I Gotta Picture of Albert, No, Marvin.

Eric

Surprise, Eric, we have a picture of all of you. The following ninety-minute bona-fide story-swapping and joke-telling performance, preserved on tape, is indeed as accurate a picture of you and your adolescent peer group as any ever done. We have a picture of you, Eric, through your songs, jokes, legends, language, and horseplay.

The performance was held at my apartment on an afternoon after school. I had personally contacted the five boys the day before, and asked them to help with a "school assignment" by telling me some jokes, songs, and stories. They all agreed to help, although "We don't know any stories, Steve." All the boys except Eric have worked for me as delivery boys for about three years. We invited Eric at Marvin's suggestion. With the exception of Eric, the boys trust me, I think, and genuinely wanted to help. They had 24 hours to think over my request before the performance. As the reader can see, the kids performed remarkably spontaneously with little prompting or guidance from me.

Let us begin by briefly describing each of the participants. Jeff, Tommy, and Albert Jackson (all assumed names) are brothers, aged 15, 14, and 13 respectively. Jeff, ninth grade, is overweight, outgoing, and very likeable. He possesses a high sense of responsibility. Tommy, 8th grade, is tall and thin for his age, and is very quiet and serious. Albert, 7th grade, shorter and smaller than the others, is the fighter of the three. He is quite loud and boisterous. Marvin Kelly, age 14 and in the seventh grade, is very overweight, outgoing, and pleasant. Marvin, though, has little responsibility, and is considered a "poor achiever" in school. Eric Curtis, age 12 and 7th grade, is much younger emotionally than the other boys. He is often loud, but in a nervous way. [See Appendix A for a more complete description of the participants.]

Our analysis of the performance shall be divided into two areas of interest: the performance and the repertoire. During the analysis we shall reproduce whole sections of the tape transcript.

The Performance Itself: How They Tell It

Far more insight into the social patterns and cultural norms of these boys can be gleaned from the performance than from the content of the session. For the way the stories are told, and the appropriate reactions to them appear more important to the kids themselves than what is said. We shall divide the analysis into two manageable parts: the apparent patterns of audience interaction, and the key characteristics of that group and of individuals which can be gleaned from ingredients in this
ninety minute session. This short paper cannot analyze all parts of the performance so we shall only attempt to outline the highlights.

Audience Response Patterns

With difficulty, we can distinguish six patterns of audience participation; these six often overlap. They are listed and briefly explained below.

We should note that no single performance in the session escaped without some audience participation. In most cases, the embellishments, giggles, second conversations, and catcalls, as described below, were a constant feature of the story. In fact, far more tape is devoted to "cutting up" than to solo folklore items. These boys were not shy. the (i) symbol on the transcript shows each time the speaker began talking simultaneously with one or more other speakers. 294 such interruptions or simultaneous conversations are transcribed. Toward the end, when Jeff first mentioned Spanish Fly, it took the interviewer a full minute before he could get a word in to ask about it and receive a coherent answer.

550
(Back)    Jeff:  See how all them, see how all them's acting up. I didn't drink none of that Kool-Aide!

Marvin:  Steve blackmails us tonight!

Albert:  Boy, just wait. We're gonna get you, Steve.

555
Eric:  I knew that tasted awful funny.

Tommy:  Oh, yeah, I think that [U].*

Jeff (i):  I know what he put in it. Spanish Fly. Put some Spanish Fly in it.

Albert (i):  Put some tsetse flies in it.

Tommy (i):  Oh, yeah, bring all those jet pack in.

Albert (i):  Hey, hey, can we turn off the tape, go out there and soak our fat in the swimmin' pool?

560
Marvin:  Soak your nuts!?

Albert (i):  Huh?

Interviewer (i):  What's Spanish Fly?

Tommy (i):  You need to soak your balls.

Jeff (i):  You don't know what Spanish Fly is?

*[U] refers to undistinguishable comments.
Marvin: Soak your peter? (giggles).

Jeff: It's this, well, it's a fly, but you crush it up make

Marvin (i): Balls!

Jeff (i): into a cows, you know, so they'll fuck, you
know, and screw in, when, the

Marvin (i): You put these two things together.

Tommy (i): Oh, yeah.

Jeff (i): When they need a calf or somethin'.

Marvin (i): Here's a ball and here's a ball.

Jeff (i): It comes in a tablet about that big. It comes
in a tablet about that big [the diameter of a
half dollar] and they just give it to the cows
and horses, but about three years ago

It was a hectic afternoon, indeed.

The following six items list the six patterns of audience response
observed in this session:

1. "Noise" - This is the hardest type to demonstrate on the transcript,
but the easiest to hear on the tape. These kids, all but Tommy, made
a large assortment of noises: catcalls, whoops, yowls, mimiced laugh-
ter, belches, barks. This noise only served to add their opinion to
the conversation when they couldn't think of a specific word or phrase:

Interviewer: OK, who else knows a song like that?

Tommy: Not me.

Eric: No wonder.

Marvin: (laugh)

Interviewer: Well, let's hear your rooster song.

Albert: Cock-adoodle-doo.

Marvin: Hey, blockhead, attention.

Interviewer: Jeff.

Albert: Cock-adoodle-doodle-doo.

Marvin: He, he, he already drank a [U].
Assorted: [U] Somebody is clucking like a hen. [I think somebody had picked up the microphone.]

Jeff: Uh, lemme see.

Tommy: I think we better turn it [the microphone] off.

Jeff: Oh, yeah,

'We had an old hen, no eggs would she lay.
Yea, we had an old hen, no eggs would she lay.'

Albert (i): No compromising, please.

Jeff: 'My wife said, "Honey, we're losin' money
Cause we got an old hen, no eggs will she lay."
Then that rooster, came into the yard,
And caught that hen, right offa her guard.
We're havin' eggs now, we're havin' eggs now,
Since that rooster, came into the yard.

