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## Stealing Peanuts and Coercing Energy Drinks: The Underground Economy Of A Middle School Summer Camp

### **Abstract**

Economic activities are one important but understudied mechanism which kids use to recreate inequality within their peer cultures. Drawing on ethnographic data from a middle school summer camp, we used Goffman's typology of economic arrangements to analyze sequences of economic interactions within an underground economy. The middle school students drew on coercion, trading and sharing in order to address their own interests and concerns. When negotiating friendships, girls sometimes engaged in a series of interactions which converted previous social exchanges into unfulfilled economic exchanges. Girls also used inappropriate social exchanges to successfully resist boys' private coercion efforts, prompting boys to switch tactics and propose appropriate social exchanges and economic exchanges. Not only were these economic interactions patterned along gender, race, and class lines, but the repetitive, routine nature of these interactions helped to recreate inequality within the peer culture.

### **Keywords**

Underground Economy, Middle School, Peer Culture, Interpretive Reproduction, Inequality, Ethnography

In contemporary US schools, many teachers craft lessons about tolerance, diversity, and multiculturalism. Yet even as their teachers preach the value of equality in the classroom, kids<sup>1</sup> often reproduce inequalities during their interactions with each other. As they build their peer cultures, kids appropriate information from adult social worlds and the peer cultures of older youth, creatively refashion this information to meet their own needs, and interpretively reproduce gender, race and class inequalities in the process (Corsaro 1992, 2005). Kids and youth use play, language routines, friendship, and media to recreate gender, race and class inequalities in their peer cultures (Adler and Adler 1998; Bettie 2003; Eder, Evans and Parker 1995; Evaldsson 2003; Ferguson 2000; Lewis 2003; Schofield 1989; Thorne 1993; van

Ausdale and Feagin 2001). However, less is known about the role kids' economic arrangements play in the reproduction of social inequality. We add to a nascent literature on kids' underground economies by examining how kids' food and monetary exchanges reproduce gender, race, and class inequalities in their peer culture.

At the summer camp we studied, the acquisition and consumption of food was a central concern in the peer culture. Each day at the start of camp, kids congregated in a central meeting room. As they greeted each other and played video games, the room would buzz with requests to share food and money, promises of future food gifts, and inquiries about economic resources. Throughout the day, kids continued to negotiate the purchase and distribution of food and drink. When adult staff were busy organizing activities or mediating disputes, kids furtively purchased and guzzled forbidden energy drinks, argued about food gifts and unpaid loans, and stole food from one another. Away from the watchful eyes of adult staff, kids organized a complicated and often coercive exchange of food, drink and money. This underground economy consisted of long sequences of economic transactions which included members of multiple friendship groups and sometimes spanned weeks. Drawing on Goffman's (1961) insights about the underlife of institutions, Corsaro's (1992; 2005) theoretical lens of interpretive reproduction, and intersectionality (Collins 1998), we analyze sequences of economic interactions in order to more fully reveal the ways that middle school kids reproduce inequalities in their underground economy.

### **The underlife and kids' underground economies**

Underground economies are part of the underlife that residents of total institutions create. Total institutions are bureaucratic organizations in which individuals work, sleep and play apart from mainstream society. Goffman (1961) argued that individuals living in such institutions faced the challenge of complying with the organization's expectations while simultaneously maintaining a sense of self. When individuals in mental hospitals, prisons, and factories exhibited character traits and behaviors that matched the organization's expectations, they engaged in primary adjustments. Goffman observed that an individual who only demonstrated primary adjustments would experience a sense of selflessness because everything that individual was and did occurred at the direction of the organization. In order to maintain a sense of self, Goffman argued that individuals created secondary adjustments, or behavioral routines with means or ends not sanctioned by the institution. These may include make-dos, working the system, workable assignments, and free places (Gallacher 2005; Goffman 1961; Ingram 1982). Whether it be stealing food from the kitchen or lighting cigarettes by sparking electrical outlets, Goffman argued that these unsanctioned activities allowed an individual to develop a sense of "selfhood and personal autonomy beyond the grasp of the organization" (1961: 314). The collective set of secondary adjustments individuals made within a total institution constituted the underlife (Goffman 1961).

Although organizations such as nonresidential schools and camps do not fit Goffman's definition of a total institution, kids in schools and summer camps routinely create an underlife. Perhaps this is because schools and camps share some of the important characteristics of a total institution, including a bureaucratic structure which homogenizes people into groups for processing, a goal of transforming people (in this case into productive, educated adults), and a high degree of social control (Davies

1989). Because children are legally minors, their ability to voluntarily enter and exit schools and camps are severely curtailed (Davies 1989). High degrees of social control over children's movements and activities in these organizations generate a threat to kids' selfhood and autonomy that kids counter by developing an underlife.

The underlife in children's organizations includes a variety of secondary adjustments. Students have engaged in unauthorized means of avoiding unpleasant chores, such as pretending not to hear the teacher's directions or claiming one needs to go to the bathroom instead (Corsaro 2005). Despite teachers' instructions to share, be friends, and work things out, kids in preschools routinely achieved the unauthorized end of excluding other kids from their play (Corsaro 2005; van Ausdale and Feagin 2001). Students have used unsanctioned forms of word play, such as insulting phrases and bathroom humor, to undermine school goals such as demonstrating respect and obedience (Hadley 2003). At both the preschool and elementary school level, kids have resisted school edicts banning food and toys. Kids concealed toys in pockets, passed notes behind raised desktops and furtively shared food while the teacher's back was turned (Corsaro 2005; Thorne 1993). These practices were so well developed in elementary school that Thorne dubbed the flourishing trade in pencil toppers, potato chips and lip gloss "the underground economy of food and objects" (1993: 20). In both Goffman's (1961) *Asylums* and ethnographic investigations of schools, the underground economy of food and objects constituted a significant component of the underlife.

Within the underground economy, Goffman (1961) observed three important categories of economic arrangements. The first, *private coercion*, occurred when one patient expropriated another's resources without providing a rationale. For example, Goffman noted that a patient in a mental hospital used another patient as a seatkeeper, pushing that patient into the seat when he left and pushing the patient out when he returned without saying anything (1961: 264). Private coercion practices can include stealing, strong-arm techniques, and forced sexual submission. Although Goffman raised the question of how long such naked expropriation could continue without justification, he did not describe how residents of total institutions might resist private coercion. In the second category of economic arrangements, *economic exchanges*, two parties agree on terms before the transaction occurs and payment must be immediate. Should one party default on the transaction, the other can demand to be repaid. Economic exchanges include selling and trading (Goffman 1961). *Social exchanges*, such as gifting and sharing, are balanced transactions that demonstrate solidarity between the giver and the recipient. The giver provides food or an object in exchange for an unspecified payment, a future favor, or an affirmation of the relationship (Goffman 1961). Although Goffman (*ibidem*) presented these three forms of economic arrangements as discrete activities, he noted that economic interactions in the underlife could combine elements of all three.

