Students' Resistance in the Classroom

BRACHA ALCERT
Beit Berl College, Israel

This article describes subtle resistance of students in upper middle-class high school classrooms who work toward achieving school success. This dialectical attitude of resistance and compliance is interpreted as being influenced by a teaching approach that attributes superiority to academic school knowledge and that promotes a recitation style of classroom interaction. It is argued that such an approach does not take into account adolescents' language and interests even though it goes along with upper middle-class academic aspirations. (STUDENTS') RESISTANCE, TEACHING APPROACH, CLASSROOM DISCOURSE/INTERACTION, ADOLESCENTS' CULTURE

The concept of resistance is used in educational research to explain and interpret various student behaviors in schools that indicate the existence of tensions and conflicts between school and the wider society to which the students belong. Studies of students' resistance in school are concerned mainly with oppositional behaviors of children from nonelite groups who are confronted in school with the norms, values, and language of dominant groups in society, which lead them, consequently, to academic failure (Erickson 1984, 1987). Another focus of these studies is on overt acts of rebellious student behavior, such as cutting classes, physical aggressiveness, and vandalism (Giroux 1983). Research on resistance seems to ignore less overt resistant phenomena that appear routinely in the daily lives of students and teachers who come from the same social-cultural groups. Alienation from learning, rejection of the contents and skills taught, and criticism of the knowledge and values transmitted by the school appear to different degrees in many classrooms, including those within schools of upper middle-class communities, in which students seem to conform to educational expectations and are actively engaged in achieving academic success.

This article aims at exploring some forms of resistance that appeared during ethnographic observations of two English classes in college preparatory, suburban American high schools described in Alpert (1984, 1987) and at explicating their possible origins in the daily classroom transactions between students and teachers. A third classroom described in the above studies, in which signs of student resistance did not appear, will be used in the present study for comparison purposes. I would like to argue that life in high school classrooms often involves a dialectic of resistance and acceptance. Whether resistance

Bracha Alpert is a lecturer and a director of a teacher training program at Beit Berl College, Kfar Saba, Israel.
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or acceptance will dominate depends on the teaching approach. Student resistance is likely to appear in classrooms where academic subject-matter knowledge is emphasized by the teacher and a recitation style is typical of classroom language interactions. Acceptance and compliance will be dominant in classrooms where the teacher incorporates students' personal knowledge in the instruction and facilitates a responsive style of classroom discourse (Shuy 1986).

Resistance and Misbehavior: Some Conceptual Clarifications

The educational literature treats oppositional behaviors of students from two different theoretical and conceptual perspectives, represented by notions that describe often similar phenomena: "resistance" and "misbehavior."

Resistance, as discussed in theoretical works and in empirical studies of sociologists, sociolinguists, and ethnographers (Erickson 1984, 1987; Giroux 1983), indicates an ideological stand emanating from the perception of schooling as a reproduction process rather than an equalization process. The function of schools, according to reproduction theorists, is to reproduce the ideology of dominant groups in society, their forms of knowledge, and the distribution of skills needed to maintain the social division of labor (Giroux 1983, 1988). Resistance theories introduce the active role of human agency in the institutional contexts that reproduce social inequality. Works on resistance describe how students react to school attempts at cultural domination in ways that often result in their exclusion from paths leading toward academic achievement (Erickson 1984, 1987; McDermott). In some studies, differences between the language and speech style of the school and the students' homes and communities were recorded as affecting conflict and resistance and as influencing academic achievements (e.g., Dumont 1972; Erickson and Shultz 1982; Giles and Powesland 1975). In other studies, gaps in patterns of interaction, such as the types of questions asked in school and at home (Heath 1982) and the organization of group conversation in school and in the community (Au and Mason 1981), were explored and offered as contributors to students' resistant behaviors. Discrepancies in social-political values between the students' home and peer cultures and those imported in school were interpreted as related to students' alienation from schooling (Cusick 1973; Willis 1977). In the above studies, as in resistance theory in general, failure to learn is seen "not as evidence of innate disability in the student, but as political resistance. In self-defeating attempts to fight back the student resists being defined by the school as a person of less worth than others" (Erickson 1984:538).