We had an old cow, no milk would she give.'

Albert (i): Mooooo.

Jeff: 'Yea, we had an old cow, no milk would she give.'

Albert (i): Moooo.

Jeff: 'My wife said, "Honey, we're losin' money
Cause we got an old cow, no milk would she give."
Then that rooster, came into the yard.
And caught that cow, right offa her guard.'
(Hand clapping)

Albert: Ya haa.

Jeff: 'We're having m-, m-, egg nog, we're havin' egg nog,'

Albert (i): Yeah, baby, egg nog.

Jeff: 'Since that rooster, came into the yard.

We had an old dog,

Albert (i): Talking about Marvin now.

Marvin and Eric (i): Whoo, Yaooo (howling sound through the verse).

Jeff (i): 'no pups would she give,
Yea, we had an old dog, no pups would she give.
My wife said, "Honey, we're losin' money,
'Cause we got an old dog, no pups will she give."
Then that rooster, came into the yard,
Jeff: And caught that dog, right offa her guard.

We're havin' bird dogs, we're havin' bird dogs
Since that rooster, came into the yard.'

Albert: Jeff, that's enough.

Tommy: Go ahead.

Jeff: 'We had an old pig,'

Albert, Marvin and Eric (i): (Oinks and grunts throughout verse. Also, assorted shuttups.)

Jeff: 'No bacon would she give.

Yea, we had an old pig, no bacon would she give.
My wife said, "Honey, we're losin' money, 'Cause we got an old pig, no bacon will she give.'
Then that rooster, came into the yard.
And caught that pig, right offa her guard.
We're havin' bacon and eggs now, we're havin' bacon
and eggs now,
Since that rooster, came into the yard.'

Eric: We are??

2. Sizing Up the Obscenity Limits - The boys were unsure exactly what was taboo for the session, especially during the first part. A lot of their chatter was devoted toward probing the limits of vulgarity I would tolerate. The first test came in Al's introduction to his elephant joke. He spelled "S-H-E-E-T," catching the immediate attention of the group to judge my reaction. Then the other boys repeated and added to the word until finally Al came out with "shit". Laughter continued for seven seconds:

Albert: All right, I got a joke.

Interviewer: OK, let's hear your joke. Put it [the microphone] down, because you can't hear yourself.


[Immediate attention of others who had been playing with the microphone]

Marvin: What?

Interviewer (i): What?

Eric: S . h . e . e . t?

Albert: Sho -he . e . e . t!

Jeff: Sheets?
Albert: Shit!
*[7] [plus assorted undistinguishable comments]*

Albert: All right, listen, y'all. There was this elephant, and they put this cork up his butt...

That was the first test, I passed, they began using increasing obscenity until they, toward the end of the session, had lapsed into the normal vulgarity-for-its-own-sake as if I weren't there:

544  
(Back)  
Eric: Marvin's dick always kisses his balls before they go to bed.

Albert: I wouldn't be talkin', Mark.

Marvin: He kisses ... 5 times. [laughing]

Assorted: [Laughter]

Albert: Mark holds the record for that.

3. Derision - The boys spent a great deal of time simply calling each other names. I thought at first they would tire, but they never did. From the first, Marvin, Al, and Eric competed for who could deliver the unkindest cut. Two exceptions to this constant derision stand out. First, Tommy and Jeff generally neither received nor addressed insults; Jeff because he was the leader and above it, Tommy because he didn't participate in delivering the teasing, and didn't acknowledge anything directed at him. Second, limits to the derogatory remarks clearly existed. One was not to directly and specifically call someone a dirty name. Generally, insults were traded in the third person and in the context of some other topic:

001  
(Back)  
I: OK, let's hear the rest of your story about, uh, the telephone pole.

Mv: Curtis messing around with that. (pencil sharpener)

I: Come sit down, Eric.

J: Will you behave?

Al: He's sharpening his dick.

At one point, young Eric called Al a "shit and a half". and the reaction indicated that it was out of bounds:

* A number in [ ] refers to the number of seconds of laughter at that point.
I: OK, Marvin, what did Eric say?

Mv: [U]

I: He said what?

Mv: Just knows.

J: Take your ice out, Marvin.

I: Just tell us, for God's sake.

Mv: I don't really know. He didn't explain it. Tell it over, Curtis.

E: AAAh.

J: Come on, Eric, tell it.

Al (i): Steve got us all here ... [U]

E (i): [U]

Mv: Sure.

Al: How long you been married, Steve.

I: Uh, a year and a half.

J: (whisper) That's all you gotta say.

Mv: All right, listen, fellows.

I (i): OK, Marvin.

Mv: Eric Curtis here says you better go open the door, Tommy. And, uh,

E (i): (Nervous giggles)

Mv: Eric Curtis says that, uh, uh,

E (i): Albert Jackson is

Mv: Albert Jackson is a piece of shit an' a half.

I: Oh, I see why you weren't going to tell him.

E: (very nervous giggles)

[Albert is by now across the room, standing over Eric]

Al: Come on, Eric.

E: Let's [U] out by the swimming pool.
Al: All right, I'll throw you in there first.

E: [U]

[Albert sits back down]

Al: Boy, if [U] hadn't got your clothes wet, boy, I would.

I: Y'all don't know any more jokes?

300

Al: Yeah, I know a lot!

J (i): Yeah, I know a joke!

4. Changing the Subjects - Often a member of the audience would use his participation prerogative to change the subject to a more comfortable one for him. They did this quite well several times, either away from an uncomfortable one or to a familiar one. They did this so abruptly and so successfully, in fact, that the transcript appears to have portions omitted where it does not. That's just the way the conversation went:

311

Interviewer: You tell it, Albert.

Albert: NO!

Interviewer: Why?

Eric: Tell me and I'll tell it.

Albert: It's very disturbing.

