

SCHOOL TRANSITIONS, FOLKLORE, AND STORYTELLING RELATED TO
PHYSICAL EDUCATION AND SPORT

by

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ABSTRACT

Transferring from one level of schooling to another can be one of the most difficult periods in a student's educational career. One source of stress is the scary stories students hear about their new secondary school. Study one collected scary stories about middle schooling in general, and physical education and sport at middle school in particular, from children about to transition from elementary to middle school. Data collection and interpretation were guided by folklore theory and the concepts of rites of passage and rituals of reversal from structural anthropology. Students completed an open-ended story record and participated in a focus group interview and a draw and talk exercise. The key finding was that scary stories about secondary schooling were not as prevalent as in previous British and American studies. Physical education and sport played a minor role in the folklore surrounding the transition from elementary to middle school.

Study two sought to discover what scary stories middle school students had heard about the high schools they were to attend (a) in general and (b) about sport and physical education in particular. Data collection and analysis were informed by the theory surrounding role reversal, the rite of passage, and folklore. Participants completed open-ended story records and participate in focus group interviews. Key findings were that high schools were portrayed as inhospitable, cold, and violent places where bullying students and uncaring teachers with impossibly high standards were plentiful. Physical education and school sport, however, appeared to play a minor role in the folklore surrounding student transition.

Study three examined the scary stories 51 young African American adults recalled hearing about physical education as they transitioned from elementary to secondary school. They wrote down scary stories that they recalled hearing within a two-item open-ended story record. The key finding was that the scary stories recalled by the African Americans in the current study were similar to those recalled by White Caucasians in previous research. Results of the current study also suggested that physical education played only a peripheral role in the African American folklore surrounding school transition.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	ii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	iv
LIST OF TABLES	vi
LIST OF FIGURES	vii
I. STUDENT’S SCARY STORIES AND FOLKLORE SURROUNDING THE TRANSITION FROM ELEMENTARY TO MIDDLE SCHOOL	1
REFERENCES	21
II. SCARY STORIES AND FOLKLORE ABOUT THE TRANSITION FROM MIDDLE TO HIGH SCHOOL.....	26
REFERENCES	40
III. AFRICAN AMERICANS’ SCARY STORIES AND PHYSICAL EDUCATION FOLKLORE SURROUNDING THE TRANSFER FROM ELEMENTARY TO SECONDARY SCHOOL.....	45
REFERENCES	64

LIST OF TABLES

1.	Frequency and Percentage of General Scary Stories Heard by Caucasians and Students of Color	10
2.	Frequency and Percentage of Scary Stories Heard by Girls and Boys	11
3.	Frequency and Percentage of Physical Education Scary Stories Heard by Students of Color and Caucasians.....	14
4.	Frequency and Percentage of Physical Education Scary Stories Heard by Boys and Girls.....	15
5.	Frequency and Percentage of General Scary Stories Heard by Caucasians and Students of Color	35
6.	Frequency and Percentage of General Scary Stories Heard by Girls and Boys	35
7.	Frequency and Percentage of General Scary Stories Heard by African American Males and Females.....	55
8.	Frequency and Percentage of Physical Education Scary Stories Heard by African American Males and Females.....	58

LIST OF FIGURES

1.	Students Fighting (on the Right; With Friends, on the Left)	12
2.	A Game of Dodgeball in Physical Education Class.....	16

CHAPTER I

STUDENT'S SCARY STORIES AND FOLKLORE SURROUNDING THE TRANSITION FROM ELEMENTARY TO MIDDLE SCHOOL

Abstract

Transferring from one level of schooling to another can be one of the most difficult periods in a student's educational career. One source of stress is the scary stories students hear about the secondary school to which they are moving. The purpose of this study was to collect scary stories about middle schooling in general, and physical education and sport at middle school in particular, from children about to make the transition from elementary to middle school. Data collection and interpretation were guided by folklore theory and the concepts of rites of passage and rituals of reversal from structural anthropology. Participants were 13 fifth grade students. Data were collected by asking students to complete an open-ended story record and participate in a focus group interview and a draw and talk exercise. They were analyzed using analytic induction and constant comparison. The key finding was that scary stories about secondary schooling were not as prevalent as in previous British and American studies. The general stories relayed by the students, however, portrayed American schooling as being carried out within a culture of violence. Scary stories about physical education and sport played a minor role in the folklore surrounding the transition from elementary to middle school.

Keywords: school transition, scary stories, physical education

Student's Scary Stories and Folklore Surrounding the Transition from Elementary to Middle School

Research suggests that transferring from one level of school to another can be one of the most difficult periods in a student's educational career (West, Sweeting, & Young, 2010; Zeedyk et al., 2003). Children in their last year of elementary school are acutely aware they are on the brink of momentous changes. They look forward to these transitions with a combination of anticipation and anxiety but are essentially unprepared for the changes they will experience (Anderson, Jacobs, Schramm, & Splittgerber, 2000; Lucey & Reay, 2000; Merten, 2005). It is during this transitional phase that students must learn to negotiate the environmental changes at the new school (Murdoch, 1986; Pratt & George, 2005; Tobbell, 2003). This can involve having to adjust to a larger school building, an increase in school enrollment, and traveling greater distances (Tobbell, 2003). Moreover, students have to adjust to new teachers, curricula, pedagogies, and rules and regulations (Anderson et al., 2000; Pratt & George, 2005; Tobbell, 2003).

When students enter secondary school, there are opportunities for personal growth and the forming of new identities (Woodruff & Curtner-Smith, 2007). Conversely, this transition often involves students moving from a relatively warm and personal environment at their elementary schools to a comparatively impersonal climate at their secondary schools (Anderson et al., 2000; West et al., 2010). In addition, the transitioning child's position in the student hierarchy changes from being within the oldest and most widely known group at the elementary level to being within the youngest and least known group in the new school culture (Chedzoy & Burden, 2005; Pratt & George, 2005). These changes can cause great stress and anxiety.

Much of the research completed on transitioning students has been positivistic and focused on statistical comparisons of academic performance pre- and post-transfer (Akos, 2002;

Benner & Graham, 2009; Chedzoy & Burden, 2005; Weiss & Baker-Smith, 2010).

Comparatively few qualitative analyses of the stress encountered by transitioning students have been conducted (Akos, 2002; Barber & Olsen, 2004). Exceptions include studies of the effects of transition on levels of academic achievement/failure, retention, and dropout rate (Cauley & Jovanovich, 2006; Mizelle & Irvin, 2000; Weiss & Kipnes, 2006); multiethnic and urban youth (Benner & Graham, 2009; Newman, Lohman, Newman, Myers, & Smith, 2000); and gender (Akos & Galassi, 2004; Anderson et al., 2000; Merten, 2005; Roderick, 2003).

Another area that has been studied qualitatively by a few researchers is the scary stories students hear about the secondary school to which they are moving. Sources of these stories include their parents, older siblings, and peers (Delamont, 1991; Pugsley, Coffey, & Delamont, 1996b). These stories are thought to be a major cause of the concerns, fears, and stress experienced by many transitioning students. Indeed, Pugsley et al. (1996a, 1996b) argued that knowledge of these scary stories could help policy makers, administrators, teachers, and parents as they attempt to make the transition from elementary to secondary school less traumatic for children.

The majority of the research of scary stories surrounding student transition has been carried out in the United Kingdom. A key finding of this research was that several scary story themes existed. These themes were concerned with eccentric teachers, sexually harassing or homosexual teachers, violent student gangs, students flushing toilets while holding other students' heads in the toilet bowl, and supernatural happenings on the school premises (Delamont, 1989, 1991; Delamont & Galton, 1986). In addition, six British studies (Delamont, 1989, 1991; Delamont & Galton, 1986, 1987; Pugsley et al., 1996a, 1996b) revealed that a common focus within the scary stories was physical education and school sport and that these

elements were a significant cause of concern and stress for many students. Specifically, these studies indicated that stories about physical education and sport were focused on cross country running, harsh teachers, showering, fears about bodily exposure, and concerns about homosexuality. These stories, then, suggested that children were concerned about their lack of motor skill, physical danger, threats to their self-esteem, and sexualized situations in the physical education and school sport context. Moreover, many of the stories were concerned with the body and schooling (Pugsley et al., 1996b). For example, boys were told stories that focused on masculinity and stressed the importance of not revealing weaknesses in front of their peers. Conversely, girls were told stories focused on homophobia and public exposure of their bodies (Delamont, 1991).

Research of scary stories told to transitioning students is relatively scarce in the United States. One such study conducted by Woodruff and Curtner-Smith (2007), however, indicated that the stories children heard portrayed secondary schools as intimidating, violent, and unwelcoming. Specifically, stories focused on high academic standards and harsh discipline; bullying; sex, drugs, and violence; and intimidating school size and imaginary places. Moreover, stories about physical education and sport relayed by the participants in the study were concerned with team initiations; communal showers and locker rooms; long distance running; coaches and physical education teachers; personal fears and insecurities; supernatural incidents; and homosexual advances and sexual molestation. The subject matter of these American scary stories, then, was similar to that of the stories described in the earlier British studies as was the focus on the body. These American scary stories, however, were more violent in nature than those earlier British stories. Scary stories about physical education and sport, however, were not

mentioned by the American sample until they were specifically pressed to do so, suggesting that they were relatively peripheral concerns.

To date, one limitation of the research on scary stories is that data have been collected by asking adults to recall stories they were told as they transitioned from elementary to secondary school. The rationale behind this strategy was that children and adolescents were unlikely to relay stories to adults that were primarily “private” and shared among themselves (Fine, 1987). There is an obvious need, however, for student voices to be heard on the issues surrounding school transition (Kefyalew, 1996; Lincoln, 1995) and, more specifically, for scary stories they are told to be recorded while they are fresh in the memory and before they are filtered and shaped by adult views and perceptions. Moreover, the fact that there has been a recent increase in the belief that young people can provide useful and reliable data, particularly when data collection techniques employed by researchers are developmentally appropriate, child-centered, enjoyable, and creative (Leonard, 2006; MacPhail & Kinchin, 2004), suggests that it is at least worth an attempt to do this kind of research with children and youth as opposed to adults. The purpose of this study, therefore, was to collect scary stories about middle schooling in general, and physical education and sport at the middle school in particular, from children about to make the transition from elementary to middle school.