Misbehavior is a concept used in psychologically oriented studies of teaching and learning to capture different forms of interference with instruction and learning in classrooms. Misbehavior is described by Doyle (1986) as "any behavior by one or more students that is per-
ceived by the teacher to initiate a vector of action that competes with or threatens the primary vector of action at a particular moment in a classroom activity" (Doyle 1986:417). Studies dealing with misbehavior are concerned with inattention, with crowd control and management, and with accomplishment of work in classrooms. Misbehavior is perceived as a “student skill,” caused in most instances by a few unruly students (Metz 1978; Sanford and Evertson 1981; Sieber 1979) who aim to achieve their own objectives while carrying out teachers’ expectations and instructions (Mehan 1980). Some explanations of “misbehavior” stem from analyses of students’ views of schooling as conflicting with the students’ interests in socializing with their peers and in investing minimum time and effort in getting school work done (Cusick et al. 1976; deVoss 1979; Everhart 1979; Lancy 1978; Sieber 1979).

Resistance and misbehavior studies deal with a wide range of school phenomena that involve student opposition and conflict. It seems, though, that educational research is yet missing an understanding of some school phenomena not captured by either of these groups of studies. Resistance studies focus on nonelite groups and neglect oppositional behaviors in upper middle-class populations in educational settings operating toward academic success. Resistance studies also emphasize overt acts of students’ behaviors, and this, according to Giroux, is one of their weaknesses. He claims:

By so limiting their analyses, resistance theorists have ignored less obvious forms of resistance among students and have often misconstrued the political value of overt resistance. For example, some students minimize their participation in routine school practices while simultaneously displaying outward conformity to the school’s ideology, opting for modes of resistance that are quietly subversive in the most immediate sense, but have the potential to be progressive in the long run. [1983:287–288]

Studies dealing with misbehavior do explore more subtle ways of interference with classroom instruction, but often misinterpret their meaning. They treat oppositional behaviors of students mainly from the teacher and the school’s perspective as conflicting with the school’s expectations. Such behaviors could, however, be considered legitimate modes of participation in a democratic society within which the schools operate. Behaviors such as limited participation in classroom discussions (Alpert 1987) or criticism of the teacher over instructional procedures and policies are common behaviors in many classrooms. They indicate rejection and challenge toward the school without being revolutionary and without leading to school failure. At the same time, it will be misleading to incorporate them under the concept of “misbehavior”: they may indeed put pressures on teachers and therefore are important to explore, but they do not involve any formal rule-breaking.
The Study

The discussion in this article is based on case studies of three high school English classes. Detailed descriptions of the classes appear in previous works by the author (Alpert 1984, 1987). In two of the three classrooms, some modes of subtle resistance appeared. In the third classroom, which is used for comparison, no particular signs of student resistance were identified. Students in this class actively participated in classroom discussions and expressed satisfaction with the teacher and the class. Each classroom operated within a different public high school. All three schools, however, were similar in their upper middle-class, mostly white student populations. They were large, college preparatory suburban schools, located in affluent neighborhoods in northern California. The particular classrooms were selected because, after some initial observations and interviews, their teachers seemed to be different from each other in instructional strategies. The students, though, were similar in age, academic level, and socioeconomic family background.

One of the classrooms in which resistance was observed was that of Mr. Wilson, a middle-aged, white, veteran English teacher with 18 years of teaching experience. His class included 31 students; the majority of them (70%) were seniors, and the rest were juniors. Most of the students were boys (68%). On the basis of about a B average in their freshman and sophomore years, the students in Mr. Wilson’s course were considered slightly above average at the school.

The other classroom in which resistance appeared belonged to Mrs. Johnson. She was a self-assured, experienced teacher, white, in her late twenties. Her class included 34 students, all seniors, 62% of them girls. The students were classified at the school as above average on the basis of former achievements at the school.

The teacher of the third classroom, in which no particular signs of resistance appeared, was a white young man in his first year of teaching. His class included 31 students: 39% sophomores, 26% juniors, and 35% seniors, 60% of them girls. The school has a high reputation academically in the area, and most students go to college after graduation. The class was classified at the school as average in English.

Students in all three classrooms came from upper middle-class families and mostly were white. Only a few students in each class (not more than two or three) were from a minority ethnic background.