Eric: (whisper) Tell me and I'll tell it.

Marvin: He, he, he, he'll tell it [pointing to Tommy].

Tommy: I'm trying to think of the first part of it.

Albert: Old Mr. Crane was a ...

Marvin (i): Go.

315

'A big fat hang and shit and a string and whoot wang!' (singing)

Albert: 'Ommpah, oompah, oom, oom' [Clapping hands]

Interviewer: I'll erase any of the dirty words on the tape, so don't worry about that.

Marvin: Who ya gonna su, supply 'em with?

Eric: Golly, we been here 23 minutes already.
Interviewer: OK, tell us the joke, Al; you came over here to tell jokes. Tell the joke.

Albert: (a whimpering sound like a puppy)

Tommy: Ha, ha, ha.

Eric: Let's have another soda water.

Marvin: Yeah. We wanna 'nother soda water. Don't we, Curtis?

Eric: Yeah.

Jeff (i): That's the Rag, Steve?

Albert (i): That's worth 23 minutes of energy.

Interviewer: What?

Jeff: The Rag?

Interviewer: It's a newspaper at, uh, the University.

Jeff: Underground newspaper?

5. Helping the Speaker - During a story, Al often helped Jeff with a key word or thought that he forgot. Eric similarly helped Marvin. These two pairs were the only way it worked, though; no other "helping" combinations were used. The "help" was always limited and the speaker allowed to continue; moreover, it was seldom reciprocal, that is, Jeff seldom helped Al nor did Marvin help Eric:

Marvin: I think I know a joke. Um, um, I mean a story like that.

Eric (i): I know one almost like that.

Marvin (i): There was this...

Albert: Lemme see.

Eric (i): I know one almost...

Marvin (i): a castle. 'Bout a woman who owned a castle. Well, she bought a castle and then she said, "Well, the first word I hear I'm...that's what I'm gonna call my castle." And then she, and then she, and then she saw this guy get off the bus and the, fell down, and then, and then he said, "Oh, HOLE!" You know, like that. And, and then pretty soon, "That's what I'll call my castle, Hole." And then, about a
Marvin (cont'd): year later she had a baby, and then said, "Well, the first word I hear I think I'll call my baby." So

Eric (i): I know this 'n...She goes walkin' around, and she goes walking around.

Jeff (i): Shut up!

Marvin: And then she goes down the street and then hears this guy who says, "Oh, Hairy Dick!" you know.

Eric (i): (low whisper) Hairy Butt.

Marvin: Yeah, Hairy Butt. And then she says, 'That's what I'll call my little boy, Hairy Butt. And then, and then, one, and then one day, about three years later, she went to the policeman and the she said, "I looked all around my," uh, its Hairy Butt, and Hole, yeah, Hole is the boy and Hairy Butt is the castle. "I looked all around my Hairy Butt and couldn't find my Hole."

Jeff: I looked all around my Hole and couldn't find my Hairy Butt.

Eric: He said it wrong. His, his castle was supposed to be Hairy Butt.

Marvin (i): I didn't know it!

6. The Repetition of Variants of the Punch Line and Key Joke Words - intermingled with laughter was the proper response to a joke in this session. The more well-liked the joke, the more words or phrases from it were repeated. The farmer's daughter joke, for example, found all sorts of variations on the punch line; and they repeated the punch line again on the way home.

Interviewer: All right, I'll tell the one I'm thinking of. OK? So you'll see what kind...

[Long joke of "Farmer's Daughter" variety, with three travelers making love to the farmer's daughter. As punishment, the farmer crams cranberries, onions, and watermelons successively up the anuses of the three travelers.]

[Joke proceeds with much audience participation: laughter, questions, word puns, and hoots. Al, at one point, says he has heard it, but refuses to tell it. There is laughter each time the word "screw" and "butt" are mentioned.]

[Laughter is interspersed with the following comments after the first ten seconds. Marvin falls on the floor, he laughs so hard.]
Marvin: He crammed...crammed...watermelons up his ass.

Albert: Not just one...about twelve.

Jeff: Comes...comes back with about...to pick up twelve watermelons.

Marvin: He says...

Albert: What a surprise!

Jeff: ...600 pounds...

Marvin: I think he shoved the watermelon in the wrong hole.

GROUP AND INDIVIDUAL SNAPSHOTs

First, we can quickly "rank" the boys' status within the group. From quantity of items told, from attention paid by the audience, and from "Shut up" discipline meted out, the boys appear ranked as follows:

Jeff is the unquestioned leader. He related twenty separate items of folklore, almost half the total. He was the only one to issue a general "shut up" to the entire group, although it didn't necessarily take immediate effect.

Albert and Marvin seemed to vie for second place status, with Albert slightly ahead due to his filial kinship with leader Jeff. Albert related ten items of folklore, and Marvin six. Marvin added a more constant stream of embellishments, though. Neither Albert nor Marvin could enforce any discipline or leadership on the other, and neither tried. Their competition came in the form of a tacitly agreed-upon "one-upmanship", with the following as the best example:

Jeff: Well, his daughter too, they gave her, his daughter

Marvin (i): Probably screwed a meat ball.

Jeff: No,

Albert: Screwed a tamale!

[1] Jeff: I've seen it work, she

Marvin: Screwed a dick!

Albert: Screwed a taco.

Jeff: I've seen it work. She, she was in there with Jesse and she kept trying to

Marvin (i): Screwed a ketchup bottle.

Jeff (i): God! Crazy!
Marvin: Screwed an orange!

Interviewer: Where was this?

Jeff: Right in the back, in the kitchen. It works.

Interviewer: Yeah?

Albert (i): Screwed a banana!

Eric: She gave to do it the dog way.

Albert: Tree trunk!

Albert: Shove it in here, boy!

Marvin: Pull the damn bugger!

Marvin: Well, listen, I know why she rode with a mechanic.