Theoretical Perspective

In congruence with the suggestions of other researchers (Delamont, 1989, 1991; Delamont & Galton, 1986, 1987; Pugsley et al., 1996a, 1996b), the collection and interpretation of data were guided by two broad sets of concepts. These were extrapolated from the work of folklorists and structural anthropologists.

Folklore

Folklore consists of urban legends or stories that have reached a wide audience, are transmitted orally, and are usually relayed as fact. While the core of each story remains consistent, there may be different versions of the same story in circulation (Brunvand, 1999, 2000, 2001; Fox Tree & Weldon, 2007; Inglis, 2007; Whatley & Henken, 2000). Moreover, while the tellers of these stories will claim that they are true, they are often sensationalized and exaggerated or embellished (Brunvand, 2001; Inglis, 2007). It is the hint of truth, however, that makes the stories intriguing and increases their credibility (Fox Tree & Weldon, 2007).

Stories told within folklore serve several purposes including entertainment, the sharing of wisdom and experience, and scaring or warning the recipients about given situations (Brunvand, 2000; Fox Tree & Weldon, 2007; Whatley & Henken, 2000; Woodruff & Curtner-Smith, 2007). A key factor in determining which urban legends die and which survive is the degree to which they entertain and frighten their audience (Brunvand, 1981). This study was concerned with folklore surrounding the transition from elementary to middle school.

Structural anthropology. Pugsley et al. (1996b) and Delamont (1991) suggested that stories about the transition from one school level to another could also be examined by borrowing two concepts from structural anthropology. These were rites of passage and rituals of reversal. These authors and others (Delamont, 1989; Douglas, 1975; Levi-Strauss, 1963) also noted that structural anthropologists examined myths and legends for “binary discriminations” or opposing constructs such as us/them, younger/older, weaker/stronger, victim/aggressor, newcomer/veteran, and threatened/safe. For example, when children move to the secondary school they are leaving an environment with which they have been familiar and in which they have been “insiders” and the eldest students. On arriving at the secondary school, however, they

are unfamiliar with the new school culture in which they are “outsiders” (Delamont, 1989, 1991; Pugsley et al., 1996b).

Method

Participants and Setting

Ninety-nine fifth grade students aged 10 to 11 enrolled at one public elementary school situated in a mid-sized city in the southeastern United States were invited to take part in the study. In line with the University’s rules governing research with human subjects, and with parental consent, 13 students agreed to participate. Six were male and seven were female. Seven were Caucasian, five were African American, and one was Latin American. All 13 students were due to move to middle school 5 months after data collection for the study commenced.

The school housed a total of 550 students in kindergarten through fifth grade. It was purposefully selected because of its diversity in terms of race and class, relatively small size, and proximity to the researchers. The fifth grade classes ranged in size from 24 to 26 pupils. Fifth grade pupils, like those in the other grades, took the majority of their classes together from one teacher.

Data Collection

Data were collected using three qualitative techniques. First, following Delamont (1991), the primary technique employed involved asking participants to complete an anonymous two-item open-ended *story record* during a 1-hour session within their classrooms. The first item asked the children to “write down any scary stories you have been told about middle school” in general. The second item asked them to “write down any scary stories you have been told about physical education at the middle school” providing they had not written down these stories in

response to the first item. Participants responded to item 1 before they read item 2 so that we could assess the degree to which physical education featured in the participants' scary stories.

Second, three approximately 60-minute *focus group interviews* were conducted with groups of four, four, and five children, respectively. During each interview, the children were asked to expand and elaborate on the scary stories about general schooling and physical education they had included in their written story records. Focus group interviews were audio and video recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Finally, in order to provide a second source of supplementary data, and in line with a growing number of interpretive researchers who support the practice (e.g., MacPhail & Kinchin, 2004; Mowling, Brock, & Hastie, 2006; Sharpe, Greaney, Royce, & Fields, 2004), participants engaged in a *draw and talk exercise*. Again, the goal of this exercise was to invite the children to expand and elaborate on the scary stories they recorded in their story records, if possible. Initially, this involved them being asked to draw a picture depicting middle school physical education. For this purpose, they were provided with a blank sheet of paper, a choice of drawing materials, including colored pencils, crayons, and markers, and 60 minutes to complete their drawings. In addition, and while drawing, they were encouraged to talk freely among themselves and with the primary investigator about their drawings. Participants completed the *draw and talk exercise* in one room within groups of four, four, and five. Their comments about their drawings were recorded in the primary investigator's field notes as they were made.

Data Analysis

The first phase of analysis involved identifying scary stories that the children had written in their story records. These stories were then coded, categorized, and reduced to key themes using analytic induction and constant comparison (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984). Throughout the

process, stories about secondary schooling in general were kept separate from those about physical education. The number and percentage of occasions story themes were referred to by all 13 participants were also calculated for general stories and those about physical education. In addition, since previous research had suggested that pupils' gender and race might impact the kinds of scary stories that children heard about secondary schooling, we also computed the number and percentage of occasions story themes were referred to by students of color, Caucasian students, girls, and boys.

The second phase of analysis involved examining the focus group's interview transcripts and the drawings and associated field notes for data that elaborated on and filled out each of the story themes on general schooling and physical education taken from the story records. Extracts of text from all three data sources and drawings representing each story theme and portraying associations with the theoretical perspectives guiding the study were then selected to illustrate those themes and connections.

Data trustworthiness was established by using the three data collection techniques, member checking during data collection, and searching for contradicting cases (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984). In addition, the second author acted as peer debriefer for the primary investigator (Creswell & Miller, 2000) during the analysis process.

Findings and Discussion

Scary Stories About Middle School in General

A total of 31 scary stories were written by 12 of the children about middle schooling in general within their story records (see Tables 1 and 2). One Caucasian boy had not heard any scary stories about middle school at all. Tables 1 and 2 indicate that the stories fell into one of four themes. These were (a) bullying and fighting, (b) mean teachers, (c) locker issues, and (d)

making the team. Importantly, while the “making the team” theme was concerned with extracurricular school sport, there was no reference to curricular physical education when the children were asked about their schooling in general.

Data in Tables 1 and 2 also indicate that close to half of the stories heard by the whole group of children were concerned with bullying and fighting and that those about mean teachers were also recalled fairly frequently. Conversely, the least often mentioned stories were those on the subject of locker issues and making the team. The tables also reveal that Caucasian students and girls had heard more stories than students of color and boys. Moreover, the patterns of story recall were similar for boys and girls but slightly different for students of color and Caucasians. Specifically, Caucasian students reported hearing a relatively large number of stories about mean teachers while students of color did not recall hearing any stories on this topic.

Table. 1.

Frequency and Percentage of General Scary Stories Heard by Caucasians and Students of Color

Scary Story Theme	<u>Caucasians</u>		<u>Students of Color</u>		<u>Total</u>	
	(n=6)		(n=6)		(n=12)	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
Bullying and fighting	8	38.10	7	70.00	15	48.39
Mean Teachers	9	42.86	0	0	9	29.03
Locker Issues	2	9.52	2	20.00	4	12.90
Making the Team	2	9.52	1	10.00	3	9.68
Total	21	100.00	10	100.00	31	100.00

Note. One Caucasian had not heard any scary stories about middle school.

Table 2.

Frequency and Percentage of Scary Stories Heard by Girls and Boys

Scary Story Theme	<u>Girls</u> (n=7)		<u>Boys</u> (n=5)		<u>Total</u> (n=12)	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
Bullying and fighting	10	52.63	5	41.67	15	48.39
Mean teachers	6	31.58	3	25.00	9	29.03
Locker issues	2	10.53	2	16.66+	4	12.90
Making the team	1	5.26	2	16.66+	3	9.68
Total	19	100.00	12	100.00	31	100.00

Note. One boy had not heard any scary stories about middle school.

Bullying and fighting. Most of the participants had heard stories about how children new to middle school would be bullied by older students. These stories focused on “name-calling” and being “shoved into a locker” or “thrown into a trash can” by individuals or “gangs.” The following extracts are typical of these stories:

My friend’s friend told her that if you wear [X-brand] clothes they would throw you in a trash can. (Mary¹, story record)

I heard that you get shoved in lockers. . . . We might get picked on because we are the youngest. (Kendra, story record)

I heard that sometimes the older students gang up together and bully younger students. I heard my cousin and his friends talk about doing that sometimes. (Drew, draw and talk exercise)

¹ The names of all participants in this paper are fictitious.

The children had also heard a number of stories about fighting. Often these stories involved older students picking fights and younger students “getting beat up” and being placed in detention or suspended from school:

I’ve heard stories about older students who want to fight. Getting suspended and getting beat up. (Beth, story record)

I heard that a fight broke out [at the school I am going to attend] and the art teacher got in the middle of it and was hit. (Brittney, draw and talk exercise)



Figure 1. Students fighting (on the right; with friends, on the left). (Beth, draw and talk exercise)

Mean teachers. Stories about “mean” teachers focused on teachers who pressed students particularly hard to reach high academic standards and assigned copious amounts of homework.

These teachers were portrayed as being strict in terms of time-keeping, likely to “yell,” and uncaring. The following extracts illustrate these kinds of stories:

A friend told me she had to go from one building all the way to the end of another building and that if she was late to class she was counted tardy. (Tristan, focus group interview)

I heard that you have to make it to class in less than 5 minutes! (Martin, story record)

I heard that we won't have a book to take home to do homework—that there won't be enough books to go around. (Drew, draw and talk exercise)

I've heard stories about how hard the classes are. (Jordan, story record)

Locker issues. Stories about lockers focused primarily on the importance and difficulty of memorizing lock combinations and the possibility of being assigned a top row locker which was difficult to reach. These stories also suggested that students who could not remember their lock combinations or had difficulty retrieving materials from their lockers ran the risk of being late for classes:

I heard that it's possible that I'm going to be assigned a top locker and I won't be able to reach it. (Mary, draw and talk exercise)

I heard that you have to run to your locker to get your English book then run to class, so I'm going to keep my books in my backpack. (Charles, focus group interview)

My friends told me that I better figure out my locker combination over the summer. (John, story record)

Making the team. The three stories the children had heard about “making the team” were concerned with how difficult it was to get selected to play sports for the school teams at the middle school level. These stories focused on eligibility issues, skill requirements, a bias in selection towards older students, and embarrassing moments during tryouts:

I heard that I won't be able to play basketball because I'll be too young. (Charles, draw and talk exercise)

I heard that if you try out for a sport and don't make it the coach and other people laugh at you. (Beth, story record)

I heard that if you start making bad grades they'll kick you off the team until you bring your grades back up. (Dianne, focus group interview)

Scary Stories About Middle School Physical Education

Encouragingly only 3 of the 13 pupils in the study had heard scary stories about middle school physical education. As shown in Tables 3 and 4, the four stories that they wrote about in their story records were about (a) evaluation and (b) uncaring physical education teachers. Tables 3 and 4 also reveal that three of these stories were concerned with evaluation and one about uncaring physical education teachers. Moreover, the tables indicate that three of the stories were heard by boys, one by girls, two by students of color, and two by Caucasian students.