I visited the classes over a period of four months. Throughout this period, an average of 25 English lessons in each classroom were observed, intensive field notes were taken, and public classroom talk of teachers and students was tape-recorded. I also conducted tape-recorded interviews with the teachers and with six to eight students in each classroom who were pointed out by their teachers as average or above average in their classes. The interviews with the students were about their experiences in their classes. Excerpts from the students’
comments that appear in this article capture the views and attitudes expressed by the other students who were interviewed and represent those of most of their peers in the classes.

In the following pages I will illustrate some modes of resistance that appeared in the two classrooms. This will provide a context for the subsequent interpretation and discussion of the possible causes of students' resistance in the classroom.

**Resistence and Compliance as Confluent Forces in Classroom Life**

*Reluctant Participation: Silence and Mumbling*

This mode of resistance is described in an earlier article by this author (Alpert 1987). It appeared regularly in lessons of Mr. Wilson. Students in this class did not respond to the teacher's questions that attempted to stimulate discussions. On occasions where a student did react, the reaction was short and uttered in a quiet tone of voice that may be described as "mumbling." Since the response rarely reached the whole class, the teacher often had to repeat it aloud. A combination of silence and mumbling is exemplified in the following excerpt of a typical transaction in this classroom.

**Teacher:** . . . now, ah, the first four stanzas certainly do create a mood for the reader. Now, what adjectives would you use to describe that mood?

**Students:** (Silence)

**Teacher:** Think about it a little bit and then try to run it through your mind. How do we describe moods? Cheerful? Light headed? Sympathetic?

**Students:** (Silence)

**Teacher:** What adjectives would you use to describe this one?

**Students:** (Silence, then a student mumbles) Mellow.

**Teacher:** Mellow? OK I can buy that to a certain extent, but what [else]?

**A student:** (Mumbles) Solemn.

**Teacher:** OK. Sarah suggests the word "solemn." Does that sound good?

**Some students:** (Mumble) No.

Low-key participation was almost a uniform mode of student behavior and a reality of life in this classroom. Students talked about it in the interviews and pointed to it as a mode of behavior purposely chosen by them as a reaction to the teacher's instructional and curricular policies.

**Arguing**

Another form of resistance was observed in the English class of Mrs. Johnson. Several times over the period of the field study, students
were observed arguing with the teacher, expressing disagreement with her perceptions of content, and criticizing her evaluation policies of the students’ written work. Unlike “discussing” during classroom lessons, which is a common way of negotiating knowledge and views in schools, “arguing” in Mrs. Johnson’s class was a potential distraction to learning and instruction. This “arguing” created pressure on the teacher, caused tensions between her and the class, and indicated a wider sense of students’ dissatisfaction with the teacher’s instructional approach. The following is an excerpt from an argument that developed after the teacher had returned the students’ corrected essays. She was pleased with the students’ organization of their essays, but criticized them for “lack of substance.” She responded to students’ negative comments about her evaluation of their papers.

Teacher: One difficult thing about teaching literature in general, and writing, too, and I think a lot of students have a lot of trouble with that, is that they keep approaching literature and writing as if it was a Math class: “Give me a formula, tell me this,” and you can’t do that with literature, it’s not that kind of a subject, so when I give you an assignment to write about, OK, certainly the topic should be clear, but I can’t say “do this, this, this, and you’re going to get an A.”

A student: Well, you said, yeh, you don’t give us a formula like Math, but see, since you don’t, then we get marked down because it’s not, you don’t show us how you want us, I mean, you grade our papers exactly how you think that you would write it or something, and you know, our minds aren’t like yours, we don’t know what you want and stuff, so then we get graded down because we are not writing the paper that, you know, you think, should be written.

(The teacher explains and justifies her evaluations, but states that she may try in the next assignment to be more specific in her directions.)

Two related components appear in the student’s complaint. One is value-oriented: the student points to his and his peers’ right to express themselves differently from the teacher, a right she does not seem to respect. Second, there is a practical concern for formal evaluation. The teacher is blamed for not providing students with a fair enough chance for success. In their view, she has a specific model of good writing, but she has not managed to transmit it properly to the students to justify her evaluation.