Jeff (i): Grab the nearest telephone pole!

Marvin (i): Man, the mechanic can find out what's wrong with here...Screwed every nut in town!

Albert: A web of the past!

Jeff: Listen, listen, listen, let's have five minutes of silence.

Note that Al apparently had come up with the ultimate: "Tree trunk!" Marvin ingeniously changed the pattern slightly to top the tree trunk: "I know why she rode with a mechanic...Screwed every nut in town." Al had no suitable response; Marvin won the contest.

Eric is low man in the group, and striving to be accepted. Eric told only three items, and two of these appear "made-up" on the spot:

Interviewer (i): Lemme hear Eric's.

(Start)

Eric: Well, see, once there was this, uh, flap, this, uh, boy and his mother. The preacher was comin' over, and they had this big ole watermelon they was savin' for the preacher to come, you know. He wasn't 'sposed to touch that, you know, it was the ripest one and all. Well, see, he got out there, lookin' at it. He cut a little ole piece out with his pocket knife. He liked it, so he ate all of it.

565

And when the preacher came

Marvin (i): Sloffered off his ears.

Eric (i): When the preacher came, there wasn't no

Albert (i): Shut your mouth.
Eric (i): Watermelon to feed him. So his mama asked him what happened to the watermelon. He says, "I don't know." See, then, after the preacher had left, watermelon started growing out his ears.

Jeff: Booooooo!

Albert: Woooooooooooo!

Eric valiantly tried to participate for the first forty-five minutes. He was just too young for the others, though, and had no real chance to compete. He finally gave up, and began wandering around the room, examining anything that interested him.

Tommy had no status ranking in the group, nor did he appear to want one. He was an "outsider". He was respected by his two brothers; they asked him several times to help them remember specific stories. Marvin and Eric, though, ignored Tommy completely, except to explicitly deride him twice: "He dead!" Tommy did not seem to mind his role as an "outsider"; he never seemed bored or listless, and he watched and listened with more interest than any of the others.

The second characteristic observed relates to "normal" social behavior: the boys are clearly comfortable with competing to be heard. They have realized from experience that to tell "about" a joke, to explain where one heard it, or to elaborate on any other extraneous material will not get anyone's attention. Throughout the entire session, the only way to quiet the horseplay and wisecracks was to begin the story. Items were announced abruptly, and usually launched into with no introduction or explanation other than, "Oh, I gotta joke." If no one hears the announcement, the speaker simply begins his joke with, "OK,..." and proceeds in a louder voice than anyone else. The horseplay always subsided to listen.

Albert: Yeah, 'bout as neat as you.

Eric: Oh, her father got sent back to jail for carryin' a gun.

Marvin: Yeahhhhhah!

Eric: Ooooh. Oh, she had to go to the judge 'cause his window was broken up.

Albert (i): Oh, I gotta joke!

Marvin: See, she broke the windows.

Albert (i): I gotta joke!

Eric: See, see, there was these windows in the top of the church that was real, real small, see. She, you know, these guys broke 'em out, but everybody, you know, said she

Marvin (i): Blamed it on that girl.
Eric (i): Yeah, they blamed it on her. And that's how come she went to the judge.

Albert: OK, what's black, white, and red?

Marvin: You!

Albert: A skunk with diaper rash.

Marvin: Laugh, Albert, you made it up.

Albert and Jeff: Ho, ho, ha, ha.

Marvin: Booo.

Third, the constant striving to tell a good story, the close attention paid to the speaker once he started, and the self-imposed limits the group placed on derision of each other, demonstrated that these boys both desired and received respect and approval from their peers. Even the leader, Mike, sought that approval in his stories. If his was received well, he would sit back to laugh himself, and not add a word:

Jeff (i): There was these, there was, there was these five houses, and they all had pools. Sewers in front of their, of their houses. So how do you tell which one's the Aggie's?

Marvin: (giggle)
   (Silence)
Tommy: I know.

Jeff: It has a divin' board.
   (laugh)
Marvin: They dive in the cesspools. Eshsh! Vosch! Vulch! Oh, Jesus (muttered).
   (pause)
Interviewer: OK.

Marvin: You must know some, I'm sure.

Albert (i): Your turn, Marvin.

Eric: Yeah.

But if, on the other hand, no one laughed or seemed to understand, Mike (and all other speakers as well) would try to embellish or explain:

Jeff (i): And she was writing with a pen and that old thing hit the pen and goes flying and she sends around, and so she,...and it was Miss Black. So she got up and she looked around the class and she said, "I want every single person to stay here until we find out who shot that thing. So we stayed until I think 4:15. Last year. And
Jeff (cont'd): so nobody ever told and so finally, she said, "Well, you, we'll just have to do this every day for a week." And so this old guy stands up and says, "I shot it!" And so she says, "Well let's go down to the office." So they went down there. Mr. Wirth's standin' there and he says, "Where's the spit wad?" And see, one of the guys had gone and picked it up and she said, "Well, we'll go back and get it." He says, "Where is it? Where is it?" And so they never did find it and so she got in a bunch of trouble for trying to get the guy in trouble... It was funny. She has, see, they could not find the spit wad, 'cause, uh, another guy had went over there and picked it up when Jim already got up and said that he'd done it, and so Miss Black got chewed out by that old guy.

[Absolutely no laughter at this story, but everyone listened quietly.]

260 Tommy: The other day a teacher hit this one boy in the mouth and started making him bleed. Miss Gail.

The fourth observation we can make is probably the most critical one: these adolescents, all but Tommy known as "discipline problems" at school, actually are highly disciplined and self-motivated when assigned a task. Their task for the afternoon was to tell stories and jokes; they disciplined themselves and each other to stay on the track. They're constantly imploring each other to come up with something:

Interviewer: OK.

Marvin: You must know some, I'm sure.

Albert (i): Your turn, Marvin.