Table 3.

Frequency and Percentage of Physical Education Scary Stories Heard by Students of Color and Caucasians

Scary Story Theme	Students of Color (n=2)		Caucasians (n=1)		Total (n=3)	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
Evaluations	2	100.00	1	50.00	3	75.00
Uncaring PE Teachers	0	0	1	50.00	1	25.00
Total	2	100.00	2	100.00	4	100.00

Note. Six Caucasians and four students of color had not heard any scary stories about physical education.

Table 4.

Frequency and Percentage of Physical Education Scary Stories Heard by Boys and Girls

Scary Story Theme	Boys (n=2)		Girls (n=1)		Total (n=3)	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
Evaluations	2	66.67	1	100.00	3	75.00
Uncaring PE teachers	1	33.33	0	0	1	25.00
Total	3	100.00	1	100.00	4	100.00

Note. Six girls and four boys had not heard any scary stories about physical education.

Evaluation. The three stories concerning evaluation were very straightforward and portrayed younger students getting low grades in physical education or failing the subject completely. In addition, three of the stories on this subject mirrored one aspect of the “making the team” stories about general schooling in that they included the consequence for getting low grades or failing physical education—not being able to participate in school sport. The following are extracts from stories within and drawings about this theme:

I heard that the coaches will give you an ‘F’ in PE. (John, story record)

I heard that bad grades in PE will affect my sports [participation]. (Dianne, story record)

Uncaring physical education teachers. The one story focused on uncaring physical education teachers was as follows:

I heard the PE teachers don’t care about you. I’m worried about the teachers not caring about me. (Drew, story record)

Drew also went on to illustrate this story by drawing students playing dodgeball in physical education, the focus of which is to inflict harm and embarrassment to one’s opponents (Williams,

1992). The artwork depicts the focus of potential harm and certain embarrassment as being on one student in the class under the “care” of the physical education teacher.

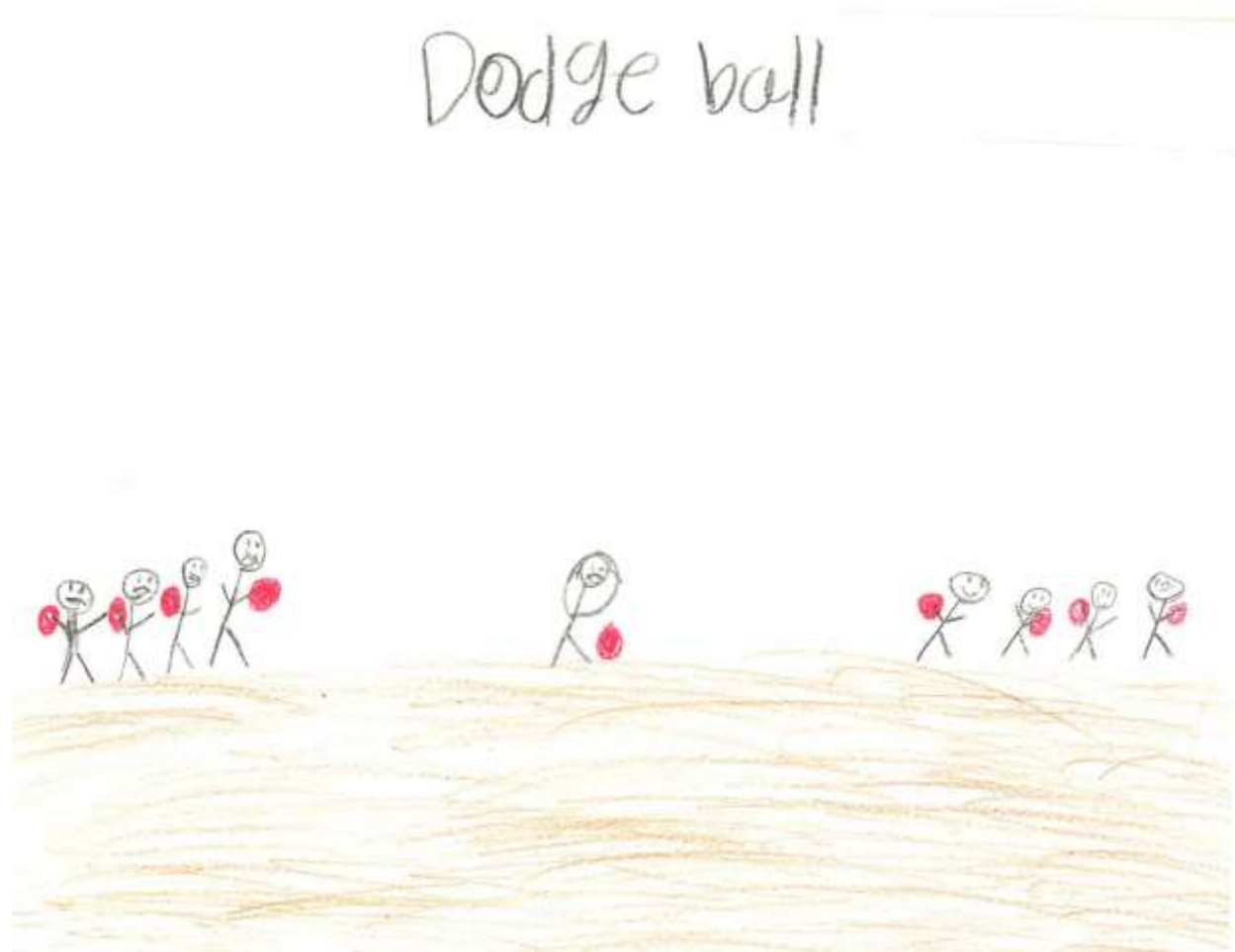


Figure 2. A game of dodgeball in physical education class. (Drew, draw and talk exercise)

Conclusions

This is the second study completed in the United States that shows that there is a folklore and set of scary stories surrounding transfer from elementary to secondary school and the first that does so specifically for elementary to middle school. It is also the first study that has

gathered unfiltered data from children about scary stories as opposed to using filtered data provided by adults recalling the scary stories they heard as children several years previously.

The key finding in this study was that scary stories about secondary schooling were not as prevalent as Pugsley et al. (1996b) reported they were in Britain in the 1970s and 1980s or as Woodruff and Curtner-Smith (2007) indicated they were in the United States from data gathered more than 20 years later. In contrast to the studies completed in the United Kingdom (Delamont 1989, 1991; Delamont & Galton, 1986, 1987; Pugsley et al., 1996a, 1996b) but in congruence to the previous study of scary stories carried out in the United States (Woodruff & Curtner-Smith, 2007), the current study also suggested that physical education and sport were not a huge part of the folklore surrounding transition from elementary to middle school. More negatively, the findings of the current study were similar to those of Woodruff and Curtner-Smith (2007) in that the general stories relayed by the children portrayed American schooling as being carried out within a culture of violence.

Several story themes in the current study matched those from or were very similar to those discovered in the earlier studies carried out in Britain (Delamont, 1989, 1991; Delamont & Galton, 1986, 1987; Pugsley et al., 1996a, 1996b) and the United States (Woodruff & Curtner-Smith, 2007). Specifically, like the adults in the previous research, children in the current study indicated that they had heard stories about fierce teachers with high academic standards, bullying, and the daunting size of the school campus. In addition, stories about making the team in the current study were similar to those about team initiations in the American study by Woodruff and Curtner-Smith (2007). Conversely, there were a number of story themes from the earlier research with British (Delamont, 1989, 1991; Delamont & Galton, 1986, 1987; Pugsley et al., 1996a, 1996b) and American (Woodruff & Curtner-Smith, 2007) adults that were not evident

in the current study with children. Most importantly, these included stories about sex and drugs; imaginary places; and supernatural incidents. Further, the evaluation story theme in the current study had not been revealed in either the British or American studies carried out previously.

Collectively, the scary stories relayed by the children in the current study did not reveal as strong a connection between schooling and the body as previous studies (Delamont, 1989, 1991; Delamont & Galton, 1986, 1987; Pugsley et al., 1996a, 1996b; Woodruff & Curtner-Smith, 2007). For example, in the current study, there was no mention of having to shower and dress with others in physical education or of sexual molestation or sexual harassment by physical education teachers, coaches, and other students. The relationship between schooling and the body was, however, still evident in the current study within a number of scary story themes. For example, stories about bullying and fighting were concerned with the body being damaged, and stories about making the team and evaluations in physical education focused on the degree to which the body was skilled.

Binary discriminations, described by those using structural anthropology as a theoretical framework in previous research (Delamont, 1989, 1991; Delamont & Galton, 1986, 1987; Pugsley et al., 1996a, 1996b; Woodruff & Curtner-Smith, 2007), were also evident in many of the stories collected in the current study. For example, a common thread throughout most of the stories was that the transitioning students were small and weak, and the older students, teachers, and the school's institutions were big and strong. Other binary discriminations that contrasted the elementary and secondary school setting and that were observed in the stories recorded in both previous research and the current study included older/younger, personal/impersonal, familiar environment/strange environment, safe place/dangerous place, and caring/uncaring teachers (Delamont 1989, 1991; Woodruff & Curtner-Smith, 2007). One new binary discrimination that

was unique to the current study was confident/shy. Specifically, the stories in the current study suggested that, at the secondary school, the youngest students had to get used to an impersonal, strange, and dangerous environment and being taught by uncaring teachers. Consequently, they lacked confidence and were shy. Conversely, the implication was that, at the elementary school, the older students enjoyed the familiar, personal, and safe environment and being taught by caring teachers. For this reason they were confident.