Within the underground economies of schools, kids are active economic agents (Zelizer 2002) who produce, consume and distribute food, toys, clothing and money. Elementary school-aged kids (roughly ages six to eleven) circulate goods in the underground economy using two of the economic arrangements Goffman identified: social and economic exchanges (Chin 2001; Ferguson 2000; Katriel 1987; McGuffey and Rich 1999; Mishler 1979; Nukaga 2008; Thorne 2005). In elementary school lunchrooms and summer camps, kids engaged in social exchanges by freely gifting and sharing food (McGuffey and Rich 1999; Nukaga 2008; Thorne 1993, 2005). Gifting and sharing were more likely to occur between friends (Chin 2001; Thorne 2005), with gifting denoting stronger friendship ties and sharing marking weaker friendship ties (Nukaga 2008). Kids occasionally engaged in economic exchanges,

such as selling fruit for money on the playground or exchanging candy for the services of a "slave" (Ferguson 2000; Nukaga 2008). Trading is relatively rare within kids' underground economies and most often occurs between those who are not friends and who have unequal statuses within the peer culture (Chin 2001; Nukaga 2008; Thorne 2005). Examples of private coercion were not reported in these studies.

Because social exchanges like gifting and sharing were the most prevalent economic practices in lunchrooms, playgrounds and day camps, previous ethnographic work documented the ways that underground economies functioned to solidify relationships and affirm group membership. Kids marked the boundaries of their friendship groups by sharing food with some classmates and not others (Nukaga 2008; Thorne 1993, 2005). Through the proper execution of food sharing routines, Israeli kids communicated respect to and affirmed ties with their friends (Katriel 1987). By gifting food to friends who qualified for free school lunches, kids in a U.S. middle school demonstrated their concern for friends who might be embarrassed or stigmatized by their free lunch status (Kaplan 2000). Low-income kids have also used the underground economy in order to generate income (Ferguson 2000) which can be used to demonstrate affection and solidarity with family members (Chin 2001; Pugh 2004).

Previous research on kids' underground economies has four limitations which we attempt to address in this paper. First, the nascent literature on kids' underground economies has primarily examined the underlife in preschool and elementary school. We extend this literature by examining an underground economy at the middle school level. Second, investigations of the underground economy have not examined *sequences* of economic transactions. In part, this may be because investigations of kids' peer cultures have often mentioned, but rarely focused on, the underground economy. Some book-length works may mention the economic interactions between kids on just a few pages (Chin 2001; Ferguson 2000; Thorne 1993) while other research focuses on the wider context of the underground economy (Kaplan 2000; McGuffey and Rich 1999; Pugh 2004; Thorne 2005). The few articles which placed elementary school kids' food transactions at the center of the analysis (Katriel 1987; Mishler 1979; Nukaga 2008) have focused largely on documenting the structure of economic activities. Consequently, many of these transactions are analyzed as isolated events instead of interactions embedded within the evolving behavioral routines of kids' peer cultures. It remains to be seen how individuals within a peer culture employ multiple economic strategies, how kids resist unfavorable economic arrangements, and how the meanings of private coercion, social exchanges and economic exchanges may change over time.

Third, drawing on insights from interpretive reproduction (Corsaro 1992, 2005), we question whether kids' economic transactions primarily function to promote solidarity. In contrast to older, passive models of childhood socialization, interpretive reproduction stresses kids' active participation in society and their own socialization. As they build their own peer cultures, kids actively interpret information from adult cultures and reconfigure those norms, beliefs, ideas and behaviors to address their own values and concerns. In the process, Corsaro (*ibidem*) posits that children contribute to processes of cultural change and ultimately reproduce society. In line with interpretive reproduction (Corsaro *ibidem*), we view underground economies as one arena where kids could appropriate elements of adult social worlds and creatively refashion them to meet the needs of the peer culture. While previous research has documented the ways kids use the underground economy to establish

group membership and inclusion, it is possible that kids are using the underground economy to address other values and concerns as well.

Fourth, previous investigations of the underlife have examined how economic activities are fundamentally shaped either by gender, race or popularity, but few studies have considered how these statuses operate simultaneously in the underground economy. Within the underground economy of the mental hospital, Goffman observed that gender shaped income-generating activities: men engaged in car washing and waxing while women were rumored to engage in prostitution (1961: 267-269). In elementary school, gifting and sharing of objects stereotypically associated with one gender (e.g., toy trucks or lip gloss) were more likely to occur between kids of the same gender (Thorne 1993). Nukaga (2008) found that Korean American kids most often shared Korean foods such as udon noodles or Korean barbecue meat with other Korean American kids. At one summer camp, popular boys had first choice of other kids' lunch foods (McGuffey and Rich 1999). Analyses which focus primarily on one type of status are limited because they do not capture variation within groups. Indeed, intersectionality developed to address this limitation. Intersectional approaches stress understanding how multiple axes of power (gender, race, class, sexual orientation, age and so on) intersect to shape the social location of each group and its members (Collins 1998). Rather than examine economic actors within the summer camp as boys or girls, or as Latinos or whites, we use an intersectional approach to examine kids' gender, race, class, and popularity simultaneously.

Based on our observations of a summer camp, we contend that middle school kids who create secondary adjustments in order to maintain a sense of self separate from the one imposed by the formal organization are able to use multiple economic arrangements to address their own interests and concerns. The middle school students we studied creatively and flexibly drew on coercion, trading and sharing in order to solidify status hierarchies, threaten friendships and resist unfavorable arrangements. In contrast to Goffman's (1961) suggestion that social exchanges are used to demonstrate solidarity, we found that the meanings of economic arrangements varied according to their position within a sequence of economic interactions and the social context of the peer culture.

## **Researching the underground economy at camp**

To investigate the underground economy in a middle school peer culture, we conducted ethnographic research at a summer day camp in a small Texas city. In June and early July 2008, the Program for After School Success (PASS) camp offered middle school students enrichment activities from noon to six pm four days a week. Each day of camp, kids congregated in a public school classroom where they chatted and played video games until everyone had arrived. Then, the camp director described the day's field trip and activities. The PASS field trips included outings to a community pool, an arcade, museums, a mall, a library, an ice skating rink, and the movie theater. If the field trip took less than six hours, the camp director and her staff took the kids back to the public school and either let the kids play in the computer lab or supervised activities designed to foster civic engagement. Because the PASS camp offered kids large amounts of unstructured time in the computer labs and on field trips, it was an ideal site for observing the dynamics of a middle school peer culture.