Conformity and Compliance

The resistance observed in the classrooms was consistent and repetitive, yet it was not their only characteristic dimension. There was
also a great deal of conformity to the school’s norms and compliance with instructional routines and procedures, dictated by the teachers. Students in Wilson’s class were reluctant to talk during classroom discussions but obeyed all of the teacher’s other instructions: they opened books to read when he so requested, and they prepared and turned in papers and tests that he assigned. Also, students in Johnson’s class carried out all the class requirements. Despite opposition toward the teacher’s strategies, which they expressed in the class and in the interviews with the researcher, the students participated in classroom discussions and submitted written work as expected. One could notice a dialectical attitude toward teaching, learning, and the school on the part of the students. Together with forces of opposition and rejection, it was clear that in both classrooms students worked to achieve academic goals within the structure and constraints of the educational system.

Resistance as Conformity

Paradoxically, alongside obedience and acceptance of the school’s procedures, resistance in our two case studies also indicated a certain degree of conformity to the schooling game. Students resisted the teacher’s policies that endangered their grades, that is, the school’s way to determine who moves up the academic ladder. In the previous example of “arguing,” students requested a fairer chance to succeed in the assignments. In the class where reluctant participation characterized classroom discussions, resistance-as-conformity could also be detected in students’ explanations of their behaviors and attitudes.

I don’t like symbolism. I must not have liked them at all. He’s [the teacher] always using symbols. I just don’t like . . . symbols, because I can interpret it one way and if he interprets it in the other way, there goes my grade. . . .

Again, one sees a value-laden concern with rights for individual interpretation and expression as well as a practical concern with grading, which indicates a compliance to formal school’s modes of evaluation.

Factors Influencing Resistance in the Classroom

I have pointed to some examples of subtle, nonrevolutionary resistance and claimed that they indicate a wide sense of dissatisfaction with classroom instruction. Other behaviors that indicate compliance to the schooling process were presented. Some aspects of resistance were pointed to as indicating, in fact, conformity to procedures of the educational system. I turn now to explicating possible factors influencing students’ dialectical attitudes and behaviors in classroom lessons. Figure 1 depicts such factors and the relationships among them.

According to Figure 1, resistance of upper middle-class students in the classroom is affected by a teaching approach that attributes supe-
Components of adolescent culture: language and interests

Upper-middle class aspirations for academic success

Teaching approach: superiority of academic, school knowledge and skills

Students' resistance in the classroom

Conformity and compliance

Figure 1
Factors influencing students' resistance in the classroom.

iority to subject-matter knowledge and skills over students' personal knowledge, individual modes of expression, and unique, everyday language style. There is a substantial discrepancy between components of adolescents' culture and this academic-oriented approach. At the same time, such an approach responds to upper middle-class needs for maintaining social class status through educational success. The criteria for educational success is mainly academic, intellectual, and cognitively oriented. Lives of upper middle-class adolescents are influenced, on the one hand, by their families' and communities' class aspirations for academic success and, on the other hand, by components of their peers' culture with which they are intensively involved. The gap between adolescent culture and the teaching approach leads to students' resistance. Yet, this resistance is moderated by recognizing the importance of conformity and compliance with the educational system. Such compliance is necessary for academic success according to norms and aspirations of middle-class groups to which the students belong. I will further elaborate this argument.

Teaching Approach: Superiority of Academic School Knowledge and Skills

A common teaching approach in schools is one that attributes superiority to cultural, intellectual domains of knowledge and learning.
Two curricular and instructional conceptions on which such an approach is based are presented in the literature. One conception, called by Eisner and Vallance (Eisner and Vallance 1974; Eisner 1979) “academic rationalism” and by Orlosky and Smith (1978) “the academic style,” advocates that curriculum and teaching should aim at transmitting the cultural, intellectual heritage that has been accumulated in “great works” of civilization: works of history, philosophy, science, art, and literature. Prominent advocates of this conception are Adler (1939, 1982) and Hutchins (1953). Under this model, the teacher’s role is that of a cultural agent who should lead her students in a process of “surrendering” to culture, which is perceived as larger than the individual, and provide them with a “more informed or enlightened sense of what truly endures” (Mandel 1980:9). The academic cultural storehouse of knowledge is defined as organized subject matter in the form of the academic discipline (Klein 1986).