Unsurprisingly, another difference between the scary stories relayed by the elementary students in the current study and those recalled by adults in previous studies (Delamont, 1989, 1991; Delamont & Galton, 1986, 1987; Pugsley et al., 1996a, 1996b; Woodruff & Curtner-Smith, 2007) is the amount of detail and description supplied. Specifically, those recalled by the elementary students in the current study were relatively brief and included much less detail and description than those recalled by the adults who participated in the earlier studies. In addition, the children in the current study provided fewer examples of the kinds of behaviors and incidents to which their stories alluded than the adults had done in the previous research. These differences may be a result of the disparity in writing skill between the children and adults and the tendency of the adults to embellish their scary stories to a greater extent than they would have when younger.

Even though the scary stories relayed by the children in the present study were described in less detail than those provided by adults in previous research, as suggested by folklorists (Brunvand, 1999, 2000, 2001; Fox Tree & Weldon, 2007; Inglis, 2007), while they maintained an element of truth, some of the stories included personal embellishments to make them more entertaining. Moreover, the purpose of the scary stories relayed by the children in the present study seemed to be the same as those recalled by the adults in previous studies (Delamont, 1989,

1991; Delamont & Galton, 1986, 1987; Pugsley et al., 1996a, 1996b; Woodruff & Curtner-Smith, 2007). That is, they were used to frighten and warn incoming students about potential problems at the middle school and to indoctrinate them into the new school's culture.

Previous studies in this line had relied on adults recalling scary stories that they had heard many years earlier. The scary stories described within this study came directly from children and so reflected what they were hearing just before moving to the middle school. For this reason, findings from the current study and others like it should enable parents and teachers to provide more useful and better directed counseling as they seek to alleviate children's fears and concerns during the transition process. Similarly, and following the suggestions of a number of researchers and scholars (Anderson et al., 2000; Cauley & Jovanovich, 2006; Mizelle & Irvin, 2000; Zeedyk et al., 2003), the findings of this kind of study should enable policy makers and administrators to design more effective transition programs which target students' current concerns revealed in their folklore. Key to the success of these programs would appear to be tackling children's fears and worries both before they leave the elementary school and immediately after they arrive at the middle school. For example, Akos (2002) suggested such programs include conducting tours of the middle school for incoming elementary students and training middle school counselors and teachers to be sensitive to specific concerns of their new students. He also suggests that anti-bullying programs and specific help with how to deal with new academic demands and homework be provided at the middle school level.

Obviously, more studies of children's folklore and scary stories surrounding the transition from elementary school are needed in order to get a more sophisticated understanding of pupils' folklore. We need to find out if the results of the current study transfer or if there are different scary stories and forms of folklore in different regions, towns, and perhaps even school districts.

In addition, studies examining scary stories and folklore about the transition from middle school to high school would also be of benefit. It may be that these are different from those surrounding elementary-middle school transition. Within these studies, every effort should be made to examine sub-groups of pupils who may be subject to different forms of folklore and hear different types of scary stories. These sub-groups might be based on race and gender, as in the current study, as well as social class. Finally, studies that examined the post-transition period immediately after children have moved to the middle school would be helpful. The goal here would be to determine the degree to which the scary stories students heard prior to transfer were accurate and true.

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CHAPTER II

SCARY STORIES AND FOLKLORE ABOUT THE TRANSITION FROM MIDDLE TO HIGH SCHOOL

Abstract

The transition from one school to another can be a stressful and challenging experience for many children and youth. One major cause of this stress is the scary stories that children and youth hear about their new schools. The purposes of this study were to discover (a) what scary stories middle school students had heard about the high schools they were to attend in general and (b) what scary stories they had heard about sport and physical education in particular. Data collection and analysis were informed by the theory surrounding role reversal, the rite of passage, and folklore. Participants were nine eighth grade students. They were required to complete open-ended story records and participate in focus group interviews. Data were analyzed by employing analytic induction and constant comparison. Key findings were that high schools were portrayed as inhospitable, cold, and violent places where bullying students and uncaring teachers with impossibly high standards were plentiful. Scary stories about physical education and school sport, however, appeared to play a minor role in the folklore surrounding student transition.

Keywords: school transition, scary stories, physical education

Scary Stories and Folklore About the Transition from Middle to High School

The transition from one school to another is a significant event for a student and is considered as both a challenging period in a student's academic career (Weiss & Baker-Smith,

2010; West, Sweeting, & Young, 2010; Zeedyk et al., 2003) and a “rite of passage” (Pratt & George, 2005). Just as students become comfortable with themselves and the environment at one school, they are moved to a different and unchartered territory (Potter, Schlisky, Stevenson, & Drawdy, 2001). This change can cause both organizational (e.g., increased school size, teacher expectations, and academic standards) and social (e.g., increased diversity in the student body, changed relationships with teachers, and the need to acquire new friends) “institutional discontinuities” which lead to discomfort and anxiety (Rice, 1997).

Other procedural causes of stress (Cauley & Jovanovich, 2006) for transitioning students include moving about the new school campus and locating specific rooms and facilities (Akos, 2002; Odegaard & Heath, 1992). Students new to a school may also be worried about their safety due to concerns about bullying, violence, and peer pressure to engage in dangerous behaviors such as drinking alcohol, smoking or chewing tobacco, and taking drugs (Arowosafe & Irvin, 1992; Cauley & Jovanovich, 2006; Elias, 2001).

Students are often left to navigate this transition alone with little help from adults (Rice, 1997). Not surprisingly, the associated stress and anxiety can adversely affect their academic performance (Zeedyk et al., 2003) and overall sense of well-being (Akos & Galassi, 2004). Problems encountered during transition may also be exacerbated by moving through puberty (Eccles & Wigfield, 1997) and other related emotional and social changes (Cauley & Jovanovich, 2006).

Scary Stories

One major cause of stress and anxiety for students about to transition from one school to another are the many scary stories they hear about their new schools from peers, older siblings, parents, and other relatives (Delamont 1989, 1991; Delamont & Galton, 1986, 1987; Pugsley,

Coffey, & Delamont, 1996a,1996b; Woodruff & Curtner-Smith, 2007). Pugsley et al. (1996a, 1996b) argued that studies of these scary stories transitioning students were told might help policy makers, administrators, teachers, counselors, and parents who were attempting to make the transition process a little easier for their charges. The rationale behind this argument was that scary stories were a valuable source of data in that they were a window into the fears and anxieties of students.

Pugsley and her colleagues carried out the earliest research into these scary stories in Britain during the 1970s and '80s (Delamont 1989, 1991; Delamont & Galton, 1986, 1987; Pugsley et al., 1996a,1996b). Since the researchers did not believe that children and adolescents would talk to them about these stories, in each study they asked adults to recall the scary stories they had heard prior to transitioning from one school to another. Findings of this research indicated that most of the stories were concerned with threats of physical violence, bullying, strange and terrifying teachers, supernatural occurrences, and public humiliation. In addition, these researchers found that a significant number of scary stories the adults recalled hearing were about physical education and school sport. Specific story themes attached to these topics included cross country running, underwear inspections, sexual harassment/sexual molestation, and communal showering. Collectively, these stories indicated that there was a strong connection between schooling and the body. For example, boys often heard stories about the extraordinary physical demands of cross country running while girls were told stories about being sexually harassed by gay and lesbian physical education teachers.

Mindful that there was no research of scary stories told to transitioning students in the United States, Woodruff and Curtner-Smith (2007) attempted to begin filling this gap in the literature by asking young American adults to recall scary stories they had heard prior to

transitioning from elementary to secondary school. These researchers theorized that more modern American stories might differ in nature to older British stories. In addition, being sport pedagogy faculty, they were particularly interested in finding out the extent to which physical education and sport were mentioned in American scary stories. Stories collected in this study suggested that American schools were far more violent than British schools had been portrayed in the earlier research. Physical education and sport, however, did not feature as prominently in the American stories as they had done in those from Britain. Stories collected about both secondary schooling in general and physical education and sport from the American sample by Woodruff and Curtner-Smith (2007) were on topics that were similar to those that had been explored in the stories collected in the United Kingdom. In addition, many of the American stories were also concerned with the body. Specifically, the American adults recalled hearing general scary stories about sex, drugs, and violence; bullying; intimidating school size and imaginary places; and high academic standards and harsh discipline. Stories about physical education and sport recalled by the American adults were concerned with locker rooms and showers, running great distances, team initiations, supernatural episodes, physical education teachers and coaches, sexual molestation and homosexual advances, and personal fears and insecurities.

Noting the call to include student voice in school transition research (Demetriou, Goalen, & Rudduck, 2000; Kefyalew, 1996) and believing that modern American children would be willing to talk to her, in a follow-up study, Woodruff (2013) asked a group of fifth grade elementary school students about to move to the middle school to talk to her about the scary stories they had heard about their new schools. Results of this research indicated that it was, indeed, possible to gain good data on scary stories by talking directly with children. Moreover,

findings of this research were similar to those of Woodruff and Curtner-Smith (2007). Scary stories surrounding the transition to secondary school in general, however, were less prevalent than they had been in earlier studies and physical education and sport were featured much less often within them. Stories about secondary schooling in general relayed by the elementary children in Woodruff's (2013) study were concerned with bullying and fighting, mean teachers, locker issues, and making the team. Those about physical education and sport were focused on evaluations and uncaring physical education teachers.

The current study was designed to both replicate and extend the work of Woodruff (2013) by using similar methods to examine scary stories told to middle school students just prior to their transitioning to high school. One main goal was to ascertain whether or not the main findings of Woodruff's study with elementary students transferred. The study's specific purposes were to discover (a) what scary stories middle school students had heard about the high schools they were to attend in general and (b) what scary stories they had heard about sport and physical education in particular.

Theoretical Framework

Following the earlier research in this line by both British (Delamont, 1989, 1991; Delamont & Galton, 1986, 1987; Pugsley et al., 1996a, 1996b) and American (Woodruff, 2013; Woodruff & Curtner-Smith, 2007) researchers, data collection, analysis, and interpretation were guided by three theoretical perspectives. These were the role reversal framework and concept of the rite of passage provided by structural anthropologists and the folklore surrounding urban legends and stories.