Eric: Yeah.

Marvin: All right. This television show in New York, Eric, Hit it!

(laughter)

Albert: It that all you can say, "hit it"?

Marvin: (giggle)

Albert: He don't want to hit you 'cause you're it, you know!

165 Jeff: Go, Kelly, tell a joke.

(Front)

Eric (i): You don't want hit me.[Marvin was hitting him].

Interviewer: OK, tell us about the television show in New York.

(giggles)
No doubt these boys' teachers would express amazement if shown the results of this transcript, but would not be surprised at the noisy, uproaring way in which the boys negotiated their task.

THE REPERTOIRE: What They Say

Within this group's repertoire of folklore, we find three basic types: jokes, songs, and legends. We shall deal with each separately.

JOKES

"All right if we tell nasty ones?"

Al

The first question to answer in dealing with this group's humor is simply, "What is funny?" From this session, we can isolate four funny subjects and two ingredients that help make any subject funny. The most obvious ingredient that adds to humor is repetition. Most jokes proceed through several stages, each repeating the other with some minor variant. Al's "Cork in the Elephant" (195, front), Jeff's "Two Indians (209, front) and most others involved large doses of repetition:

195

Albert: All right, listen, y'all. There was this elephant, and they put this cork up his butt.

(giggles)

And for three months. And then they got this little monkey to pull the cork out. And these judges were standing over here and he pulled it out. And so, the first judge said, "I saw shit fly everywhere!"

Marvin (i): (Loud laughter)

Albert: And the second judge said, "I saw shit fly everywhere!" And the third judge said, "I saw that poor little monkey trying to push that cork, back in the elephant's butt!"

200

[The laughter was five seconds long, but not loud. Everyone was red-faced. Marvin fell off the couch, he was laughing so hard, but not loudly.]

The second ingredient that adds to humor is novelty, much as it does in adult humor. The boys proved numerous times that a new joke is fully, a repeated joke is not. Mike's "Sunny Beaches" brought guffaws during its first telling in the car, but only a giggle during its repeat at the session (485, front). More quantitative study is necessary with this ingredient before we can reach any firm conclusions, though. Novelty as an element of humor is probably a function of at least two other situational factors: time lapsed since hearing the joke and group composition (specifically if at least one person in the group has not heard the joke).

The funniest of the four most humorous subjects has already been discussed: derision:
Interviewer: Let's hear your MacDonald's Song.

Eric: [Immediate start] [To the commercial tune]
'MacDonald's is your kind of place' (break off into laughter)

Albert: (loud, nervous laugh)

Eric: 'Dirty, dirty kind of place,
MacDonald's is Marvin's kind of place!'

These boys simply never tired of laughing at each other. (See page 44 this paper).

The other three subjects, as any Freudian might expect: anal jokes and references, girls, and male organs. Almost half of all jokes told involved anal references (usually "shit"). In fact, just the first mention of the word "shit" brought seven seconds of laughter, earlier reference (194, front).

Similarly, girls, especially nasty girls, seem to be a very popular and funny subject. They jokes about girls at great length, but said very little, really; they were uneasy with the subject. They never mentioned girls until I specifically asked a question, late in the session. Note that I had to ask twice, as all but Albert ignored my question at first:

Albert: Tommy, you remember it, don't ya?

Eric (i): Come here, kitty cat.

Tommy (i): No.

Marvin: Come here, puddy cat.

Eric: Meow, meow yaw - row, tow! (Bark)

Interviewer: Let's talk about girls.

Albert: My subject!

Eric (i): (Continued barking)

Marvin (i): Now here's one, Mr. Controller. Have one.

[The Playboy]

Jeff: Put the book up, son.

Marvin: No, they're a...[U]

Eric (i): Here, kitty, kitty.

Jeff: Shuttup.

Interviewer: OK, put the magazine down. Again, Marvin.
Albert: Ow, he hit my hand.

Jeff: Cut it out, Eric. You're sacring him.

Marvin: Ooh, you hear it whatever.

Interviewer: What do y'all think of girls?

Assorted: (Loud immediate claps, catcalls, screams, and whistles)

Eric: They're ugly!

Marvin: Some are nice, some are low, some are pretty...

Assorted: [arguments]

Although none of the boys except Al would admit to liking girls ("Oh, I call a pretty girl my girlfriend", 592, front), and they all made obliquely obscene references, no one was explicitly lewd about the opposite sex. For example, the nastiest girl in class was "She smokes like the devil" (106, back). Even when questioned specifically, "Well, what does she do?" (109, back), they gave oblique answers, "Oh, 'cause she thinks she's so tough" (110, back). In addition, the boys would use the words "fuck" and "screw" in the context of a joke, but in conversation about a specific girl, they would often say she "did something" (112, back). In short, these boys are just too young to make specific "boy talk" about the opposite sex them seem to hold in awe.

Jokes and references to male organs were much more vulgar, and brought more laughter. Marvin's first "Oh, balls" brought two seconds of laughter on its own (203, front).

One more point needs to be made concerning this group's humor. The interviewer let it take its own course, and only four of the overt jokes were not crude or obscene, and two of those involved a skunk.

Within the context of the humor of this group, the learning process is obvious to an outsider. Not all boys understand all parts of every story; when one didn't understand, he listened until he did, or he asked. For example, Eric asked what a whore is, and was told by leader Jeff (while the tape was being turned). Also, Al, Eric, and Marvin didn't know what Spanish Fly was, but they listened until Jeff had explained it with his "stick shift" story (590, back).

Education continues not just in the area of sex during the session. These boys are remarkably well-versed on current events and issues. "Pollution" was a popular word all afternoon in normal conversation (084, front), and Jeff even led a debate about it, with full participation (177, back). Jeff's joke in the return trip in the car dealt with hijacked planes to Cuba, and everyone understood well enough to laugh (705, back). And in the course of horseplay, when Tommy asked what a spittoon was, Al and Marvin told him. It's a little surprising that two 14 year-old low grade students (Marvin failed a year) would know the definition of a spittoon,
and use it in friendly conversation:

Jeff: It's a spittoon [a bowl that Eric was playing with].

