner (1988), 117; Knapp and Knapp (1976); Opie (1994), 13, 111; Opie and Opie (1967), 81–82.
32. Northern Ireland’s consumption of nicotine and caffeine products outstrips its consumption of alcohol.
33. These jokes are usually started and ended by the same person, making them rather more like couplets than the more regularly encountered riddling question. See McCosh (1979), 214–216; Opie (1994), 14.
34. Two jokes from P.S. 2, P6es and P7s.
35. Four jokes from C.S. 1, P6es.
36. From P.S. 2, P7s.
37. Two jokes from C.S. 1, P6es and P7s.
38. From C.S. 1, P4s; see Bronner (1988, 68) for a “Sir” rhyme that has him with a cold, caught while hunting polar bears at the North Pole. See also Abrahams (1969), 60; E. Brady (1984), 64; Hubbard (1995b), 75; Leyden (1993), 116, 133.
39. Thanks to Alan Dundes for this insight.
40. As in Chapter 1.
41. As in Chapter 1.
42. While Barney the big purple dinosaur and his television show had already had their heyday in the United States before I entered the field, the show and the characters within it, especially Barney himself and his little green friend Baby Bop (a girl dinosaur in frilly clothes), were still quite popular among some

younger (four- to six-year-old) children in Belfast during the time I was there. As was the case in the United States, many older children and adults were disgusted or annoyed by the treacly show, and such sentiments are present in the parody song given here.

43. This rhyme and variants of it in an American context are discussed by Sherman (1999, 22–23).
44. See Brown (1998), in an article from the *Washington Post* that discusses the way that local schools make the link between rude language and violence explicit in their conduct codes. One seventeen-year-old was quite clear in noting how contextual language is, suggesting an awareness that “violence” in language is not an absolute, any more than rudeness or obscenity is.
45. Thank you to Nancy Scheper-Hughes for stimulating this line of thought.

### 3. Masculinity and Femininity on the Playground

1. Of course, many of these restrictions on when and where kids might play are for their own safety.
2. See Gill Valentine’s discussion (1996) of the maintenance of public spaces as adult spaces, and the subsequent marginalization of the young from those spaces.
3. Both of the Catholic schools I worked in were girls only. There the gendered nature of the play was consistent with what I observed at the co-ed schools. The absence of boys on the playground meant that struggles over control of space were not gendered, however, but fell out along lines of age and friendship. The girls’ schools produced many rich gender-laden texts, which I discuss later in the chapter.
4. The students were not allowed to be on the playground after school hours, and so those in the after-school/homework clinic program had to play in the dinner hall.
5. Thanks to JoAnn Conrad for discussing this with me.
6. See Moore (1986) for her discussion of the invocation of particular gendered meanings in space.
7. Of course, this was not always so; there was a time in both Western Europe and America when most teachers were men. At that time, most pupils were boys, and the intent of schooling was to prepare the boys for their public, masculine lives. Primary school is preparation for secondary school, and so is one step removed from the public life students begin to officially participate in as high schoolers. The increase in the number of male teachers at the secondary school level additionally corresponds to the perception that they are performing less “domestic” teaching.
8. Susan Faludi (1999) describes this process in the United States among cadets at the (until recently) all-male Citadel military academy.
9. See Chapter 2 for more discussion of rudeness and obscenity as a way of testing the content and loyalty of your peer group.
10. As in the “wee hard man” made of cement in the joke related in Chapter 2.
11. Physical strength as an indication of masculinity is not, of course, unique to working-class Belfast; Douglas E. Foley describes the importance of hard, physical