Twenty-seven students from three different middle schools attended the PASS camp. In this area, middle schools served students in the sixth, seventh and eighth grades. The kids at camp were primarily from the earlier grades. There were ten sixth graders, fourteen seventh graders, and just three eighth graders. Eleven of the campers were boys and sixteen were girls. Seven (26%) of the students at camp were Latino/a and the remainder were white. Fifty-two percent of the students at the camp were on free or reduced lunch status, which we use as a crude measure of social class.<sup>2</sup> During the 2005-2006 school year, 36% of the students in this school district were racial and ethnic minorities and 35% were economically disadvantaged students. Compared to the school district as a whole, the PASS camp enrolled a smaller percentage of racial and ethnic minorities and a higher percentage of economically disadvantaged students.

In order to observe how the kids organized their peer culture, two female ethnographers entered the field and attempted to become quiet and marginal members of the peer culture (Eder, Evans and Parker 1995). The first author was a 36-year-old white college professor and the second author was a 21-year-old Asian American undergraduate. On the first and second day of camp, the camp director asked the college professor to describe the research project to the kids. The first author stated that she and the second author were from the local university and planned to write a paper about what it was like to be a kid at PASS. Most kids were excited that we were going to write about their experiences. We obtained parental consent for twenty-three of the twenty-seven kids and all three of the high school students who volunteered as camp staff. We obtained consent from the adults at a pre-camp staff meeting.

Both ethnographers participated in camp activities with the kids. We avoided sitting at the "adults' table" with the camp director and her staff. By the end of the first week at camp, both ethnographers had been accepted into the peer culture at the camp as marginal members. The kids demonstrated their acceptance of us into the peer culture when they broke rules in front of us by cussing, switching seats while the bus was moving, and streaming explicit music videos in the computer lab (Corsaro 2005; Eder, Evans and Parker 1995). They also included us in their groups by saving bus seats for us, sharing food and stickers, and inviting us to join their conversations. Accepting their invitations to sit and talk allowed us to move between different friendship groups within the peer culture and observe all of the kids at the camp. The first author primarily observed the girls' groups and the second author spent much of her time with the boys' groups.

While it was impossible for either ethnographer to fully abandon her adult status within the camp, both ethnographers were able to construct field roles which minimized our adult power and authority (Best 2007; Mandell 1988). PASS campers clearly understood that we were not regular adults. Within the camp, we had very little authority and campers recognized that we did not discipline kids for rule infractions. For example, after Angelica cussed repeatedly in front of the second author, "Angelica turned around, looked in my direction, and then told Nathan that she cussed in front of me. Nathan said that everyone had already cussed in front of me all day and it was alright" (Second author's fieldnotes, 06/10/08). The only adult authority we had was the ability to escort the kids somewhere when the camp director instructed us to do so, though this authority did not transform us into full-fledged adults. Throughout the summer, kids referred to us as "friends" rather than "teachers." Minimizing our adult status helped us develop rapport with the kids and gain access to their peer culture.

While in the field, we tried to take jottings unobtrusively whenever possible. After exiting the field each day, we used our jottings to write full and detailed field notes. In addition, we used small digital recorders to record samples of kids' conversations. Although the quality of these recordings rarely allowed for full transcription, these recordings functioned as audio jottings which helped us to expand our field notes. Each week, we met to compare field notes and to discuss the salient features of the peer culture. Before data analysis began, we replaced names with pseudonyms and changed identifying information. Following the procedures outlined by Emerson, Fretz and Shaw (1995), we analyzed our data by identifying emergent themes, coding fieldnotes, and writing analytic memos. We identified food and money as two main concerns in the peer culture and focused our analyses on how the youth at camp structured their underground economy.

### **The quest for food and the underground economy**

All of the kids at the camp shared a quest for food. At the start of each day, the kids had the option of eating a school lunch. As in Chin's (2001) study, few kids found the school lunches appetizing and most kids went to the lunchroom primarily to visit with friends. With the exception of a few special days when the camp had a cookout, the camp provided only a small snack sometime between 12:30 and 4:00 pm. This snack usually consisted of chips, cookies or a granola bar coupled with a juice box.<sup>3</sup> Because the school lunches were unappetizing and the snacks were fairly small, kids at the camp were often hungry. Campers spent a great deal of time seeking access to food or looking for money with which to purchase food. Because food and money were rare and valued within the peer culture, the kids generated an organized underground economy to govern their distribution.

Unlike previous studies of the underlife in elementary school, the most common economic arrangements in the middle school camp were private coercion and social exchanges. Economic exchanges were rare, although kids did discuss trades and loans to be repaid. In order to demonstrate how the meanings of these economic transactions shifted according to context, we present two series of economic interactions. The first sequence of economic interactions illuminated how one kid, Kate, simultaneously juggled three different economic interactions. The second was a series of economic interactions that occurred over the course of three weeks between Angelica and the highest-status group of boys. By analyzing these sequences, we reveal how kids manipulate, respond to and resist unfavorable economic arrangements as they address their own concerns and values.

#### ***Kate and the Peanuts***

Throughout the summer the camp director, Mrs. Levinson, encouraged the kids to share their food and drink, to be kind to one another, and to respect each other. On several occasions, we observed Mrs. Levinson lecturing kids who had denigrated, hit or humiliated each other. We observed several episodes where kids shared food while insulting each other and engaging in power plays. Although the director encouraged sharing, she discouraged sharing that occurred within a context of insults and domination. Consequently, one set of secondary adjustments kids made was to exchange food and insults out of sight of the camp director. Such sharing episodes became a part of the underground economy.

Within the underground economy, we observed kids in group situations deftly handling multiple economic arrangements simultaneously. Not only were kids able to multitask by fending off coercion while negotiating the terms of a trade, kids were also able to convert one type of economic interaction into another after the fact. To illustrate the alacrity with which kids could switch between economic arrangements, we focus on a series of interactions centered around Kate. Within the space of thirty minutes, Kate deftly handled and converted multiple economic arrangements in order to address her own interests and concerns.

Kate (white, regular lunch) was one of the few kids at the camp who had money every day. Her money came from birthday gifts and an allowance. Toward the end of the summer, the camp took a field trip to a history museum. Because no one expected there to be opportunities to purchase food, few of the kids had brought money. Late in the afternoon, the kids congregated outside the snack bar at the museum. Several stated they were starving and bemoaned their lack of money. Kate had used her money to purchase a bag of peanuts, which she pulled out of her purse and began eating. Immediately, Mackenzie, Paige, Chase and Josh besieged Kate with requests to share her peanuts. In order to stave them off and maintain control over her peanuts, Kate employed and responded to a variety of economic arrangements.