Marvin: 46¢ or what?

Albert: No, it isn't.

Interviewer: You know what a spittoon is?

Marvin: It's somethin' that you chew tobacco and then you spit into it.

Tommy: What is a spittoon?

Albert: Yes, it's one of them things you spit tobaccer in.

Eric: A spit can.

Marvin: There's an old bowl, us, letsee, there is a story our teacher wrote, uh, told us, and this girl would always chew tobacco, you know. And, she's an expert with rocks, you know. And she can kill anything in, uh, hunnerd yards, or more, you know, and she's about 7th, 8th grade. And, then, uh, and then the teacher told her to go see the judge, you know, and he was in the courtroom, talkin' to these people in there.

Tommy (i): Oooooh.

SONGS

The group enjoys singing songs and song parodies. They were all humorous songs, although the group response was not very high. The reason for little laughter in all but one of the songs was simple: they had heard them often, so the ingredient of novelty was missing. Mike's "we had an old hen" did get some laughs from Marvin and Eric in the car, but during the taping it was old stuff. Al's "Crane" song, apparently new to everyone, was greeted with the quietest two seconds all day:

Assorted: (Shouts)

Albert (i): OK, y'all shuttup and I will.
'Old Mr. Crane was a son-of-a-bitch. He drove his tank in the whore house ditch.'

Marvin (i): (giggle)

Albert (i): 'Lined fifty women up against the wall, Said, "Give 'em $50, I'll fuck 'em all." Fucked 48 till his balls turned blue, Jacked off, backed off, fucked the other two.'
[two full seconds of silence]
Jeff: (short laugh) Oh, brother!

Marvin: You went too fast. (giggle)

Albert: Nooooo!

Jeff: That tape recorder is goin' too slow.

The song went too fast and was simply too obscene to be laughed at. Notice that the group quickly changed the subject:

Marvin: (Belch)...Ain't too big.

(Front) Jeff: Lettseeee. Y'all know any stories?

The subject matter of the songs for the first two songs, "Comet" and "MacDonald's" dealt with what could be called "technological folklore":

Jeff: Comet. It was the one about Comet.

Eric (i): Yeah, Comet.

Jeff: Comet, it

Interviewer (i): Yeah, it's OK, go on.

Jeff: You want me to start over?

Interviewer: Yeah.

Jeff: 'Comet, it tastes like Listerine [To march tempo] Comet, it makes your mouth so clean Comet, (laughter) it makes you vomit, So get some Comet and vomit, today!'

[No laughter. Everyone had heard it in the car.]

Marvin: OK -- We'll go around thataway.

Interviewer: Let's hear your MacDonald's song.

Eric: [Immediate start] [To the commercial tune] 'MacDonald's is your kind of place' (break off into laughter)

Albert: (loud, nervous laugh)

Eric: 'Dirty, dirty kind of place. MacDonald's is Marvin's kind of place!'

Marvin: Shuttup.

Eric: Go, Marvin.

Interviewer: Okay. Marvin, go.
Jeff: OK, Marvin.

Marvin: [Immediate start] [To the commercial tune]
'MacDonald's is your kind of place.
They shove hamburgers in your face.
They stick French fried between your toes.
They shove dill pickles up your nose.
Don't forget about our shakes,
They're polluted from every lake.
MacDonald's is your kind--of--place.'

Albert: Big correction. Marvin's kind of place.

[Again no real response]

Both songs show a real rejection in this group of the "Consumerism" of America. Al, Eric, and Marvin make quite a point of pinning whose "type of place" MacDonald's is, a really serious insult. An interesting extension to this study would be a collection of such anti-consumerism songs.

The only comment one can make about Jeff's song, 'We had an old Hen', is that it is clever, and he remembered it completely, and sang every verse exactly as he had in the car earlier (earlier reference, 090-115, front).

LEGENDS

"You don't know what Spanish Fly is?"

Jeff

The two legends told during this session, "Spanish Fly" and "Spit Wad", were not told as legends, of course, but as Lady Truth herself:

555
(Back)

Eric: I knew that tasted awful funny.

Tommy: Oh, yeah, I think that [U].

Jeff (i): I know what he put in it, Spanish Fly. Put some Spanish Fly in it.

Albert (i): Put some tsetse flies in it.

Tommy (i): Oh, yeah, bring all those jet pack in.

Albert (i): Hey, hey, can we turn off the tape, go out there and soak our fat in the swimmin' pool?

560

Marvin: Soak your nuts?

Albert (i): Huh?

Interviewer (i): What's Spanish Fly?

Tommy (i): You need to soak your balls.
Jeff (i): You don't know what Spanish Fly is?

Marvin (i): Soak your peter? (giggles)

Jeff: It's this, well, it's a fly, but you crush it up, make

Marvin (i): Balls!

Jeff (i): Into a cows, you know, so they'll fuck, you know, and screw in, when, the,

Marvin (i): You put these two things together.

Tommy (i): Oh, yeah.

Jeff (i): When they need a calf or somethin'.

Marvin (i): Here's a ball and here's a ball.

Jeff (i): It comes in a tablet about that big. It comes in a tablet about that big [the diameter of a half dollar] and they just give it to the horses and cows, but about three years ago

Marvin (i): Hey, scratch.

Jeff (i): The start -- some boys got ahold of it and they gave it, they've been puttin' it in girls' cokes and things. Every boy at school, almost, has come.

Interviewer: Really?

Jeff: Yeah, you can buy a little old packet.

Interviewer (i): Does it work?

Jeff: Huh?

Marvin (i): Of what?