A relatively recent notion that conceptualized how subject-matter knowledge should best be taught is that of the “structure of knowledge,” which means the basic concepts and principles of a certain discipline and the research skills through which disciplinary knowledge is acquired. Bruner (1960), Schwab (1974), and others recommend centering instruction around “structures” and attributing great importance to the development of cognitive skills. The academic approach, then, is a close relative of a second conception called by Eisner and Vallance (Eisner and Vallance 1974; Eisner 1979) the “cognitive processes” and by Orlosky and Smith (1978) “the analytic style” in curriculum and instruction. Under both approaches, “academic rationalism” and “cognitive processes,” the main purpose of schooling and the teacher as a cultural agent is to have students acquire knowledge and skills that they do not own and may not own through agencies other than schools. Cultural knowledge and skills, “school knowledge” in Barnes’s (1976) terms, are perceived to be superior to the students’ personal knowledge, which is central in a humanistic orientation to curriculum and instruction. This orientation refers to personal purpose and to the students’ need for personal integration (Eisner and Vallance 1974). Under such an approach, students are encouraged to relate their personal life experiences to what is learned in school and to express their individual preferences, interests, and tendencies in the classroom.

The academic emphasis of the two teachers investigated here was reflected in the content of their questions to the students. Both teachers asked descriptive, factual, “known information” questions dealing with subject-matter concepts related to the literary works taught. Examples of such questions are: “What’s the significance of the dream [in the poem]?” “What is the tone of the poem?” or “What’s being implied [by the author] in that scene?” (Alpert 1987). Also, papers the teachers assigned in class were aimed at reinforcing subject matter and
academic concepts and competencies. For example, students wrote papers on the theme and motifs in a play, and were asked to discuss in writing the imagery and symbolism in a novel or a poem (Alpert 1984).

In contrast to the two classrooms, the teacher in the third classroom, in which no resistance appeared, made room for personal knowledge in classroom discussions. He often asked students questions about their experiences in relation to the literary works they read, for example: “Why the [literary character] is so angry . . . think of what kinds of things make you angry, really angry?” He also asked questions that referred to the students’ involvement with the works, their feelings about the literary work, for example: “Do you feel sorry for any of the characters?” “Do you want Eliza to marry Freddy?” “Did you see his way as somewhat less worthwhile than hers?” (Alpert 1987). Also, topics for students’ papers allowed students to express their feelings and attitudes toward the literary works and to relate the works to their life experiences. For example, in relation to a novel in which the main character is going through a difficult growing-up process, students were asked to write about their own growing up and what makes them mature and become adults (Alpert 1984).

In addition to emphasizing school knowledge, the academic orientation to curriculum and instruction is characterized by a recitation mode of student-teacher interaction (Hoetker and Ahlbrand 1969). The recitation mode of interaction is composed of three parts, or sequences, called “elicitation-reply-evaluation” (Mehan 1979). Turn allocation in recitation mode is exclusively the teacher’s role, as opposed to equal turn allocation rights assigned to people in everyday conversations (Mehan 1979). Shuy (1986) points to an alternative to recitation teaching called “responsive teaching.” Responsive teaching resembles everyday dialogues more than typical classroom conversations. Recitation teaching emphasizes standard, proper use of language as it seeks to reinforce acquisition of cultural knowledge. In classroom interactions that resemble everyday conversations, nonstandard, informal language use is legitimate. Observations of teacher-student transactions in the two case study classroom lessons where resistance did appear indicated that they were closer to the recitation mode. Structural sequences of classroom talk in both classrooms were of the “elicitation-reply-evaluation” kind in which the teacher is the only one who allocates turns in speaking and in which language use is expected to be proper and standard (Alpert 1987). In contrast to the two classrooms, the interactional mode in the third classroom, in which no resistance appeared, was of the response kind: the “evaluation” component was often eliminated in discourse sequences, teacher and students had equal rights in turn taking, and informal, everyday language use was legitimate, as demonstrated by Alpert (1987).
School Knowledge, Adolescents' Culture, and Social Class Aspirations

The gap between instruction that attributes superiority to intellectual, cognitive "school" knowledge and the students' adolescent world was reflected in the students' interviews with the researcher. The following is an excerpt from an interview with a girl from Mrs. Johnson's class:

She [shouldn't be] so much of a teacher, you know, not so much better than us . . . it's not intimidating, but you just don't want to cooperate, I think. Kids are at that rebellious age or whatever, where you just, if you are forced to answer you not going to do it and sometimes I think she is to relax a little, I mean, I don't think it's her fault, I feel sorry for her sometimes, but if she'd just [ask]: OK, what do you think? and just be more casual about it, she'll get a lot more [genuine] response from the kids.