- labor to concepts of manliness not only during his youth in rural Iowa, but also in the South Texas town in which he did fieldwork among teenagers (1990, 87).
12. The importance of gender precision was felt by girls, too. When Aisling and Grainne at I.S. were discussing what they wanted to be, someone volunteered that Grainne wanted to be a “fireman.” She corrected them fiercely: “firewoman.”
  13. Gender separation extends into many realms in the adult world, including the political. This may be because of assumptions that the domestic and the public are mutually exclusive, therefore disqualifying women from “political” action because of their domestic status. Indeed, women who appear from the outside to be carrying out political actions, such as cross-community organizing for child care or community leisure facilities, often resist being labeled “political.” This may be because “politics” is associated with traditionally male ways of doing public things, and especially with the Troubles (Morgan and Fraser 1995, 93; Whitaker 1998).
  14. From the Austin collection: collected at Lenamore P.S., Derry city, April 1985 by Siobhan Bray, who interviewed several P4 students.
  15. From the Austin data: remembered materials from Omagh Co. P.S., Omagh, 1969–1973, by Ruby Wilson, born 1962.
  16. Of course it can and should be argued that one is deeply affected by the other.
  17. “Den” is the safe space in any game of Chasies (some Chasies games do not allow Dens, but this has to be “called,” as in “No Dens!”). It crops up elsewhere, too: one explanation of lyrics of *The Farmer in the Dell*, tendered by a group of P6 girls from C.S. 1, was that the Farmer was actually in his *Den*. They knew what a Den was, and were less certain about the Dell. Leyden (1993, 35) notes that both “den” and “dell” are words that originally meant some sort of clearing in the woods.
  18. Thanks to Sandra Hyde for this insight.
  19. Brady (1984), 124–126; Hubbard (1995b), 129; Leyden (1993), 63–65; Opie (1994), 200; Opie and Opie (1985), 458–461. Knapp and Knapp (1976, 147–148) record a game called *Mary Died*, wherein the players imitate the leader in the performance of Mary’s death: “like this!”
  20. See Chapter 2 for more on children’s awareness of what is and is not “proper” behavior.
  21. From the Austin collection: Clooney P.S., Simpson’s Brae, in the Waterside Area of Londonderry, Janice McLaughlin attended from 1966 to 1973, remembers from P4, ca. 1970–1973.
  22. Leyden records a nearly identical version of this wherein her “pyjamas bursted” (1993, 132). He also notes the presence of the “made a mistake and kissed a snake, how many doctors did it take?” version; so while I did not collect the latter in Northern Ireland, it is apparently not unheard of.
  23. Thanks to Judy Lanclos for stimulating this line of thought.
  24. A possible version of this game is described by Iona Opie (1994, 165), wherein the players have to run to steps when the person On It calls out “Sea.” The role playing described here, however, appears not to have been part of the game observed by Opie.



25. When “Captain’s Son” was called, the players pretended that they were playing football.
26. Variants like this have also been collected by other scholars, see the annotation of this rhyme in Chapter 1.
27. See Dundes (1988, 111) for a brief discussion of the sexual symbolism of glass, especially broken glass, in Western European folklore.
28. Bronner (1988, 101) records the “throw your teacher overboard” parody of “Row, Row, Row Your Boat,” on its own. See also Craig 1994, [39].
29. From the Austin collection: Collected from two pupils at Sion Mills P.S. in 1984, as well as remembered for the period 1966–1973 by collector Margaret M. Kennedy, born in 1962. According to Kennedy, “This school is in a mainly rural setting being a small village between two major Northern Irish towns, namely Strabane and Omagh.” She also notes that Sion Mills P.S. is “one of the very few schools in Northern Ireland which boasts integrated education. Children of both religious denominations have attended this school since it was opened in 1880.” See also Bronner (1988), 62; Knapp and Knapp (1976), 115
30. To place the following statistics in perspective, note that there are currently (and have been for the past several years) about 1.6 million people living in Northern Ireland.
31. House of Commons, Eighth Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation, Thursday, 29 January 1998, Miss Ann Widdecombe in the Chair, Draft Family Homes and Domestic Violence (Northern Ireland) Order 1997: 4:30 p.m.: The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Mr. Paul Murphy), from the Internet.
32. Citizen, November 1996, Peace People Publications, from the Internet, searched Lexis-Nexis Universe: Domestic Violence and Northern Ireland.
33. See also Bronner (1988), 151; Brunvand (1981), 53–57.
34. Again, it is hard not to interpret these as specific to the Northern Irish experience of men, both paramilitary and army, invading people’s homes and doing violence to them. Yet while many people have had such experiences, and they might inform some listeners’ understanding of these fantastic narratives, other listeners in Northern Ireland and elsewhere could and probably do take away very different, less military allusions from them.
35. Baughman motif Z13.1(a): Man coming to get girl calls out from each step of the stairs that he is coming. Addy FL 8: 393–394 (1897); MacDonald, Storyteller’s Sourcebook Z13.1.3\*: Ghost gets nearer and nearer. “I’m in the room.” “I’m on the bed.” M. Leach, *The Thing at the Foot of the Bed* (1959; Goldberg, pers. comm.); see also Bronner (1988, 158) and Opie and Opie (1967, 36). According to the folklorist Christine Goldberg, to whom I showed this third tale, “I haven’t seen glass dresses. There are the splendid dresses in AT510A and even more so in AT510B. I suspect the ‘glass’ comes from the glass slipper. Tearing or soiling the dresses would have fit the story; it’s as if the girl(s) telling it are trying to make it out-of-the-ordinary” (pers. comm.).
36. For a discussion of Republican women’s experiences in prison, and how those experiences failed to disrupt expectations that women be properly “domestic,” see Aretxaga (1997).