Tommy (i): It sure does.

Interviewer (i): How much does it cost to buy a packet?

Marvin (i): Of what, sauce?

Jeff (i): I don't know how you can

Albert (i): I'm just gettin' interested!

Jeff (i): You buy a packet about that big, and, and

Marvin (i): OF WHAT?
Jeff (i): From some of the guys for about a quarter and put it in girls' cokes. Boy,

Interviewer: Does it work?

Jeff: Yeah, it works.

Marvin: Hey, does [U]?

Interviewer: How do you know?

Jeff: Huh?

Interviewer: How do you know it works?

Jeff: You know Anna Eyers, Al? Uh, Tony gave her some. God, you oughta have seen her. In there...

Albert: Gimme! Boyboybo.

Jeff: One, one girl took some right before, see, she was comin' back on an airplane. I mean, no, no, it wasn't an airplane. She was comin' back

Marvin (i): On her balls.

Jeff (i): And she a ride with this, she got a ride with this mechanic. And, so, this guy let her off, and before she, she had taken some of that Spanish Fly, and before she got off, she got one of those stick shifts. And so she was carryin' it with her and all of a sudden, she used that stick shift and then she bled to death.

[two seconds of silence]

Jeff: She needed to screw so bad that she used the stick shift.

[6]

Marvin: Her a [U].

Jeff: It does a, it's like a drug and it'll make you horny as hell.

Interviewer: You know anybody it's ever worked on?

Marvin (i): You! (laughter)

Jeff: Yeah, Anna Eyers! Uh,

Marvin (i): Hey, you know, you know

Jeff (i): You know Mr. Eyers that owns the Good Time Restaurant? Well, his daughter took, they gave her, his daughter

Marvin (i): Probably screwed a meat ball.
Jeff: No.

Albert: Screwed a tamale!

Jeff: I've seen it work, she

Marvin: Screwed a dick!

Albert: Screwed a taco.

Jeff: I've seen it work. She, she was in there with Tony and she kept trying to

Marvin (i): Screwed a ketchup bottle.

Jeff (i): God! Crazy!

Marvin: Screwed an orange!

Interviewer: Where was this?

Jeff: Right in the back, in the kitchen. It works.

Interviewer: Yeah?

Albert (i): Screwed a banana!

Eric: She gave to do it the dog way.

Albert: Tree trunk!

Albert: Shove it in here, boy!

Marvin: Pull the damn bugger!

Marvin: Well, listen, I know why she rode with a mechanic.

Jeff (i): Grab the nearest telephone pole!

Marvin (i): Man, the mechanic can find out what's wrong with her...Screwed every nut in town!

Albert: A web of the past!

Jeff: Listen, listen, listen, let's have five minutes of silence.

Marvin: Ooooooh.

Albert: Phlungh.

Eric: He blew it!

Albert: Phlunghungh.

Marvin: Play that goes down just right.
Jeff: Quit, Al. (loud, evil laugh into the microphone)

Jeff: This old guy, he took this big old spit wad. Had a big old one, about that big around.

Marvin (i): Right at the teacher.

Jeff (i): 'Bout as big as the size of a quarter. And he had, had, had, this old flexible ruler. So he put it on there. And he shot.

Tommy (i): Ohhhh.

Jeff (i): That old thing and she was sittin' there.

Marvin (i): (Bomblike whistle sound)

Jeff (i): And she was writing with a pen and that old thing hit the pen and goes flying and she send around... and so she, ...and it was Miss Black. So she got up and she said, "I want every single person to stay here until we find out who shot that thing." So we stayed until I think it was 4:15. Last year. And so nobody ever told and so finally, she said, "Well, you, we'll just have to do this every day for a week." And so this old guy stands up and says, "I shot it!" And so she says, "Well, let's go down to the office." So they went down there. Mr. Wirth's standin' there, and he says, "Where's the spit wad?" And see, one of the guys had gone and picked it up and she said, "Well, we'll go back and get it." He says, "Where is it? Where is it?" And so they never did find it and so she got in a bunch of trouble for trying to get the guy in trouble...It was funny. She has, see, they couldn't find the spit wad, 'cause, uh, another guy had went over there and picked it up when Jim already got up and said that he'd done it, and so Miss Black got chewed out by that old guy.

[Absolutely no laughter at this story, but everyone listened quietly.]

Some kernel of truth probably exists for the "Spit Wad", but "Spanish Fly" has been with us for decades. Jeff told both, and the others had heard neither (except Tommy had heard the Spanish Fly). Age 15 is possibly the age to first hear this type of legend.

The basic plot of the "Spit Wad" story is a natural fantasy for Junior High students: a big kid (hero) hits the teacher (villain), villain gets mad, but hero keeps his cool, hero is almost caught and punished, friend helps hero, Principal (the calvary, an army, a god?) rules in favor of
the hero, Principal punishes teacher instead. One can understand the appeal and transmission of a story of this type. One two curious points arise for comment. First, the principal is the "good guy" and the teacher the villain, the reverse of one's expectations. Second, and fitting with the first point, the boys all agreed that they called their principal "The Beak" (228, front), but Jeff refers respectfully to him in conversation as "Mr. Wirth". Obviously the principal at David Junior High is well-thought-of by his students.

The Spanish Fly legend serves as a more universal item of folklore. This writer heard it in Lockhart, Texas, 13 years ago. Asking students at the University of Texas, I have discovered that most have heard it somewhere in the Southwest or California (students from the North hadn't heard it until arrival in Austin). Many UT students believe it.

In any event, the legend is undeniably true, and a recent medical development in Mike's mind. He stated, "Yeah, it works," (576, back) and proceeded to give an example as proof (605, back). It never occurred to Mike that the girl was turned on by something other than Spanish Fly, reflecting a viewpoint of girls as normally shunning sex. In addition, Mike stated that "some boys", implying his own peer group, discovered it only about three years ago (566, back). He also asserted, positively, that Spanish Fly can be purchased at David Junior High for 25¢ a packet. It would be interesting to get him to purchase a packet, if indeed he can, to chemically analyze it.