By "so much of a teacher," the student refers to the teacher's authoritative handling of classroom discussions by means of evaluative statements after each of the student's moves in the conversational sequences and by pressing toward specific "correct" answers that are in accordance with academic knowledge (Alpert 1987). The same girl also described how the teacher conveys which knowledge is important and which is less:

But she [the teacher] doesn't ask the right questions and then I want to raise my hand, but what she's asking isn't anything that I want to answer. Sometimes I raise my hand anyway and say what I want to say, and she goes "ah-ha" and then goes to something else.

The teacher determines that certain concerns, interests, and views of students are less worth discussing than topics she perceives as suiting her academic agenda. The prominence of subject-matter concepts and ideas and the priority they receive over students' topics is depicted also in statements of Mr. Wilson's students about writing in the class. In the following two excerpts, the students reject the teacher's topics for writing, which involve central concepts of the discipline, and present their own interests:

I like to write [but] essays are not one of my favorite things to write. [Essays] are not usually on things that I really like to write about. I don't really like to write about imagery and hidden meanings. . . .

[If I had a choice] I would just write about like more my opinion about the play, like what, ahm, how, to me it seems interesting that the play was so interesting now even though it was written so long ago and you know it had the basic elements for a good movie, you know, it opens with a big suspense scene of the ghosts . . . but I'm not interested in "tragic flaws" [a concept introduced by the teacher]. I don't care much about that.
The superiority of school knowledge was conveyed by the teacher not only through determining which topics are "important" and which are less, but also in the teacher's attitude toward students' language. Both our case study teachers promoted use of "proper" language and rejected nonstandard language (Alpert 1987). They especially required a standard language use in students' writing. In the following excerpts, a student from Mrs. Johnson's class describes the teacher's reaction to her use of a word from an adolescent's repertoire in a paper, a reaction that the student rejects.

Like here [in the paper] she [the teacher] puts "odd word," the word [I wrote is] "clueless." It's funny, because [it is] a word that she doesn't understand, I think maybe that's because it's more of a kids' word, but I used it because it said exactly what I wanted to say, and she says "odd word."

What emerges here is a students' world of estrangement from the knowledge and contents transmitted to them in school. By being "too much of a teacher," the teachers alienate themselves, the knowledge they represent, and the school from the adolescent students who are heavily influenced by psychological, social, and cultural elements of their age and age group.

The literature on adolescents distinguishes this age group from younger children and from adults. Adolescents like to converse with their peers (Csikszentmihalyi et al. 1977) and are interested in expressing their opinions on many subjects (Crow and Crow 1956, 1965; McCandless and Coop 1979; Nelson and Rosenbaum 1972; Rice 1975, 1978). They have a special culture characterized by special dress, certain types of entertainment, and unique language. This language is described as "a blend of accepted usage and special jargon, with constantly changing modifications" (Rogers 1981). It serves to demarcate adolescents from adults and to provide separate identities to different youth subcultures (Leona 1978).

The emphasis on academic school knowledge contributes to creating a clash between the school and the adolescent students' culture. Given this gap, one would expect the students to be more aggressively resistant to the school and to the teachers. The research literature points mainly to expressions of strong resistance and rebellion in schools where most students are from the working class. We know less about expression of resistance in schools populated mostly by upper middle-class students.

For lower-class students there are two kinds of gaps that are potential sources of aggressive resistance: one is the gap between the school's emphasis on academic knowledge and the adolescents' culture. The other gap is between the norms and values of the social class—low or working class—and the school's norms and values, which represent those of the dominant, upper middle-class society.