#### 4. Exploring the Protestant/Catholic Divide

1. “Orange” is an epithet for Protestant. The term is derived from the Orange Order, the largest and oldest Protestant organization in Northern Ireland. The Orange Order takes its name from William of Orange, who defeated the Catholic king James II at the Battle of the Boyne in 1690. The Order regularly stages parades on or around July 12, the traditional day that the Battle of the Boyne is remembered. The parades follow traditional routes, many of which now go through Catholic neighborhoods (due to population shifts, as described in the Introduction). Orange Order parades and protests against them spark many of the riots and other troubles that happen so often so often during Northern Irish summers. “Fenian” is an epithet for Catholic, but is also found in pro-Republican, and more generally pro-Irish ballads, in references to proud “Fenian men,” soldiers fighting for Ireland. The original Fenians are a part of Ireland’s legendary past, soldiers who fought with the hero Fionn MacCumhail. Members of the Irish Republican Brotherhood (which later became the IRA), founded in 1858, also called themselves Fenians, evoking this heroic Irish past in their armed resistance to British rule (Bottigheimer 1982, 200–201).
2. See McWhirter and Gamble (1982) on the development of ethnic awareness in Northern Ireland among children. Clarke (1964) deals with similar issues in analyzing the folklore of Black children in Louisville, Ky.
3. This is an extremely offensive word for “Catholics,” probably derived from the Gaelic Irish name “Tahdg.”
4. UVF: The Ulster Volunteer Force, one of the main Loyalist Paramilitary groups. McAuley (1991) provides an account of the cultural politics of the UDA, the Ulster Defence Association, another major Loyalist group.
5. It can be argued, and rightly so, that middle- and upper-class children are also confronted with this division within their society, but the population I was dealing with was a predominantly working-class one.
6. See Chapter 2 for additional discussion of catches as a genre.
7. This is a reference to Education for Mutual Understanding (EMU) programs, described in the Appendix. Toner (1994, 1995) has written on the efficacy (or lack thereof) of other programs designed to take children from both communities in Northern Ireland, and have them go on holiday together on “neutral ground.” The programs Toner discusses took place in North Carolina. He suggests that because such “interventions” are short lived, and easily removed (in the minds of the kids) from everyday life in Northern Ireland, they do not provide the sorts of long-term solutions to the Troubles that the program backers were hoping. I would argue the same about EMU programs.
8. What follows is a transcript from a videotape I made of this discussion.
9. Historically, research among working-class Protestants in Northern Ireland has been outpaced by that conducted among Catholics. This is changing, as was noted by O’Malley (in O Maolain 1993), and as exemplified by the work of scholars like McAuley (1991), McCoy (1997, 1998) and O’Dowd (1998).
10. At the time of my fieldwork, he was in his late twenties and early thirties.