The other boys were apparently impressed by this legend (580, back), and listened carefully until they figured out what it was (590, back). Then they thought it was hilarious and added plenty of their own comments (595-615, back).

CONCLUSIONS

This brief presentation has, at the least I think, demonstrated a useful approach to the study of social interactions of peer groups. From a careful study of a brief ninety-minute folklore transmission session, valid sociological conclusions, such as those outlined in this paper, can be reached that would require months of effort via traditional sociological approaches. Indeed, the study of the folklore of this group, and I suspect of other groups as well, tells us far more about the group than its members could ever transmit. The folklore of this peer group is, as we suggested at the beginning, a "snapshot" of these boys: their values, group pressures, interaction processes, learning abilities, and world views.

This analysis has only scratched the surface of the material in this one short session; and this session only touched on some of the highlights of the folklore of this age group.

This writer strongly recommends this area of study to future folklorists and sociologists.

We'd like to come back another time,
but I don't think this guy's gonna want us.

Jeff

Oh, balls!

Marvin

(Ed. - A complete transcript of the conversations with the boys is available from B. Kirshenblit-Zimbé, Dept. of Anthropology, U. of Tex., Austin)
Credits:

I would like to thank Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Assistant Professor of anthropology at the University of Texas for her help and encouragement in this undertaking.

To my wife Gail goes my heartfelt thanks for typing this paper, both times. Without her typewriter and encouragement my small contribution would never have seen print.

Typing and scholarship aside, the final credits must go to my friends Jeff, Tommy, Albert, Marvin and Eric. Thanks.

Appendix A

Personal Data Sheet: Informants

JEFF JACKSON
Age: 15
Grade: 9
Race: White
Religion: Baptist

Family: The family has a distinct lower working class background. The three boys live in a small, run-down house on a busy street in North Austin. The boys, in the three years I have known them, have only mentioned their father once, and then in a derogatory sense. He does not live at home. They have an older half-brother in his early twenties, who does not live at home. I think he has been in prison, as they have referred to him as "Ex-con". Their mother works at various jobs, and they have to struggle to get by. The family attends a nearby Baptist church regularly. I met the Jackson brothers in 1967 through a North Austin newspaper. They worked for me as delivery boys off and on since then. Jeff recently got a bus-boy job at a local Restaurant.

Personal Description: Jeff is the oldest, and the accepted leader of the three. He possesses a very high sense of responsibility and integrity. A very gregarious person, he has a very likable, outgoing personality, although he has been occasionally moody. He seems to have a strong will to achieve.

Physical Description: Jeff is slightly overweight and wears his hair long, in a country and western style. He has always enjoyed singing and has a good singing voice.

TOMMY JACKSON
Age: 14
Grade: 8
Race: White
Religion: Baptist

Personal Description: Tommy is the middle brother of the Jackson brothers. He is very quiet, and when he speaks, he speaks very slowly. He seldom jokes or participates in horseplay with his brothers. His brothers seem to have little respect for Tommy, and treat him
harshly, which never has seemed to bother Tommy. His brothers, though, always listen to anything Tommy says, and usually act upon it. When the three were delivery boys, Jeff and Al would not accept a job unless Tommy was also included.

Physical Description: Tommy is taller than any of the others, and very skinny. He tires easily, and I have often thought that he is slightly anemic. His hair is fairly short, and neatly combed down.

ALBERT JACKSON
Age: 13
Grade: 7
Race: White
Religion: Baptist
Personal Description: Albert, the youngest brother, is the fighter of the group. Smaller than his two brothers, he seems to carry quite a reputation among his peers for toughness. He is loud, boisterous, and never tires. Adults who usually like Jeff's personality and responsibility usually instantly dislike Al. "Smart Aleck" is the most frequent term applied to him.

Physical Description: Al is short and fit, neither over nor underweight. His hair is kept so short that it is almost a "Butch", but for a tangled forelock.

ERIC CURTIS
Age: 12
Grade: 7
Race: White
Religion: A very strict Protestant sect.
Family: A lower-income, working class family in North Austin. He has several brothers and sisters. His mother and father are very strict with Eric. They were reluctant, in fact, to allow him to attend this session, and insisted he be returned promptly at 7 p.m. for a church meeting later that evening.

Personal Description: Eric is much younger emotionally than the other boys. He was invited at Marvin's insistence ["Uh, yeah, Eric knows a lotta stories."] Eric contributed little or nothing to the session, although he was always cutting up. He speaks with a slight slur, almost a speech impediment, which got worse as the session proceede. He knew Albert before the session, but had never met Jeff or Tommy. Eric had worked as a delivery boy for one month; his performance was highly unsatisfactory.

Physical Description: Eric is short and skinny. He wears a burr haircut.

MARVIN KELLY
Age: 14
Grade: 7
Race: White
Religion: He has never mentioned church or religion.
Family: Marvin lies in a small, well-kept house in North Austin. His father works long hours: he is seldom home and his influence is not felt. Marvin's mother seems to run the household. She is a very pleasant woman, very concerned about her children. They completely dominate her, though, and do anything they please with or without her approval. I have never heard her reprimand any of the
children, although she always displays keen interest in them. Marvin has three brothers: one older and two younger. All three are very active boys.

**Personal Description:** Marvin is a very likable boy, with a ready smile and a pleasant wit. He has virtually no sense of responsibility, though. As a delivery boy, he would work hard, but often deliver one or two days late. He is well-liked by his peers, but not well-respected. "Old Maaaaarvin" is the common reference. Adults like him also.

**Physical Description:** Marvin, the largest of the group, is tall and very overweight. He has bright red hair, cut in a burr.