Role Reversal Framework

Structural anthropologists have provided a useful framework for examining scary stories about school transition that is focused on role reversal (Delamont, 1989; 1991). Specifically, as students move from one school to another they often shift from being on top of the old school's hierarchical system to being on the bottom of the new school's hierarchical system. It is, therefore, useful to examine myths and legends that are promoted in scary stories with the goal of finding opposing concepts or "binary discriminations" (Douglas, 1975; Levi-Strauss, 1963; Pugsley et al., 1996b) that illustrate this shift in different contexts. Examples of these opposing concepts include older/younger, veteran/newcomer, insider/outsider, stronger/weaker, aggressor/victim, and safe/threatened (Delamont, 1989, 1991; Pugsley et al., 1996b). Following Delamont (1989), Pugsley et al. (1996b), and Woodruff and Curtner-Smith (2007), prior to changing schools students are older, veteran, insiders, and are the strongest in the school. This means that they are more likely to be the aggressor than the victim in any bullying scenario. After moving schools, however, their status changes dramatically. They become younger, weaker, newcomers, and, being unfamiliar with the new school culture, are outsiders who are more likely to be victims of bullying and so may feel threatened.

Rite of Passage

Murdoch (1986) emphasized the importance of recognizing the differences between the school that a child is leaving and the one to which she is transferring. For this reason, Murdoch encouraged teachers and parents to mark the transition with a degree of ceremony in order to assist children to make the change smoothly, or, at least, to reduce the stress during the transition. This ceremony serves to acknowledge the emotional and social changes the child is dealing with (Chedzoy & Burden, 2005). In addition, this "rite of passage" helps children and

youth navigate three distinct stages in the transfer process. These are *separation* from the security of the previous school; *transition*, when students become anxious and fearful about the move; and *adjustment* in which the new student's status is confirmed within the new school (Chedzoy & Burden, 2005; Murdoch, 1986).

Folklore

Folklore consists of urban legends or stories that are generally told as if they are the absolute truth but are, in fact, representations of elements of what is true or inaccurate exaggerations (Brunvand, 1981, 1999, 2000, 2001). For this reason, there may be several versions of the same story (Brunvand, 1999; Whatley & Henken, 2000).

These stories help to shape and define a group's culture by transmitting expectations, attitudes, and information amongst the group (Whatley & Hencken, 2000). Moreover, the stories told are often designed to entertain and to warn members of the group about specific situations or behaviors they may face (Brunvand, 2000; Whatley & Henken, 2000), such as moving from one school to another (Delamont, 1989, 1991; Delamont & Galton, 1986, 1987; Pugsley et al., 1996a, 1996b). Those stories that continue to entertain or have relevance for the group survive and those which do not die out (Brunvand, 1981).

Method

Participants and Setting

I invited 208 eighth grade students (ages 13 to 14) to take part in the study. The students attended a rural middle school in the southeastern United States. Nine students agreed to participate in the study and, in congruence with the University's rules about research on human subjects signed assent forms. Their parents also gave consent for their children to participate in the study. Seven of the students were girls and two were boys. Five students were Caucasian and

four were African American. The study took place 5 months before the students made the transition from middle to high school.

The middle school was attended by 680 students and was selected for the study because it included a wide range of social classes and was racially diverse. Moreover, it had a reputation for providing excellent pastoral care and a comfortable environment.

Data Collection

Two qualitative techniques were employed to collect data. First, using a similar technique to Delamont (1991), the students completed a two-item open-ended *story record*. For the first item, the students wrote scary stories they had heard about high school in general. For the second item, they wrote scary stories that were specifically about physical education and sport as long as they had not included these stories within item 1. The students responded to item 1 before they saw item 2 so we could discover the extent to which sport and physical education was foregrounded in the participants' scary stories.

Second, two *focus group interviews* were conducted with groups of five and four students. Each was approximately 60 minutes in duration and involved the students discussing the scary stories they had written in their story records. The interviews were audio and video recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Data Analysis

Scary stories from items 1 and 2 of the students' story records were coded and categorized separately by employing analytic induction and constant comparison (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984). This enabled the main story themes about high schools in general and physical education and sport to be identified. The number and percentage of times the different story themes were referred to in the story records were also calculated separately for general schooling

and physical education and sport. The number and percentage of times story themes were referred to by students of different gender and race were also computed.

Transcripts of the focus group interviews were analyzed for data that developed the story themes taken from the story records. Passages of text from either data source that illustrated each general and physical education/sport-related story theme were then chosen. In addition, data snippets that illustrated connections with the theoretical framework were selected.

The use of two data collection techniques helped establish data trustworthiness and credibility. Other procedures employed in this endeavor were member checking, searching for discrepant cases (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984), and peer debriefing (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

Findings and Discussion

General Scary Stories About High School

Thirty-six general scary stories about high schooling were taken from item 1 of the students' story records. As shown in Tables 5 and 6, these scary stories were grouped under one of three general scary story themes. These were (a) high academic standards; (b) bullying, drugs, and violence; and (c) intimidating school size. Tables 5 and 6 also reveal that the students had heard most stories about high academic standards and bullying, drugs, and violence. Conversely, the students recalled hearing stories about intimidating school size least often.

Data in Table 5 also reveal that Caucasian students had heard more scary stories about high academic standards and intimidating school size than students of color who had heard more stories about bullying, drugs, and violence. Moreover, data in Table 6 indicate that girls heard a higher percentage of stories about high academic standards and intimidating school size than boys who had heard a higher percentage of stories about bullying, drugs, and violence. The fact that no stories referring to physical education or sport were recorded by the students within item

1 of their story records is significant. It suggests that these aspects of schooling were not a major focus of the folklore surrounding the transition from middle to high school within this group of students' culture.

Table 5.

Frequency and Percentage of General Scary Stories Heard by Caucasians and Students of Color

Scary Story Theme	<u>Caucasians</u>		<u>Students of Color</u>		<u>Total</u>	
	(n=5)		(n=4)		(n=9)	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
High Academic Standards	9	42.86	5	33.33+	14	38.89
Bullying, Drugs and Violence	6	28.57	8	53.33+	14	38.89
Intimidating School Size	6	28.57	2	13.33+	8	22.22
Total	21	100.00	15	100.00	36	100.00

Table 6.

Frequency and Percentage of General Scary Stories Heard by Girls and Boys

Scary Story Theme	<u>Girls</u>		<u>Boys</u>		<u>Total</u>	
	(n=7)		(n=2)		(n=9)	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
High Academic Standards	12	41.38	2	28.57	14	38.89
Bullying, Drugs and Violence	10	34.48	4	57.14	14	38.89
Intimidating School Size	7	24.14	1	14.29	8	22.22
Total	29	100.00	7	100.00	36	100.00

High academic standards. Six of the participants recalled hearing scary stories about high academic standards. These stories featured concerns about “strict teachers” who would be “hard to please” and have excessively high expectations. These teachers would, they were told, give “a lot of homework” and make it difficult to achieve good grades. Typical of the stories the students heard within this theme were the following:

I was told the classes are very hard to pass and that teachers are very strict. (Renee², story record)

I heard the classes are hard, and the teachers aren’t going to accept late work. (Ashley, focus group interview)

I’ve been told that it is hard to make good grades. (Betsy, story record)

I have heard that high school can be hard, and that I may have a lot of homework. (Audra, focus group interview)

Bullying, drugs, and violence. Participants reported hearing scary stories about how “older kids bully younger kids” and “freshmen get treated bad.” As illustrated in the following data extracts, scary stories about bullying often included references to lockers, issues as students switched classes, and the “mean” nature of older students:

I heard that older students will call you ‘Fresh Meat’ and target you for bullying. I heard that [upperclassmen] may stick stuff in your locker. (Thomas, focus group interview)

I heard that the older kids bully the younger kids, like slamming their locker and pushing them in the hallways. (Renee, focus group interview)

My friend said next year’s seniors will be terrible and mean. (Jasmine, focus group interview)

I have heard that people will tell you something wrong instead of helping you. (Meredith, story record)

In addition, some of the stories recounted by the participants included tales of “fights” and the availability of illicit drugs:

² The names of all participants in this paper are fictitious.

I've heard that seniors will throw bottles of pee at us and batteries. You know, those big thick batteries (demonstrates size with her hand). And then I heard there would be a "beat down"—you know, a fight. And you would get suspended. That's what I heard. (Jasmine, focus group interview)

I heard that people fight for nothing. (Ashley, story record)

I heard there are drugs. (Thomas, story record)

Intimidating school size. Stories about intimidating school size were focused on both the size of the high school campus and that of the student body. Those focused on the size of the campus were invariably concerned with not "getting to classes on time" because the high school is "big" and "huge" and "you can get lost." Those focused on the size of the student body suggested that high school students got much less attention than students in lower levels of schooling:

I heard that it's going to be hard to get from class to class because it's so big. (Thomas, focus group interview)

I heard that the high school is very big, and I could get lost. (Audra, story record)

In fifth grade, teachers could give you attention. When we got to middle school, the classes were bigger and the teachers couldn't give you much attention. I heard it's going to be worse at the high school. The teachers will have a lot of students to take care of. (Jasmine, focus group interview)

Scary Stories About High School Physical Education.

Only two of the nine students had heard scary stories about high school physical education. Both these students were Caucasian girls. The two scary stories were about (a) the locker room and (b) difficult tasks/uncaring teachers. None of the students had heard scary stories about extracurricular school sport.

Locker room. The locker room story was relatively tame. It alluded to the possibility of being bullied in the locker room prior to and immediately following physical education lessons.

Specifically, in her story record, Audra recalled that “I have been told that some people get teased in the locker room.”

Difficult tasks/uncaring teachers. The scary story about difficult tasks and uncaring teachers in physical education was also recalled within a story record:

I heard that you have to climb a rope [in physical education]. . . . I heard that if you can't climb the rope all the way to the top the teachers make fun of you. (Betsy, story record)

The story Betsy heard, then, suggested that physical education teachers would require students to perform difficult tasks in front of other students and that this could be a daunting prospect. In addition, students who could not complete such tasks would be humiliated by the teachers in front of the rest of the class.

Conclusions

The study reported in this paper is the third in a line of research completed in the United States on scary stories and folklore surrounding the transition of children and youth from one school to another. This study was, however, the first to examine scary stories specifically about the transition from middle to high school. It was also only the second attempt to gather such stories directly from children immediately before they changed schools, all but one of the previous studies (Woodruff, 2013) having relied on adults recalling the scary stories they had heard prior to transition.