In schools with a majority of upper middle-class students, the students' social class-school gap does not exist. School norms and values,
with the importance attributed to learning and academic achievements as paths toward social mobility, are in accordance with the upper middle-class norms and values, which also attribute such importance to academic success. Sociologists have found, indeed, that not only do the parents' occupations affect aspiration to college and college enrollment, but also the parents' encouragement to go to college. According to Alexander, Cook, and McDill (1978), at the time of entry into secondary school, higher-status students exceed lower-status youths in plans for college and plans to pursue an academic program of study. Moreover, they are also more involved in peer networks supportive of academic pursuits, and they receive more parental support for college plans than lower-status students.

Given the phenomenon described above, it may be argued that potential resistance of upper middle-class students, stemming from the gap between the school's emphasis on academic knowledge and adolescents' interests, is moderated by the match between the school's norms and values and students' social class aspirations. Conformity and acceptance of school demands is expressed by students' following most of the teacher's instructions required for academic success (doing homework, passing tests) while resisting those instructions and procedures that do not endanger academic achievements. This conformity stems from students' needs to maintain or upgrade their social status by going to college. They know that overt, revolutionary resistance will hamper their aspirations. Therefore, what we observe in schools with a majority of upper middle-class students is a moderate kind of resistance that usually stays within the classroom doors, known mainly to the participants in the situation.

Conclusion

The present study explored the forces operating in a mode of students' resistance that is different from both the overt resistance investigated traditionally by researchers and what is perceived in the literature as "misbehavior." This mode of subtle, moderate resistance is likely to appear in schools that have a majority of upper middle-class students.

There may be many ways in which nonrevolutionary resistance is expressed. I described two such ways: limited participation in classroom discussions and frequent arguments with the teacher over perception of content and evaluation policies. It is important to distinguish between local, temporary expressions of opposition that may be related to particular incidents and continuous, repetitive resistant behaviors of students that indicate a wide sense of dissatisfaction with the teacher and the instruction. The latter kind was the concern of the present study.

The clash between school and student culture is interpreted in some studies from the perspective of Marxist resistance theory. This clash
involves attempts of middle-class social and cultural domination through school, on the one hand, and resistance of lower-class students as a reaction to these attempts, on the other hand (Everhart 1979, 1983; Willis 1977). In other studies, the school-student clash is described as a source of "deviance" or "misbehavior." It is examined within a classroom management perspective that perceives misbehavior as threatening to primary vectors of classroom orderliness and teaching effectiveness (Doyle 1986). In some of these studies, students are presented as interested in socializing with their peers, and as investing little effort in their school work (Cusick 1973; Cusick et al. 1976).

DeVoss (1979) takes a constructivist approach and argues that students, not only teachers, are actively involved in constructing their classroom experiences. During some segments of a lesson, especially during individual and group work, students are periodically engaged in "passing time" behaviors, such as socializing, daydreaming, walking around the room, and so forth. DeVoss perceives these to be human activities and claims that it is unrealistic to expect students to be constantly productive in the classroom.

The present study describes situations where resistant behaviors appear even though social-cultural norms of the students' home and school are compatible. Therefore, explanations of Marxist resistant theorists are not appropriate here. The classroom management frame of reference for issues of "misbehavior" only partially looks into pedagogical-curricular approaches as they interact with aspects of adolescents' culture. I have claimed that a highly academic teaching approach conflicts with adolescents' language and interests even though it goes along with upper middle-class norms and academic aspirations.

Similar to DeVoss (1979), I perceive students' behaviors of opposition and resistance, as described in the present study, to be a common, legitimate mode of expression and reaction in the classroom. The two observed teachers acknowledged this legitimacy of students' opposition by not sanctioning it in any way that would prevent the students from succeeding in their courses. Mr. Wilson graded students on the basis of their written work and overlooked their limited participation in classroom conversations. Mrs. Johnson expressed a willingness to consider students' arguments and to reevaluate her judgments. Nevertheless, the resistance observed seemed to create pressure on the teachers and to contribute to their sense of professional frustration. For students, the resistance indicated a resentment at the way they are required to spend a large portion of their time during their adolescent years.

The consequences of living with a sense of opposition toward the teaching while also presenting an outward compliance are a recommended issue to study in future research. A second recommendation
is to search for ways to reduce the gap between school culture and upper middle-class adolescent culture to promote more participation and compliance. Making more room for personal expression and responsive classroom interaction, while teaching subject-matter contents, may be such a way.

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Shuy, Roger W.

Sieber, R. Timothy

Willis, Paul