Kate's relationships with Mackenzie, Paige, Chase and Josh set the stage for how Kate responded to their multiple requests for peanuts. Kate and Mackenzie were good friends during the school year and the two girls spent the first few weeks of camp hanging out together. During the third week of camp, Mackenzie left to go on a family vacation. Left alone, Kate started to spend time with Paige, whose friends had also recently stopped attending camp. Although Kate and Paige spent several days together, they did not become good friends. Kate also spent much of her time at camp arguing with her cousin Josh and fighting with Chase, a boy whom she had known since elementary school and with whom she had a sibling-like relationship.

On the day of the museum trip, Mackenzie returned to camp to find that Kate and Paige had started to spend time together. Mackenzie and Paige did not know each other, but both spent time with Kate that day. During free time at the museum, the three girls sat near each other on a bench. Mackenzie (white, free lunch) said she was hungry and started counting her change to see if she had the 92 cents needed to buy a candy bar. When Mackenzie announced that she had 46 cents, Kate suddenly decided to claim Mackenzie's money. Confused, Mackenzie pointed out that Kate had gifted her the money earlier that day.

**Excerpt 1: 6/26/08, first author's recording and fieldnotes**

Kate: Hey, you owe me the rest of my money.  
Mackenzie: Okay, but I owe you a dime and two cents.  
Kate: You owe me. You can keep the dime but I gave you a dollar.  
Mackenzie: You said I didn't owe you back it.  
Kate: No, I said that I didn't, that you didn't owe me back. You owe me back! Stop! (directed at Chase who was grabbing peanuts).  
Mackenzie: (held out hand to Kate for peanuts)  
Kate: NO. I don't feed poor people. (Mackenzie punched Kate and then Kate slapped Mackenzie).

It was no accident that this negotiation occurred on the first day Mackenzie returned to camp after several days absence. Kate refused Mackenzie's request to share by converting a previous gift into an economic transaction on which Mackenzie had



defaulted. Because economic exchanges usually occur between non-friends (Nukaga 2008), converting a previous gift into a trade is a method for both refusing the request and threatening to deny the friendship. It is possible that Kate lashed out because she was angry that Mackenzie had left her alone at camp the past few days. Mackenzie was dismayed by Kate's refusal and immediately protested the terms of Kate's economic arrangement. Mackenzie tried to reestablish the original terms of the exchange and the friendship by observing that the earlier transaction had been a gift because Kate did not specify the need for repayment. Although Kate agreed that she initially told Mackenzie there was no need for repayment, Kate tried to change the terms by stating that now "you owe me back". After Kate was distracted by Chase's successful attempt to steal her peanuts and throw them off a balcony, Mackenzie mutely asked again for peanuts and Kate responded with a vehement denial that she did not feed poor people. By pointing to the difference in their class statuses, Kate converted Mackenzie's request for a gift from a friend into a petition for a charitable handout. As she did so, Kate again made it clear that she did not consider Mackenzie a friend of equal status but instead that she was a person of lower status who could be treated without respect. Such interactions may contribute to the hidden injuries of class (Sennett and Cobb 1972) inflicted in childhood.

Stung by Kate's refusal, Mackenzie then tried to turn the tables on Kate and convert an earlier gift of her own into an economic exchange on which Kate had defaulted.

**Excerpt 2: 6/26/08, first author's recording and fieldnotes**

Mackenzie: Kate! You owe me. Kate! You owe me. Peanut. Two.  
Kate: How do I owe you a peanut?  
Mackenzie: You actually owe me two.  
Kate: No, I don't.  
Mackenzie: Because I gave you two candies this morning.  
Kate: You just gave 'em to me. You didn't say I had to pay it back.  
Mackenzie: You didn't say I had to pay you the money back.  
Kate: Yeah I did. I said--  
Mackenzie: Kate, you said, here you can have it, but don't, you don't have to pay me back.

When Mackenzie turned the tables on Kate, Kate reacted by using the same counter Mackenzie had. Kate asserted that Mackenzie did not insist on repayment at the time she gifted Kate the candy. Once Mackenzie realized her tactic had prompted Kate to feel dismay, Mackenzie returned to the earlier argument about the money Kate had lent her. Kate and Mackenzie began to revisit this argument, making the same points each had made earlier. Before they could renegotiate the terms of the transactions and their friendship, several kids returned to the benches and pulled Kate and Mackenzie into separate conversations.

Although Goffman's (1961) original definition of a social exchange suggested that gifting and sharing could demonstrate solidarity, the context of a social exchange in middle school can change that meaning. On this day, Kate distributed her peanuts in a way that threatened, rather than demonstrated, solidarity. First, Kate refused to share peanuts with Mackenzie by converting an earlier gift into a loan which needed repayment; by doing so, Kate threatened to treat Mackenzie like an unequal acquaintance rather than a friend. Then, Kate shared peanuts with Paige (white, free lunch) in a way that emphasized Paige's hunger, desperation and weight.

**Excerpt 3: 6/26/08, first author's fieldnotes**

Paige begged for a peanut and said she was starving. Kate said there were starving people in China and Africa, that Paige wasn't starving, and if she was she'd be like people in Africa. Paige asked again for a peanut. Kate threw a peanut toward Paige and it landed on the floor. Paige picked it up and ate it. Kate said 'You licked it off the floor, you pig.' Paige asked for another one. Kate said no. Kate said 'I swear you're just like kids.' Paige asked who. Kate said 'Alyssa, Mackenzie, everyone who was just over there buying candy, and YOU.' Paige said 'Why me?' Kate said 'You just took a peanut off the floor and ate it.' Paige laughed. Kate said 'Here, have a peanut' and threw another one. The peanut went on the floor at the other end of the bench. Paige laid down and asked 'Where'd it go?' Kate said it was the white speck on the floor. Paige reached for a wadded up straw wrapper. Kate said not that one, the other one. Paige said 'Oh.' Paige found the peanut and ate it.

Although this was not a social exchange, it was a gifting of sorts. Although Kate derived enjoyment from her "gifting" of the peanuts, there is little solidarity expressed by forcing Paige to eat food off the ground and crawl around under the benches. Nor is there a balanced exchange here. Kate clearly retains the upper hand, berating Paige for her use of the word starving, calling her childish and naming her a pig. Kate's actions are reminiscent of Goffman's description of interactions that combined elements of social exchanges, economic exchanges, and private coercion in which the recipient was humbled (1961: 297). In the context of the evolving friendships, Kate's actions take on additional meaning. Paige had been a convenient friend while Mackenzie was unavailable. Once Mackenzie returned, Kate tried to drive Paige away and return her to a non-friend status by throwing food on the floor for her to eat and calling her a pig.