There were two key findings within the current study. First, the general scary stories that the children had heard about transition from middle to high school had similar foci to those recalled by American adults (Woodruff & Curtner-Smith, 2007) and relayed directly by elementary school children (Woodruff, 2013). That is, they portrayed secondary schools as inhospitable, cold, and violent places where bullying students and uncaring teachers with impossibly high standards were plentiful. Moreover, the binary discriminations observed in

previous studies (Delamont, 1989, 1991; Delamont & Galton, 1986, 1987; Pugsley et al., 1996a, 1996b; Woodruff, 2013; Woodruff & Curtner-Smith, 2007) were also evident within the stories in the current research. Specifically, the stories in the current study illustrated that the status of middle school students shifted from being stronger, older, veteran, insiders with potential to be the aggressor in bullying situations, to being weaker, younger, newcomer, outsiders, with the potential to be bullying victims once they moved to high school. In addition, the stories recalled in the study illustrated Murdoch's (1986) first two stages of transition. They were concerned with separation from the middle school and revealed anxiety about the high school. Finally, as in earlier research, many of the scary stories relayed by the students in the current study were concerned with the body.

While the findings of the current research indicated that there was indeed a set of scary stories surrounding the move from middle to high school, the data also suggested that this folklore was not as prominent and powerful as it had been in earlier studies using adult recall in Britain (Delamont, 1989, 1991; Delamont & Galton, 1986, 1987; Pugsley et al., 1996a, 1996b) and the United States (Woodruff & Curtner-Smith, 2007). Specifically, the volume of stories the students in the current study provided was significantly lower than the adult recall studies had yielded. Moreover, the stories the students in the current study had heard were qualitatively not as outrageous and extreme as those recalled by adults in previous studies. In short, this latest group of stories was not as "scary" as those that had been collected in the past.

There are four possible explanations for the differences between the current study and those using adult recall, both in terms of the quantity of stories and the degree to which the stories scare. First, it could be that, over time, transition from one level of schooling to another has improved and so the folklore surrounding the transition process is on the decline as it is

gradually becoming unnecessary. Second, it may also be that the move from middle to high school is nowhere near as traumatic as that from elementary to any form of secondary schooling on which previous studies have focused. Third, and as suggested previously by Woodruff (2013), it could be that there really are not any differences between the strength and nature of the folklore surrounding school transition in the cultures explored in past studies and the current study. Rather, the “differences” in the quantity and nature of the data can be explained by the children in the present study being less skilled, in terms of writing down the stories that they had heard, and less articulate, in terms of talking about these stories, when compared to the adults who participated in previous studies. A final explanation for these differences might be that those who did the early research on scary stories with adults were at least partially correct when they argued that children and youth would not talk to adults about a folklore that they considered “private” (Best, 1983; Fine, 1987). In short, it is possible that the children in the current study did not tell us all they knew about transition folklore. Research which can tease out which of these explanations is accurate would be of significant help.

The second main finding of the study was that scary stories about physical education and school sport were rare among this group of students. Indeed, the two stories that were recounted came to light only after students were prompted to think specifically about these two contexts. This finding is similar to that of Woodruff’s (2013) study of elementary students. Conversely, while the adults studied by Woodruff and Curtner-Smith (2007) had also not recalled any stories about physical education and sport when asked about scary stories in general, once prompted, they relayed a comparatively large number of stories on these topics. In addition, a large proportion of scary stories recalled by British adults studied in the 1970s and ’80s had focused on physical education and sport without prompting.

The fact that many of the students in the current study had not heard stories concerned with physical education and sport could mean one of two things. It may be that these two elements of schooling had been modernized and improved to the extent that the folklore surrounding them had withered and virtually died as there was now no need to warn incoming students about the perils embedded within them which no longer existed. Alternatively, and especially in terms of physical education, it may have been that the subject had been marginalized (Sparkes, Templin, & Schempp, 1993) and its status lowered to the extent that it was just not worthy of featuring in students' transitional folklore. Further research focused on these two alternative explanations would be of use.

Despite the suggestion that the folklore surrounding the move from lower to higher levels of schooling could be waning, the practical implication of this study and others like it is that policy makers, school administrators, teachers, and parents should continue to work to improve the transition process. If the results of the current study were to transfer, they suggest that those attempting to construct intervention packages specifically designed to ease transition from middle to high school would do well to feature anti-bullying programs within the high school (Kneisler, 2001). In addition, they should include opportunities for middle school students to tour and become familiar with high school buildings (Mizelle & Irvin, 2000), have academic counseling focused on the new and different study skills they will need in high school (Akos, 2002), and meet those who will be teaching them (Brown, 2010).

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CHAPTER III

AFRICAN AMERICANS' SCARY STORIES AND PHYSICAL EDUCATION FOLKLORE SURROUNDING THE TRANSFER FROM ELEMENTARY TO SECONDARY SCHOOL

Abstract

Transferring from elementary to secondary school can be difficult for many children, and students making this transition often suffer from anxiety and stress. One source of stress can be found in the scary stories transitioning pupils hear about their new schools, particularly those about physical education and sport. The purpose of this study was to examine the scary stories young African American adults living in the Deep South recalled hearing about physical education as they made the transition from elementary to secondary school. Folklore and the concept of role reversal were the theoretical perspectives that guided data collection and analysis. Participants were 51 African American students. They were asked to write down scary stories that they recalled hearing prior to transferring to secondary school within a two-item open-ended story record. Stories were coded and categorized and reduced to key themes using analytic induction and constant comparison. The key finding was that the scary stories recalled by the African Americans in the current study were similar to those recalled by American Caucasians in previous research. The stories collected in the current study were also reminiscent of those described in the studies carried out with young adults in Britain during the 1970s and 1980s. Results of the current study also suggested that physical education played only a peripheral role in the African American folklore surrounding school transition.

Keywords: school transition, physical education, scary stories

African Americans' Scary Stories and Physical Education Folklore Surrounding the Transfer from Elementary to Secondary School

Research indicates that transferring from elementary to secondary school can be a difficult and bewildering experience for many children due to the academic and social changes they encounter and because they are moving from the familiar to the unknown (Cauley & Jovanovich, 2006; Ganeson & Ehrich, 2009; Pietarinen, 2000). Not surprisingly, students making this transition can suffer from anxiety and stress (Akos, 2002; Grills-Taquechel, Norton, & Ollendick, 2010). Specific causes of this stress include larger school buildings, school enrollment, and class sizes than those to which they are used (Crockett, Petersen, Graber, Schulenberg, & Ebata, 1989; Pratt & George, 2005). Changes in academic organization, practices, standards, and accountability can also lead to anxiety (Demetriou, Goalen, & Rudduck, 2000; Newman, Lohman, Newman, Myers, & Smith, 2000). Moreover, the myriad of social changes that new students face as they start secondary school can be problematic. These include interacting with other students who are physically and socially more advanced (Cauley & Jovanovich, 2006; Eccles & Wigfield, 1997; Shachar, Suss, & Sharan, 2002) and being bullied by older students aiming to gain social acceptance with their own peer group (Chedzoy & Burden, 2005; Pellegrini & Long, 2002). In addition, differences in the racial composition of the new school's student body and teachers can be disconcerting (French, Seidman, Allen, & Aber, 2000; Tonkin & Watt, 2003; Wampler, Munsch, & Adams, 2002). Finally, since this transition occurs at an age when children are also going through physiological and psychological changes, the lack of stability it causes can amplify feelings of distress (Gentle-Genitty, 2009). Not surprisingly, as well as causing considerable emotional upheaval, the changes encountered during school transition can have a negative impact on academic performance (Benner & Graham, 2009; Roderick, 2003; Weiss & Baker-Smith, 2010).

Few studies have examined the role that physical education plays in the school transition. There is, however, some British research that indicates that this process might be less traumatic for students when their elementary physical education teachers pass on data they have about these children to their counterparts at the secondary school to which they are moving. Specifically, the sharing of these data helps both academically, in terms of curriculum continuity and skill development, and socially, in terms of facilitating integration into the new school (Capel, Zwozdiak-Myers, & Lawrence, 2004, 2007). Furthermore, Dismore and Bailey (2010) noted that students' attitudes toward physical education may change for the better or worse once they make the transition to secondary school. This is because they perceive the subject's main goal as shifting from being about enjoyment at the elementary school level to being about performance at the secondary school level. Those transitioning students who like this shift are positive about secondary school physical education. Conversely, those students, who do not approve of this shift, are relatively negative about the subject. Dismore and Bailey argued that these findings highlighted the need for secondary school physical education teachers to provide positive experiences and a supporting environment for all newly transitioned students in their charge.

In addition, researchers have noted that physical education and school sport feature prominently in the scary stories transitioning pupils hear from siblings, peers, parents, and other adults about their new schools (Delamont, 1991; Murdoch, 1986; Pugsley, Coffey, & Delamont, 1996a, 1996b; Woodruff & Curtner-Smith, 2007). Specifically, six British studies (Delamont, 1989, 1991; Delamont & Galton, 1986, 1987; Pugsley et al., 1996a, 1996b) indicated that children heard stories about long distance running, taking showers, underwear checks, and sexual harassment by gay and lesbian physical education teachers. These stories revealed that students

were concerned about threats to their person and self-esteem and potentially sexualized situations (Delamont, 1991; Pugsley et al., 1996b). Moreover, many of the stories connected pupils' bodies and schooling (Pugsley et al., 1996b). For example, stories boys heard targeted their sense of masculinity by emphasizing their need to have skilled, strong, and tough bodies. Stories girls heard were concerned with their physical appearance and issues surrounding the exposure of their bodies in public. As a result of these findings, Pugsley et al. (1996b) suggested that those intent on making the process of transition less traumatic for children would do well to pay attention to these scary stories as they provided clues about specific concerns children and youth had about secondary schooling.

Heeding the sentiment of this advice, Woodruff and Curtner-Smith (2007) examined the scary stories American children had heard just prior to transitioning to secondary school. The goal of this research was to see if the scary stories American children heard were similar to those of British children and whether physical education and school sport featured as prominently in these stories as they had done in Britain. Findings of the research indicated that American secondary schools were depicted as being particularly violent and inhospitable places and that the stories focused on bullying; the intimidatory size of schools; imaginary places within schools; impossibly high academic standards and harsh discipline; and sex, drugs, and violence. Furthermore, although not as prominent as those in Britain, there were a relatively large number of scary stories about physical education and school sport. These were concerned with team initiations, communal showers and locker rooms, long distance running, coaches and physical education teachers, homosexual advances and sexual molestation, personal fears and insecurities, and supernatural incidents.