11. Peter and Iona Opie note (1967, 345) that it “was not thought desirable to ask about sectarian matters in schools” (their collection included schools from England, Scotland, and Wales) in explaining the dearth of sectarian materials in their *Lore and Language of Schoolchildren*. The Opies use “sectarian” to refer to Protestant/Catholic references as well as to Jewish/Christian ones.
12. Grammar schools and secondary schools are post-primary schools, with student bodies that combine the equivalent of American junior high and high schools. It is assumed that students in grammar schools will be going to university, and that secondary school students will not. There are, of course, exceptions, and many secondary school students do go on to university educations, despite institutional assumptions to the contrary.
13. Glasgow, like Belfast, has a history of a population divided along Protestant/Catholic lines. This division is reflected in their rival football teams, Celtic (Catholic) and Rangers (Protestant), and the division in the fan base carries over to Northern Ireland.
14. Many Belfast Citybuses do this, especially those with routes in North Belfast, where the patchwork of neighborhoods results in swift transitions from Protestant to Catholic neighborhoods, and back again (see Introduction). See McClenahan (1991) for further discussion of geography as a measure of sectarian identity in Northern Ireland.
15. See Chapter 2 for further discussions of rudeness.
16. As described in Chapter 1; I observed versions of this game at every school.
17. In her book *Children of “The Troubles,”* Holliday (1997) entitled an entire section “Pig in the Middle,” referring to those who attempted to straddle the Protestant/Catholic divide, either personally, politically, or both.
18. As described in Chapter 1.
19. See Chapter 2 for another version of this same joke.
20. See Buckley (1998, 7) for a discussion of kids who engage in overtly sectarian acts as much—and sometimes more—to violate conventions of polite society as to express prejudice.

## Conclusion

1. A case in which two young boys were tried and convicted for the murder of a younger boy. The Home Secretary (U.K.) recommended a fifteen-year minimum period of containment for both (James and Jenks 1996, 315).
2. Concern about violence among children (as expressed in their folklore) is linked to concern about violent folklore in general. The censoring of the Grimm tales, once it was determined that they should be read to and by children, is a prime example of how notions of innocence and propriety interfere with popular and scholarly presentations of oral traditions.

## Appendix

1. This is not always the case. Open Enrollment is now the official policy in the United Kingdom. Any child in any neighborhood can apply to go to any school

in the city, regardless of how far away the child lives from the school. Parents typically exercise their “right to choose” in cases where they have recently moved away from the school their children had been attending, and wish to continue to keep them in that same school or, alternatively, to send their children to the school they went to, even if they are no longer living in the same neighborhood. Children in Belfast still tend, on the whole, to go to local primary schools; busing from one neighborhood to another to go to school is not only time consuming but occasionally dangerous, if the bus has to go through “other” neighborhoods to get the children to school. This danger is especially high in North Belfast, which, as already noted, is a closely packed patchwork of alternating Protestant and Catholic neighborhoods, where the main roads and thoroughfares switch “allegiances” from one block to the next.

2. “Dinners” were the hot lunches served in the dining halls at each school; the dining halls were most often called “dinner halls” by the kids. Those who ate “lunches” were those who had brought food from home. The terms “lunches” and “dinners” were also applied to the kids who ate them, therefore, at all but one of the schools (P.S. 2), “lunches” sat in their respective classrooms to eat, while “dinners” ate in the hall.
3. Because the tunes and hand motions have been collected by other scholars at schools and playgrounds throughout the English-speaking world, I have not included transcriptions of the motions or music here. Rather, the first time I reference a specific piece of folklore, an accompanying note indicates several other works in which the piece can be found.
4. P1 through P4 were identified as “Key Stage 1” among educators. P5 through P7 were “Key Stage 2.”
5. Both grammar schools and secondary schools are post-primary; on the difference between them, see Chapter 4, note 12.



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