After Kate taunted Mackenzie by converting a previous gift into an unpaid loan, and after Kate had mocked Paige by "gifting" in a demeaning way, Chase (white, regular lunch) and Josh (white, regular lunch) again asked for peanuts to eat.

**Excerpt 4: 6/26/08, first author's fieldnotes**

Chase and Josh asked for more peanuts. Kate said 'Ha, you don't get any, meanies.' Chase said he already got some. Josh said 'We don't need to get anything. We could just steal it from you.' Kate said 'Yeah right.' Kate said she would put the peanuts in her purse and the purse was going to be behind her on the bus.

When Kate refused the boys' request to share, they simply responded that they could use private coercion to get the peanuts away from Kate. Chase even pointed out that he had stolen some peanuts earlier. To some extent, this demonstrated a sense of entitlement and white male privilege. Chase and Josh were aware that coercion was an acceptable means for white boys to access girls' resources (see below). Kate responded by saying that she would hide the peanuts where the boys could not steal them. Kate did indeed hide her peanuts in her purse for the bus ride home and the boys did not have an opportunity to steal her peanuts. Chase and Josh continued to interact with Kate in friendly ways during the bus ride home.

Within this one sequence, Kate demonstrated an amazing ability to protect her resources and to use multiple economic arrangements to affirm and deny friendships. With a friend, Kate was able to convert a previous social exchange into an economic exchange; this allowed her to express her resentment at being abandoned as well as to conserve her resources. With a temporary friend of lower status, Kate was able to

"share" in a way that emphasized her distance from and superiority over Paige. With the boys, Kate was able to protest their threatened theft and then hide her food when the boys threatened private coercion.

Kate's use of multiple economic arrangements was not unusual within the camp. Throughout the summer, we saw white and Latina girls refusing requests to share by claiming that another girl had "jacked" or stolen her food earlier. The girl requesting to share almost always immediately protested that the earlier transaction had been a gift. It was also not unusual to see white girls "gifting" in ways that demonstrated hierarchical relationships rather than solidarity. Throughout the summer, white girls handed out cruel comments about each other's bodies, behaviors, and possessions alongside gifts of food and money. Latina girls also engaged in this behavior but did so less often than the white girls; in addition, Latinas were more likely to target white girls than other Latinas. Like Kate, other girls on regular lunch status were able to share food in ways that emphasized the poverty and hunger experienced by girls on free and reduced lunch status. Because girls alternated between gifting freely, refusing requests to share, and offering food with cruel comments attached, it was critical to examine their economic arrangements in the context of evolving friendships in order to understand why girls chose a particular strategy at any given moment. As they wielded and responded to a shifting array of economic arrangements, white middle-class, white working-class, and Latina working-class girls recreated inequalities within the camp's peer culture.

### ***Angelica and the Energy drinks***

Within the underground economy at the camp, some foods were valued more than others. Both girls and boys craved energy drinks. There are several different energy drinks, although kids at this camp preferred Energy drinks. When Paige (white, free lunch) told Alyssa (white, reduced lunch), "I would so DIE for a Energy drink" (first author's fieldnotes, 06/24/08), she illustrated the high value kids placed on energy drinks. Energy drinks contain high levels of sugar, caffeine and herbal stimulants such as ginseng and guarana (Griffith 2008). It is possible that kids valued the energy drinks because caffeine is a short-term appetite suppressant and consuming energy drinks helped them to quash their hunger. More importantly, the energy drinks were appealing because they were taboo items. Some kids stated that their parents had prohibited energy drinks. During the first two weeks of camp, the camp director made disparaging comments about the energy drinks to the kids. By the third week of camp, the camp director and the high school volunteers outright banned the energy drinks. During field trips, the high school volunteers sat just outside snack bars and vending machine areas monitoring campers' purchases to make sure that no one bought energy drinks. Purchasing and consuming the forbidden energy drinks were another set of secondary adjustments that kids made.

As a highly valued and taboo commodity, energy drinks occupied a central place in the camp's underlife. Both girls and boys yearned for the energy drinks, but it was primarily girls with free and reduced lunch status who brought cans of Energy drinks to camp and who purchased energy drinks while on field trips. The highest status boy, Connor, and his friends worked very hard to divest the girls of their Energy drinks and the cash which could be used to purchase the drinks. Connor's high status derived from his race, class, grade and physical appearance. Connor was white, lived in a middle-class neighborhood and paid full price for school lunches. In addition, the girls quickly deemed the seventh grader the most attractive boy in the

camp. Connor's best friend was Chase (white, regular lunch). Throughout the camp, Connor and Chase regularly interacted with a small group of boys including Max (Latino, free lunch) and a few other white boys on both free and regular lunch. Although Connor appeared to be middle-class, he never brought his own money or food to camp. Instead, Connor and his friends used private coercion to expropriate Energy drinks from Mackenzie (white, free lunch), Faith (white, reduced lunch) and Angelica (Latina, free lunch).

**Week 1: The provision of Energy drinks.** Although three girls provided Connor and his friends with food and money, Angelica proved to be the most reliable source of Energy drinks for the boys. Each day during the first week of camp, we observed Angelica enter the classroom, walk up to Connor, silently pull a can of Energy drink from her purse and hand it to him. Then Angelica walked over to her female friends to sit and talk. Angelica's silent offering might be construed as gifting, except that these economic interactions demonstrated little in the way of solidarity or balance. Angelica did not appear to gain access to the boys' group either as a friend or dating partner which suggests that this gifting did not affirm a relationship between Angelica and the boys. Also, Angelica did not verbally request a future favor in return.<sup>4</sup> Consequently, we argue that Connor's repeated demands for Energy drinks constituted a form of private coercion because Connor provided no rationale for his expropriation of Angelica's resources.

**Week 2: The beginning of resistance.** As Angelica's supply of Energy drink dwindled during the second week of camp, Angelica began to resist Connor's private coercion. Angelica used five resistance strategies: partially consuming the resources herself, pretending to forget her promises, placation, hiding her resources, and suggesting Connor share with his friends. These strategies had varying degrees of success. We consider a strategy unsuccessful when Angelica was forced to hand over the Energy drink. Sometimes Angelica was able to keep the drink, but only by enduring the boys' continued attempts to coerce the drink from her and/or by listening to the boys' critiques, insults, and verbal harassment; we consider this outcome partially successful. Angelica's resistance was completely successful when she was able to keep her Energy drink and did not experience any negative reactions from a boy.