The participants in Woodruff and Curtner-Smith's (2007) study were predominantly Caucasian and were located in the "Deep South" of the United States. I theorized that the relatively recent history and lingering aftereffects of institutionalized racism in this region (Cazers & Curtner-Smith, 2013) might lead to African American children hearing a different and perhaps more formidable set of scary stories than Caucasians. This theory was supported by some research suggesting that children of color in general and African American children in particular may have different and more difficult transitions from elementary to secondary school when compared with Caucasians. Specifically some multi-ethnic youth have been shown to have extreme difficulties with academic work following transition and suffer badly with anxiety and loneliness. These problems can, in turn, lead to students of color dropping out of school at alarming rates (Benner & Graham, 2009, Newman et al., 2000; Roderick, 2003; Wampler et al., 2002). Other research has shown that African American children are at greater risk of transitioning poorly to secondary schools when they come from poverty and because of the reduced expectations society has for minorities in general (Ford, 1993; Gentle-Genitty, 2009; Simmons, Black, & Zhou, 1991). In addition, there is some evidence to suggest that African American students who do not gain a sense of belonging within their new secondary schools may be particularly susceptible to academic failure (French et al., 2000; Gutman & Midgley, 2000). The purpose of this study, therefore, was to examine the scary stories that young African American adults living in the Deep South recalled hearing about physical education as they made the transition from elementary to secondary school.

Theoretical Perspectives

The two theoretical perspectives primarily employed in previous research of scary stories were also used to guide data collection and analysis in the current study (Delamont, 1989, 1991;

Pugsley et al., 1996b; Woodruff & Curtner-Smith, 2007). These were folklore and the concept of role reversal as defined and described by structural anthropologists.

Folklore

Folklore consists of scary stories, tales, and urban legends designed to warn and teach the young and inexperienced about the dangers that may exist in the world (Brunvand, 2000; Fox Tree & Weldon, 2007; Inglis, 2007; Whatley & Henken, 2000). This means that they play a key role during childhood and adolescence (Brunvand, 1981). Although the tellers of these stories will claim that they are factually accurate, they are often embellished or exaggerated for dramatic effect (Brunvand, 1999; Whatley & Henken, 2000). For this reason, there may be several variations of the same or similar stories in circulation at one time (Brunvand, 2001). In addition, folklore continues to change and develop over time (Brunvand, 1999). Stories that remain relevant and continue to both entertain and frighten their recipients survive and those which do not die out (Brunvand, 1981). This study focused on the scary stories that comprised the folklore about secondary schooling in general and physical education and sport in particular and that were consumed by African American children prior to transitioning to secondary school.

Role Reversal

The transition from one level of schooling to another is a rite of passage (Murdoch, 1986) for children that results in a reversal of their status and role (Zhang, 2012). Specifically, students shift from being on top of the social hierarchy in the elementary school to being at the bottom of the hierarchy in the secondary school (Lucey & Reay, 2000). Structural anthropologists have found it useful to analyze urban legends, myths, and stories by searching for opposing constructs or “binary discriminations” which fully or partially describe this role reversal (Delamont, 1991; Douglas, 1975; Levi-Strauss, 1963; Pugsley et al., 1996b). Examples of these binary

discriminations in the school transition context include before/after, older/younger, stronger/weaker, knowing/unknowing, insider/outsider, old hand/newcomer, us/them, aggressor/victim, thrower/thrown, and clean/dirty (Delamont, 1989; Pugsley et al., 1996b). Specifically, before transition, the oldest elementary students are invariably the strongest children in their school and know its culture extremely well. This makes them insiders or old hands and so considered by others of the same status as “one of us.” It also means that they are more likely to be the aggressor in bullying situations and throw students in order to make them dirty. Conversely, after transition, the youngest secondary students are generally the weakest children in the school who know little about the school’s culture. This makes them outsiders and newcomers and so they are regarded as “one of them” by more established students. Moreover, they are more likely to be the victims of bullying and end up dirty having been thrown. During the present study, I searched for these and other binary discriminations within the scary stories heard by the participants that described and helped explain the role reversal pupils encountered during the transition process.

Method

Participants and Setting

Participants were 51 students enrolled in several sections of an introductory course taught within the Department of Health and Physical Education at one historically Black college situated in the Deep South of the United States. All participants were African American. Twenty-seven were female and 24 were male. Fifty of the participants were traditional students and between 19 and 22 years of age. One participant was a non-traditional student and 49 years of age. Prior to taking part in the study, all participants signed an informed consent form in

congruence with the requirements of the University's Institutional Review Board policy regarding human participants in research.

Previous research in this line (Delamont 1989, 1991; Delamont & Galton, 1986, 1987; Pugsley et al., 1996a, 1996b; Woodruff & Curtner-Smith, 2007) had also asked young adults to recall the scary stories they had heard when transitioning to secondary school. This was because this kind of folklore was thought to be a “private” matter, as far as children were concerned, and not for the consumption of adults (Best, 1983; Fine, 1987). In short, the suggestion was that young adults were more likely to produce a “rich” source of data than children. The downside working with young adults, however, was that there was more potential for inaccurate recall of stories heard or embellishment and fabrication of stories (Woodruff & Curtner-Smith, 2007).

Data Collection

The protocol and technique employed to collect data during this study were the same as had been used by Woodruff and Curtner-Smith (2007) with their largely Caucasian sample and very similar to that used by Delamont (1991) in one of the first studies of scary stories. All participants were asked to complete a two-item open-ended *story record* during a 1-hour session in their classrooms. To enhance credibility, *story records* were anonymous. Participants were, however, asked to note their gender and confirm their race as being African American.

The first item in the story record asked participants to “write down any scary stories you can recall being told when you were about to move from your elementary school to your junior high/middle/high school.” At this stage, there was no mention of physical education. The second item requested that participants “write down any scary stories you can recall being told about physical education when you were about to move from your elementary school to your junior high/middle/high school” provided that they had not recorded these stories within item 1.

Participants were required to respond to item 1 before they turned their attention to item 2 so that I could determine the degree to which physical education was foregrounded in the participants' scary stories. In line with Delamont (1991), the participants were asked to preface the scary stories they recollected with the following statement: "Before I went to ... school, I was told by ... that" (p. 239).

Data Analysis

I worked with the data by employing similar methods to Woodruff and Curtner-Smith (2007). General scary stories from item 1 of the story records and stories centered on physical education from item 2 were analyzed separately. Since some students recalled multiple general and physical education-oriented scary stories, initially stories for each participant were identified and separated. Analytic induction and constant comparison (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984) were then employed to code and categorize both the general and physical education scary stories. This process resulted in the identification of story themes that described collections of scary stories that were common across participants. Trustworthiness in and credibility of the analysis process were enhanced by a search for stories which contained elements that contradicted story theme descriptors. Once all the stories had been coded and categorized, the number and percentage of stories within each theme, and for both general schooling and physical education, were computed across the whole sample and for men and women.

Findings

Scary Stories About Secondary School in General

Fifty-nine general scary stories were collected from item 1 of the story records. These stories were recalled by 34 of the participants (see Table 7). Seventeen of the participants could not recall hearing any scary stories about secondary schooling in general. Table 7 also reveals

that the general scary stories recalled by the participants fell into one of three story themes. These were (a) bullying and deviant behavior, (b) high academic standards, and (c) supernatural incidents and mythical rooms. In congruence with the largely Caucasian sample studied by Woodruff and Curtner-Smith (2007), none of the participants recorded a story about physical education or sport within item 1 of their story records.

Table 7 indicates that the vast majority of general scary stories recalled by the participants were concerned with bullying and deviant behavior. Relatively few stories were about high academic standards or supernatural incidents and mythical rooms. Table 7 also shows that the stories both men and women heard when they were children were mainly on the topic of bullying and deviant behavior. Only women, however, recalled stories about high academic standards. Women also recalled stories about supernatural incidents and mythical rooms more often than men.

Bullying and deviant behavior. Stories about bullying and deviant behavior were focused on how incoming secondary school students would be abused by older children. Types of abuse featured within the stories included “name-calling,” “teasing,” being targeted with “water balloons,” “thrown into lockers,” “stuffed in trash cans,” “pushed and punched in the hallways,” and being attacked on “Fresh Meat Fridays”—the day of the week on which older students made a deliberate attempt to increase this kind of behavior. The following extracts are typical of stories about bullying and deviant behavior:

Before I went to . . . high school, I was told by my cousins that the first Friday . . . there was something called “Fresh Meat Friday.” “Fresh Meat Friday” is when [older students] would stuff people in the trash cans, lockers, and maybe hit them. (Female)

I was told that the high schoolers would pick on you, call you names, and try to put you in the garbage can upside down. (Male)

Table 7.

Frequency and Percentage of General Scary Stories Heard by African American Men and Women

Scary Story Theme	<u>Men</u>		<u>Women</u>		<u>Total</u>	
	(n=14)		(n=20)		(n=34)	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
Bullying and Deviant Behavior	20	95.24	28	73.68	48	81.36
High Academic Standards	0	0	6	15.79	6	10.17
Supernatural Incidents and Mythical Rooms	1	4.76	4	10.53	5	8.47
Total	21	100.00	38	100.00	59	100.00

Note. Ten males and seven females did not recall hearing any general scary stories.

While women tended to recall stories that described psychological bullying such as “teasing,” and “name-calling,” men were more likely to recall stories that described physical bullying and were more violent in nature. Men, for example, frequently recalled stories which included boys new to the secondary school being “beat up in the hallway,” “beat up after school and on the bus,” and attacked by “seniors [who] would take turns punching [new students].”