When Angelica began to resist the boys' efforts to expropriate her Energy drinks, her first strategy was to make the Energy drink seem less appealing. Rather than entering the classroom with an unopened can and offering it to Connor, the second week of camp Angelica entered the classroom with an open and partially consumed can of Energy drink.

**Excerpt 5: 6/18/08, second author's fieldnotes**

Connor and Chase turned around while they were playing the game. Connor asked where his was. Angelica said, 'Whoops, my bad.' Angelica said that she would try to buy one for Connor at the library today. Chase asked if he could have the one in Angelica's hand. Connor got up from his seat and reached for the Energy drink. Angelica pulled it away and said that this one was hers.

Angelica's resistance strategies are partially successful. In general, once food is touched by another's hands or partially consumed, it is less appealing; the presence of another child's saliva can "contaminate" food or drink (Nukaga 2008; Turner 2003). However, as Nukaga (2008) observed, close friends sometimes find it acceptable to share drinks, food and utensils even when saliva may be present. By partially consuming the Energy drink, Angelica marked the drink with her saliva and

successfully made that particular can less appealing to Connor. Connor made it clear that he wanted a pristine, unopened Energy drink by asking where his was. Angelica employed additional strategies of forgetfulness and placation, claiming that she forgot Connor's Energy drink and offering to purchase him one on the field trip. Connor rejected this placation attempt by reinitiating private coercion: he tried to grab Angelica's drink out of her hand. Chase, who has less status than Connor, also attempted a form of private coercion in which he asked for Angelica's Energy drink without providing a rationale. Angelica simply ignored him. In the end, Angelica's resistance was partially successful because she was able to reserve her Energy drink for her own consumption, but only at the cost of continued coercion attempts.

In response to Angelica's new strategies of resistance, the boys increased their coercion efforts. Angelica, in turn, added to her repertoire of strategies for protecting her Energy drinks. The next day, Angelica again used the strategy of carrying a Energy drink which was open and partially consumed.

**Excerpt 6: 6/19/08, second author's fieldnotes**

Connor saw the Energy drink, walked up to Angelica and asked where his was. Angelica said oops. Chase said that Angelica had short term memory loss. Angelica laughed. Angelica said that the energy drink she had was nasty and asked Connor if he wanted it. Connor said sure. Max said that he wanted some too. Angelica told Connor that he should share the drink with Max. Connor said no and Connor went back to his seat in front of Guitar Hero. Angelica gave the drink to Max. Then Angelica then pulled out an unopened Energy drink from her purse and popped it open.

When Connor saw Angelica drinking "his" Energy drink, he immediately contested her ownership of the Energy drink. Angelica successfully fooled him into thinking that she had forgotten his Energy drink. She then prevented Connor from drinking any of the opened Energy drink by asking him to share it with Max. Max, a Latino sixth grader eligible for free lunch, was of lower status than Connor within the camp. The day before, the combination of partially consuming the Energy drink and pretending to forget resulted in Connor's attempt to physically swipe the Energy drink. Adding a suggestion to share with a lower-status boy made Angelica's resistance more potent. Rather than stealing her Energy drink, Connor walked away. In addition, Angelica resisted the boys' private coercion by hiding her resources. After she gave the partially consumed Energy drink to Max, Angelica revealed a second, unopened Energy drink in her purse. Because Chase and Max had proven willing to drink open Energy drinks before, Angelica drank this Energy drink when the boys could not see her. When the camp director told the kids to board the bus, Angelica frantically searched for a place to hide the open Energy drink.

**Excerpt 7: 6/19/08, first author's fieldnotes**

Angelica was the last one in the classroom. She ran up to me holding her Energy drink and asked me where to put it so the other kids wouldn't steal it. I suggested in a desk. Angelica put it in a desk and walked out.

When we returned from the field trip that day, Angelica immediately ran to the desk, pulled out her Energy drink and guzzled it triumphantly.

During this second week, Angelica brought four Energy drinks to camp. Of these four Energy drinks, Angelica managed to reserve two completely for herself and only gave away two partially consumed Energy drinks (one to Chase and one to Max). Angelica's strategies included partially consuming Energy drinks, pretending to forget her promises to bring Energy drinks, and offering to buy Energy drinks at

a later date. While these strategies prompted additional attempts at coercion, her most successful strategies were hiding Energy drinks and countering one economic arrangement by suggesting a second, inappropriate arrangement. Hiding was a successful strategy because the boys did not attempt to steal Energy drinks they did not know existed. Manipulating the rules of a social exchange also proved effective. When Angelica suggested Connor share with Max, she put Connor in an untenable position. Because Connor had no desire to demonstrate solidarity with a lower status boy, he simply walked away. Angelica's resistance strategies were so successful that Connor was unable to divest her of any Energy drinks during the second week of camp. He was, however, receiving Energy drinks from other girls on free and reduced lunch status that week.

**Week 3: A tangle of economic arrangements.** Angelica's successful resistance of Connor's private coercion was somewhat short-lived. On the fifth day that Angelica refused to provide Connor with Energy drinks, the boys increased their private coercion attempts. When Angelica walked into the meeting room with no Energy drink, Connor immediately approached her.

**Excerpt 8: 6/23/08, first author's fieldnotes**

Connor asked Angelica, 'Where's my Energy drink?' Angelica said she did not bring one for him, and that he needed to call and remind her on Sunday night. Connor walked back across the classroom.

Angelica drew on a strategy she had used the previous week and claimed that she had simply forgotten Connor's Energy drink. She elaborated on this strategy by suggesting that Connor had a responsibility to remind her. However, this week Angelica's resistance was not as successful. A few minutes later, Connor and his friends approached Angelica again to demand their Energy drinks. This time, the boys escalated their coercion efforts to include scrutiny, judgment and ridicule.

**Excerpt 9: 6/23/08, second author's fieldnotes**

Connor asked how much caffeine Angelica had today already. Angelica said not much and that she had a Energy drink and Mountain Dew. Chase said that was a lot of caffeine already and Angelica said, 'No, it's not.' Connor asked where his Energy drink was. Angelica said she forgot. Chase said that Angelica always forgot. Angelica said she really did this time because she was over at Kate's house this morning and did not have a chance to grab a Energy drink for Connor because she didn't get it before she left to go to Kate's house. Chase and Connor sarcastically said 'Sure.'

After Angelica resisted the boys' attempts at private coercion by claiming forgetfulness, the boys approached her in a group, scrutinized her caffeine intake, judged her for having too much caffeine, and insisted that she provide Energy drinks for them. When Angelica protested again that she had simply forgotten, the boys mocked her. Scrutiny, judgment and mockery augmented the boys' demand for more Energy drinks. The boys' strategies were successful because the next day Angelica walked into the meeting room holding another open, partially consumed Energy drink. Connor immediately grabbed the Energy drink out of Angelica's hand. While Angelica yelled at Connor and told him not to finish it, Connor gulped the remainder of the drink before handing the empty can back to Angelica (6/24/08, first author's fieldnotes).