Before I went to . . . high school I was told by some older kids in the neighborhood that the first week of school was going to be freshmen “beat down week.” (Male)

Before I went to high school, I was told by a friend that it was inevitable that I would get into some fights and get seriously hurt. I was told that students would bully and tease you just because you were different. (Male)

Though stories recalled by women about incoming girls being bullied physically by older students were much less prevalent, they were still recorded:

Before I went to my middle school, I was told by other students that you would get involved in at least one fight the first year. I also heard that they cut girls' hair if it was longer than other girls. (Female)

In addition, both men and women reported hearing stories of older students "trying to take our lunch money and other valuables":

I was told not to go to the bathrooms alone because students would gang up on you and steal valuable items from you. (Male)

Before I went to middle school, I was told by my older brothers that the students would be bigger, meaner, and would always beat me up and take my lunch money. (Female)

Finally, the lone non-traditional student in the sample remembered "stories" from the time when racial tensions were very high in the Deep South and integration was still in its infancy:

Not long after the schools were integrated, I can remember my sister telling stories of kids fighting, stabbings, and was even told of one girl's hair being set on fire. This was all so scary to me . . . transferring from elementary school to Jr. High. (Female)

High academic standards. The scary stories the female participants in the study recalled about high academic standards were concerned with "mean, uncaring teachers," and "hard classes," and included the advice "that it was time to buckle down" in the classroom:

Before I went to middle school, I was told that the teachers were mean to the 6th graders because they had to break us in to the middle school way. (Female)

I was told by my teachers that high school would be a lot harder, which it was but in a good way. They also told me that this was when we had to begin preparing for college. (Female)

In addition, these stories included the warning that academic grades might suffer if new students were "late for class." This might be a major issue because students only had "a short time between each class." Moreover, this issue could be negated if new students could "learn how to use a locker" efficiently.

Supernatural incidents and mythical rooms. Three of the five stories participants recalled hearing within this theme were focused on fairly far-fetched ghost stories connected to the secondary schools to which they eventually moved.

Before I went to high school, my friends and I were told that this girl was hung in the auditorium, and when I got to high school all I could picture was the girl hanging in the auditorium. (Female)

Before I went to high school, I was told by an upperclassman that the school was built on a graveyard and at night you could see ghosts in the halls and the lockers would open and close. (Female)

Furthermore, two stories in this category were concerned with fictitious or mythical rooms and buildings in the school which older students invented with the aim of confusing, scaring, and misdirecting newcomers:

Before I went to high school I was told there was a swimming pool on the roof. (Male)

Scary Stories About Physical Education

Sixteen scary stories about physical education and school sport were collected from item two of the story records. These stories were recalled by just 11 of the participants (see Table 7). Conversely, 40 of participants could not recall hearing any scary stories on the subject of physical education. Table 2 also reveals that scary stories focused on physical education and school sport were categorized as being illustrative of one of four story themes These were (a) hard physical exercise, (b) communal showers and homosexual advances, (c) bullying in physical education, and (d) team initiations. Data in Table 8 also indicate that stories about long distance running and communal showers and homosexual advances were most frequently recalled by the participants while those about bullying in physical education and team initiation were recalled less often. Table 8 also suggests that the women heard more scary stories about physical education before transitioning to secondary school than did the men.

Table 8.

Frequency and Percentage of Physical Education Scary Stories Heard by African American Men and Women

Scary Story Theme	<u>Men</u> (n=4)		<u>Women</u> (n=7)		<u>Total</u> (n=11)	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
Hard Physical Exercise	1	25.00	6	50.00	7	43.75
Communal Showers and Homosexual Advances	0	0	5	41.67	5	31.25
Bullying in Physical Education	2	50.00	1	8.33	3	18.75
Team Initiations	1	25.00	0	0	1	6.25
Total	4	100.00	12	100.00	16	100.00

Note. Twenty males and 20 females did not hear any physical education scary stories.

Hard physical exercise. Stories in this thematic category were concerned with being required to run long distances and to perform other forms of rigorous and potentially uncomfortable forms of exercise in physical education classes. As illustrated in the extracts below, they also included feelings of inadequacy:

Before I went to high school, I was told that we would have to run 8 miles to pass the class, and that was scary to me because I was fat and out of shape. (Male)

Before I went to high school, I was told by upperclassmen that PE was going to be really hard. The teachers were going to make you run every day on the track and you were always timed as well. (Female)

Before I went to middle school, I was told by my brother that in physical education class we would have to bear crawl and rope climb. (Female)

Communal showers and homosexual advances. Three of the female participants recalled hearing scary stories centered on showering and homosexual advances within the

physical education setting. These stories included references to girls having to “change into gym clothes in front of each other,” and “shower with other females.”

Before I went to middle school, I was told that after a strenuous workout in PE class I would have to shower with other females. (Female)

Before I went to high school, I was told by a lot of my older peers that the girls were going to get me—especially during physical education when we dressed out. There was a lot of homosexuality in that high school. (Female)

Before I went to high school, I heard some of the girls were lesbians. At that time, I was not comfortable with my body, and I did not want anyone fantasizing and contemplating on taking my innocence. (Female)

Bullying in physical education. The three scary stories recorded specifically about bullying in physical education suggested that such action might be taken against incoming students by both older pupils and physical education teachers. Collectively, they portrayed physical education classes as anything but warm and welcoming:

Dodgeball vs. eighth graders! I was told they would kill us younger kids with the ball. (Male)

Before I went to high school, I was told by random people that people used to jump on new freshmen in PE class. (Male)

Before I went to middle school, I was told by my friends that the PE coach would yell really loud. (Female)

Team initiations. There was only one scary story recalled about the initiation of incoming students who made the various sports teams at the new secondary school. It was, however, particularly brutal:

Before I went to high school, I was told by friends that as freshmen athletes you would get stripped and beat with wood. Without a care, they (i.e., older established players on the team) would trap you while in school and take off all your clothes in front of whoever was around. If necessary, they would use their wooden paddle to set you straight. (Male)

Conclusions

This was the second study in which the folklore surrounding physical education and the transition from elementary to secondary school in the United States was investigated by asking young adults to recall scary stories. The main conclusion drawn from the current study was that many of the general scary stories, and those specifically about physical education and sport, recalled by the African American sample were the same as or very similar to those relayed by a largely Caucasian sample studied previously by Woodruff and Curtner-Smith (2007). General scary stories about bullying, high academic standards, supernatural incidents, and mythical or imaginary rooms had all been recollected by participants in that earlier study, as had stories on the subject of physical education and sport concerned with hard physical exercise, showering and homosexual advances, bullying, and team initiations. In short, there was nothing to suggest that the scary stories heard by young African Americans residing in the Deep South were different in nature to those heard by Caucasians from the same region of the country. The recollections of the one older non-traditional student who participated in the study did, however, suggest that during the civil rights era in the 1960s, African American children living in the Deep South and transferring to newly integrated secondary schools would have been bombarded with infinitely more scary stories than today's youth. Further research of the transitional folklore that existed in that era may be helpful in that it could illustrate the extent to which the southeastern region has shifted in terms of racial equality.

The scary story themes unearthed in the current study were also reminiscent of those described in the studies carried out with young adults in Britain during the 1970s and 1980s (Delamont, 1989, 1991; Delamont & Galton, 1986, 1987; Pugsley et al., 1996a, 1996b). Like those in the Woodruff and Curtner-Smith (2007) study, however, they portrayed American

schools as being significantly more violent than the earlier studies had suggested British schools were.

Another parallel that can be drawn between the stories collected in the current study and those collected in previous studies (Delamont, 1989, 1991; Delamont & Galton, 1986, 1987; Pugsley et al., 1996a, 1996b; Woodruff & Curtner-Smith, 2007) is that many of them indicated a link between the body and schooling. For example, within the current study, girls were concerned about exposing their bodies and unwanted sexual advances. Furthermore, both genders were concerned about their bodies being physically attacked or lacking the strength to tackle hard physical exercise.

The majority of the binary discriminations illustrating the role reversal students undergo when they transition from elementary to secondary school that had been described in previous studies (Delamont, 1989; Pugsley et al., 1996a, 1996b) were also apparent within the stories collected in the current study. For example, these stories portrayed students who were newcomers to the secondary school as weak outsiders likely to be the victims of bullying, whereas the inference was that students at the top of the social hierarchy in their elementary schools were relatively strong insiders. In congruence with Woodruff and Curtner-Smith (2007), then, the stories in the current study suggested transitioning students went from being all powerful to powerless.

Recall that the British studies of scary stories (Delamont, 1989, 1991; Delamont & Galton, 1986, 1987; Pugsley et al., 1996a, 1996b) had indicated that physical education and sport were a key part of children's folklore surrounding the transitional process in the 1970s and 1980s. In contrast, the only American study conducted to date (Woodruff & Curtner-Smith, 2007), suggested that, while prominent, stories about physical education and sport were not as

central to the folklore American children had constructed. The findings of the current research suggested that physical education and sport played an even smaller and more peripheral role in the folklore of the African American sample studied. The first piece of evidence supporting this conclusion was that none of the participants mentioned physical education or sport until prompted to do so. The second was that following the prompt, a large proportion of the participants still could not recall hearing any scary stories about physical education and sport. This suggests that scary stories specifically about physical education and sport may be dying out as the folklore surrounding school transition changes and develops. In line with Brunvand (1981), this might be because stories on these topics are no longer relevant, scary, or entertaining. If correct, a positive explanation for this development would be that modern American physical education and school sport has improved to the extent that incoming secondary school students no longer need to be warned about them to the same extent as they once were. A more negative explanation would be that physical education's status at the secondary school level has slipped significantly and to a point where children really do not consider it very much at all.

At this juncture, I should also note that 17 participants in the current study could not recall hearing scary stories about any aspect of secondary schooling immediately prior to transition. In the Woodruff and Curtner-Smith (2007) study of Caucasian students, only 3 of 70 participants had no recollection of hearing these kinds of stories. If this finding transfers to other groups over time, it would also suggest that the folklore surrounding transition in general is weakening.

Following Pugsley et al. (1996b), the main practical implication of this study was that it provided signposts as to where administrators, teachers, and parents might focus their efforts in

order to improve the transitional process for children moving to secondary school. Specifically, the study suggested that these efforts be directed at eradicating bullying (e.g., see Kneisler, 2001), honing new academic skills needed by children for success at secondary school (e.g., see Akos, 2002), and familiarizing incoming students with their new school building (e.g., see Cauley & Jovanovich, 2006; Mizelle & Irvin, 2000). In terms of physical education, the study's results suggest the focus be on quieting fears about showering, changing clothes, and lesson content. More generally, the study indicates the importance of training teachers who have primary contact with students as they leave the elementary school and join the secondary school (Akos & Galassi, 2004; Gentle-Genitty, 2009). Studying the scary stories and folklore surrounding transition should be part of that training.

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