Once Angelica had demonstrated that she would comply with Connor's coercion efforts, Connor and his friends began to use other economic arrangements. Initially, Connor responded to Angelica's newfound compliance by sharing with her.

**Excerpt 10: 6/25/08, second author's fieldnotes**

Angelica came in and stood at the side of the room. Connor went up to Angelica. Angelica handed Connor an unopened Energy drink. Connor took it and went back to sit near the Guitar Hero game. Connor popped the tab of the drink and took a few gulps and then walked over back to Angelica and gave the drink back to her.

At first glance, it seemed as if Connor was willing to reward Angelica for her silent compliance by turning the event into a social exchange, demonstrating solidarity and perhaps even friendship with her. Indeed, were we to analyze this economic interaction as an isolated event, interpreting this as a social exchange would seem reasonable. Put in the context of subsequent interactions, this apparent social exchange fades into a facade of magnanimous generosity. After the camp had been called to order and kids boarded the bus for the day's field trip, Connor began to wish he had consumed a full Energy drink. On the bus, Connor sat up so that he could see over the seats and began to talk to the other boys.

**Excerpt 11: 6/25/08, second author's fieldnotes**

Connor said that he wanted some more Energy drink. Angelica turned in her seat and told Connor that he had already drank half of her Energy drink. Connor said that the Energy drink that he got from Angelica earlier was warm and that was nasty. Connor asked a group of boys 'Hey guys, have you ever had a warm Energy drink?' No one responded. Connor said into the silence, 'That's right. You shouldn't because they're nasty.' Connor said that Energy drinks were his favorite. Angelica said that she was out of Energy drink and that she would have to go to the store and buy some more.

On this day, Connor initially used sharing to gain access to Angelica's resources. It is possible that Connor was dissatisfied with sharing part of a Energy drink because that was what the lower-status boys in his friendship circle did to gain access to Angelica's Energy drinks. After one brief sharing episode, Connor reverted to coercion to extract more Energy drink. Connor used public humiliation and shaming to extract Angelica's promise of future Energy drinks that would not have to be shared.

While Connor returned to private coercion after briefly using the social exchange of sharing, Connor's friends moved toward making trades in order to obtain the Energy drinks.

**Excerpt 12: 6/25/08, second author's fieldnotes**

Chase was giving Angelica his hoodie. I walked by and asked what was going on and Chase said that he was giving Angelica his hoodie because she was going to buy him a Energy drink before we left the library.

Chase's hoodie had become a highly valued object within the peer culture the day the camp went ice skating. Most of the kids at the camp had worn shorts and shivered through the four hours at the ice rink. The warmth Chase's hoodie provided was highly sought after that day, and kids took turns wearing the hoodie. Since that day, even when the kids were outside in the Texas heat, kids vied to wear or carry Chase's hoodie. Consequently, Chase was able to make a trade with Angelica: he would lend her his hoodie and in exchange she would purchase an energy drink for him later.

It is important to point out that Angelica was not the only girl providing Connor and his friends with energy drinks. Nor was Angelica the only girl at camp to experience this mix of coercion, sharing and trading. Because of space limitations, we chose to describe the detailed series of interactions centering around Angelica in order to reveal how the economic arrangements unfolded over a period of time and in relation to previous interactions in the underground economy. Within this peer culture, only the highest status boy in this camp, Connor, was able to practice the purest form of coercion by simply taking unopened Energy drinks and demanding more. Connor's friends, who are not themselves of the highest status, are willing to settle for sharing opened and partially consumed Energy drinks and trading for other drinks. Asking the highest-status boy to use a strategy commonly employed by lower-status boys was an effective means of resistance because it led to a temporary cessation of coercion. When the highest-status boy briefly used sharing after a girl had renewed her compliance with his coercion efforts, he immediately returned to public mockery as a means of coercing more Energy drinks from her. These patterns add to the findings in the previous literature that sharing occurs among equal status friends and trading among non-friends of unequal status. We find that in this middle school camp, status is linked to the kinds of economic arrangements employed, with the highest status white boy primarily using private coercion to extract drinks from a lower status girl. Boys in the next status tier, however, were willing to use coercion, accept gifts and trade. Notably, although white boys in the camp would steal from the girls, Latino boys never resorted to stealing. Common behavioral routines in which high-status, middle-class white boys coerce food and money from white and Latina working-class girls widen economic disparities and recreate gender, race and class inequalities within the peer culture.

## Discussion

At the summer camp we studied, middle school kids organized an underground economy governing the distribution of food and money which reflected and recreated status hierarchies. Examining race or gender in isolation could not explain which kids participated in specific economic interactions; for example, it would be inaccurate to say that boys practiced private coercion when it was *specific* boys who coerced energy drinks from *particular* girls. Using an intersectional approach (Collins 1998), we noted that middle-class white girls were able to distribute food in ways that emphasized the poverty and hunger experienced by white and Latina girls on free and reduced lunch status. Because there were no Latinas on regular lunch status in the camp, we were unable to observe whether middle-class Latinas also inflicted hidden injuries of class. Both white and Latina girls expressed dissatisfaction with their friends by converting previous sharing episodes into unpaid loans and sharing food in humiliating ways, although Latinas were more likely to do so with their white friends than their Latina friends. White, middle-class, popular boys often used private coercion to obtain food or energy drinks. The targets of their coercion attempts were white and Latina girls on free and reduced lunch status. Although white boys occasionally attempted to steal food and money from white girls on regular lunch status, middle-class white girls were more adept at preserving resources for their own use. Latino boys at the camp practiced coercion by asking girls for food and drink without providing a rationale, but we never once observed the Latino boys stealing. These routine economic transactions were patterned along gender, race, popularity



and class lines. As kids circulated food and money using these practices, they reinforced status distinctions within the peer culture.

This study makes four contributions to the nascent literature on children's underground economies and Goffman's (1961) analyses of economic exchanges. First, we extend previous research on underground economies in preschool and elementary school by examining economic transactions in a middle school peer culture. As in previous studies conducted in elementary schools, we found that middle school kids engaged in social exchanges like gifting and sharing with friends and that economic exchanges were rare. Consistent with previous research, the few trades we observed occurred between kids who were not friends and who occupied different statuses. In contrast to prior research, we found that private coercion played a much larger role in this middle school underground economy. Although we cannot be certain, we speculate that private coercion attempts may have been more prevalent because the disparity in monetary resources was greater in this middle school setting than in elementary school. Some middle school kids had access to larger sums of money than they did in elementary school because they had begun to work informally; some of the kids at the camp reported working paper routes, babysitting, and doing yard work for neighbors. The greater resources some kids brought to camp and the higher costs of food at field trip sites (often four or five dollars for a small snack) combined to create a situation of obvious inequality. Faced with conspicuous monetary disparities, a kid who is hungry for six hours may be more likely to view private coercion as a viable method for gaining access to food.

Second, because private coercion played such a large role in the peer culture, we were able to add to Goffman's (1961) analyses of the underground economy by analyzing how individuals resist unfavorable economic arrangements. Girls used several strategies to resist the boys' private coercion efforts including hiding their resources, making food less desirable by partially consuming it, pretending to forget food items at home, and placating boys by offering to bring food another day. These strategies proved to be only partially successful and boys continued to coerce girls into providing them with food, money and energy drinks. It was notable that working-class girls did not simply refuse boys' requests. Middle-class girls were more likely to issue clear refusals, but even they had to reinforce their refusals with other resistance strategies such as hiding their resources. Unfavorable arrangements in the underground economy of middle school provided an eerie preview of the sexual economy of high school. In high school, the compulsive heterosexuality boys enact emphasizes their ability to engage in sexual behavior with multiple girls and to overcome any resistance the girls may exhibit (Pascoe 2007). Working-class high school girls are more likely to find it difficult to resist boys' sexual advances while middle-class girls are more likely to develop a sense of control over their bodies and exert sexual agency (Martin 1996; Thompson 1994, 1995). As interpretive reproduction suggests (Corsaro 1992, 2005), kids bring knowledge and skills from one peer culture with them into the next; coercion and resistance dynamics practiced in the underground economy of middle school may pave the way for the sexual economy in the high school peer culture.

Third, we furthered Goffman's (1961) theorizing on the underground economy by highlighting the importance of analyzing *sequences* of economic transactions and individuals' responses instead of isolated transactions. Our analyses revealed that the most potent and intriguing forms of resistance occurred when kids countered one economic arrangement with another. For example, one of the most successful strategies for resisting private coercion attempts was to suggest an inappropriate social exchange. By manipulating the unwritten rules of a social exchange, girls were

able to counter unfavorable economic arrangements (such as the forced expropriation of an energy drink) with the suggestion that a high status boy then use the energy drink to demonstrate solidarity with a lower status boy. Between girls, when one friend wanted to deny a request to share food, she could simply convert a previous social exchange into an economic exchange on which her friend had defaulted. To protest this unfavorable denial of a request, girls would counter by converting a previous gift of their own into an unpaid loan.

Finally, we extend both Goffman's (1961) arguments about the functions of economic transactions and the literature on children's underground economies by examining economic interactions within the context of the peer culture. Although Goffman (*ibidem*) and ethnographers of children's peer cultures (Chin 2001; Nukaga 2008; Thorne 2005) suggested that social exchanges demonstrated solidarity between friends, we found that they could also function as forms of resistance, rewards for compliance with coercion efforts, threats to friendship, or a means of reinforcing hierarchy. Our results indicate that economic exchanges in the underground economy might have multiple functions and that the function of each exchange depends upon the current state of relationships in the peer culture. In sum, our analyses suggest that Goffman's (1961) typology of economic arrangements can provide greater insights into the recreation of inequality in kids' peer cultures if 1) economic interactions are examined as part of a sequence rather than as isolated events; 2) responses to economic arrangements are analyzed as part of the sequence; and 3) economic arrangements and resistance strategies are placed in the context of unfolding friendships and relationships.

Taken together, our results demonstrate that kids in one camp used the underground economy to interpretively reproduce and resist inequalities within their peer culture. However, the limitations of our study demand that our conclusions be approached with caution. Although we were present for the entire summer camp, the camp itself was of fairly short duration. It is entirely possible that common sequences of economic exchanges, their functions and effective forms of resistance would develop in new and unexpected ways had the peer culture lasted longer. In addition, only white and Latino kids attended the summer camp while the middle school population included white, Latino, Black, Middle Eastern, Asian and indigenous kids. The underground economy might change in significant ways within the context of a multi-racial peer culture. In order to better understand how underground economies recreate and disrupt status hierarchies, future research on children's underground economies needs to examine sequences of economic transactions in multi-racial peer cultures that are longer in duration. Such research might also identify the most common sequences of sharing, trading and coercion, facilitate comparisons with typical sequences in adults' underground economies, and further our understanding of how such sequences recreate inequalities across the lifespan.

Middle school kids created an underlife at camp which allowed them to develop a sense of self separate from the tolerant, egalitarian self espoused by the camp director. Consistent with interpretive reproduction (Corsaro 1992, 2005), we argue that kids used economic arrangements in the camp to address their own interests and concerns and to reproduce the wider social world. As kids addressed their own desire to obtain taboo food items, express displeasure about friends' abandonment, or end a temporary friendship, their economic transactions reproduced larger gender, race, and class dynamics in their own peer culture. By developing a greater understanding of how kids' economic practices recreate inequality, teachers, camp directors and concerned adults will be better prepared to whet kids' appetites for both food and equality.

## Endnotes

1. We follow Thorne's (1993) practice of referring to middle schoolers by the term that they most often used themselves, kids, in order to maintain a side-by-side rather than a top-down approach to the summer camp.
2. In this school district, kids are eligible for free lunch if the family income is less than 130% of the federal poverty guidelines and reduced lunch if the family income is less than 185% of the federal poverty guidelines. In the 2007-2008 school year, a family of four would have had to earn less than US\$26,845 to qualify for free lunch and less than US\$38,203 to qualify for reduced lunch. Although kids at the camp explicitly discussed class differences, they used brand names of clothing and the quality of housing rather than lunch status to identify the class background of a subset of campers. We use lunch status as a crude measure of social class because we had access to all of the kids' lunch statuses.
3. The camp rarely provided milk to drink because many kids were lactose intolerant. We suspect that the camp avoided any kind of nut product in order to avoid triggering severe food allergies. Whatever the motivations, the consequence was that kids were provided with snacks consisting solely of carbohydrates.
4. Angelica's motivations for providing Connor and his friends with Energy drinks during the first week are unclear. We never observed her talking about her motivations. Despite her lack of success interacting with the boys, it is possible that she *hoped* the energy drinks would allow her access to their friendship group either as a friend or dating partner. As contextual evidence for this interpretation, we note that one of the other providers of energy drinks, Faith, did gain access to the group as Connor's girlfriend during the third week of camp.

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