



codes and contradictions

**RACE,
GENDER
IDENTITY,
AND
SCHOOLING**

Jeanne Drysdale Weiler

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CODES AND CONTRADICTIONS

SUNY series, Power, Social Identity, and Education
Lois Weis, editor

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Race, Gender Identity,
and Schooling

JEANNE DRYSDALE WEILER

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P R E F A C E

I came to Alternative High School because I wasn't gonna make it in another school. I was a regular truant. They wanted to send me to court to take me away from my mother cause I wasn't going. I had a lot of absences and then they put me in AIDP [attendance improvement dropout prevention] and then I passed and my guidance counselor told me to come here cause if I was to go to a regular high school, I would've dropped out.

—Marlissa, age 15, 1989

In testimony to the success of Alternative High School (A.H.S.)¹ in New York City, Marlissa, once considered a student at risk of not completing high school, graduated in September 1992. Indeed, Alternative High School, a haven for students who have disengaged from traditional schooling, has many similar successes—85 percent of its students graduate with a high school diploma and almost one-half of those students go on to some form of higher education.

"Success," however, is relative. Working-class and low-income students of color, however "successful" they are at graduating from high school, still must enter a race- and sex-segregated labor market with diminishing opportunities for adequate wages and meaningful work. I want to be clear, however, at the beginning of this book, that I believe for working-class and low-income young women, a high school diploma, at the minimum, is absolutely necessary to enhance their chances of avoiding poverty or finding adequate employment to financially sustain themselves or their families. I make this statement based on both New York City and national data, which clearly indicate the relative worth of a high school diploma for young women. For example, in New York City, Rivera-Batiz (1994) has calculated that earnings for women with less than a high school degree have fallen while female high school graduates' earnings have been increasing. National data also provide convincing evidence that young women need to stay in school. Both African American and white women with a high school diploma earn approximately one-fifth as much as those without one (National Center for Education Statistics, 1997). Thus, I refer to Alternative High School's success in graduating students.

The formula for the success of Alternative High School is complex and multifaceted. The administration and faculty have done away with the most overt forms of pedagogical practices generally associated with unequal school outcomes such as tracking, ability grouping, traditional grading practices, Eurocentric and sex-differentiated curricula, and a punitive and authoritarian environment. The school is small (less than five hundred students), the teacher/student ratio is low, intensive counseling as well as other social and emotional supports are provided to students. It is a school that not only affords educationally disenfranchised students with hope that they will graduate, but through its reconfigured infrastructure, provides students the material and psychological supports to do so. I wish the reader to continually bear in mind the uniqueness of this school and its unparalleled success in educating disengaged students who otherwise would have little hope of completing high school.

Alternative High School, designed to prepare students to make reasonable and informed future occupational and educational choices, offered a singular opportunity to research how school processes actually contribute to and shape girls' self-understandings and future expectations, particularly as they relate to wage labor. I wish to emphasize here that although the centerpiece of the school's curriculum is the career education and internship component, the reader should in no way construe A.H.S. as a vocational high school. Rather, the school's career education program is an effort to orient its students toward formulating future career goals at the same time the academic curriculum is preparing them for higher education.

This book is about a group of young women enrolled in the ninth grade at A.H.S., all of whom have experienced past educational failure. I document their experiences within school and speculate on the impact these experiences have in the shaping of their future aspirations and hopes. While many of the participants in the study furnished me with rich information about their day-to-day lives, the main focus of this book is on the processes solely within the school itself. Certainly gender identity is also created and refashioned within other social or cultural spheres such as the family, peer group, community, and workplace.

Many people have had a hand in helping me to conceptualize this study, and complete the data collection, analysis, and writing. I could not have completed such tasks alone.

Most importantly, I owe my greatest thanks to the young women who allowed me to briefly enter their lives and who fill the pages of this book with their energy, insights, optimism, and aspirations. I am also indebted to the administrators and teachers at A.H.S. who spoke candidly about their feelings and observations and provided me with oppor-

tunities to learn how their school has become a place that truly challenges the status quo.

Gail Kelly's thoughts and words are woven throughout this book. We spent much time together in her kitchen and on her front porch clarifying the original ideas that shaped this work. I owe tremendous thanks to Lois Weis for generously taking over the guidance of my project after Gail's death. I am especially appreciative of Lois's astute insights, constant encouragement, and mentoring along the way. I also owe many thanks to Michelle Fine for her incisive comments on an earlier draft of this work. Maxine Seller, Catherine Raissiguier, and Angela Calabrese Barton read various versions of the entire manuscript and provided me with many helpful suggestions as did an anonymous reviewer. My friends Kowsar Chowdhury, Olga Drogal, Kate Josephson, Junko Kana-mura, Grace Mak, Bonnie Oglensky, Melissa Ragona, Barbara Schollar, and Wendy Schwartz contributed their friendship and perceptive insights.

It would not have been possible to complete such an undertaking without the patience, encouragement, and many forms of support—intellectual, material, and emotional—that I received from my husband, John. I am also grateful to both our families for their unflagging encouragement. I could not have sustained such a long-term effort without the love and support of my parents. My mother Jean Thompson Weiler generously dedicated her time and energy in transcribing interviews and providing much-needed child care. My mother-in-law, Ruby Choonoo, during her long visits, took on many household activities that gave me the time to work uninterrupted.

This book is dedicated to our children, Ruby Jean and Jeffrey.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

At 20 [years old] how do I picture myself? Married, going to law school, wearing my tight black pants, my hair pouffed out. I want to have a son by then.

—Doreen, age 15, Italian American

I want to be successful [in the future]. I do want to get married, but like I want to be successful. First I want a college degree, then a good job. I ain't gonna think about getting married. I could have a boyfriend here and there.

—Aurea, age 14, Puerto Rican descent

I'm going straight to college [after high school]. I'll be living in a dorm. Everything will be alright. I'll have my car. I'll be preparing for my career. I won't have no kids.

—Saundria, age 14, African American

I think you have to be an example [to your children]. When they grow up you're not gonna be sitting around the house waiting for the husband to bring whatever you want. I'll have a steady job so I could bring home the money and my kids could learn that.

—Lucy, age 15, Colombian descent

Above are the voices of young working-class women enrolled in an alternative high school in New York City.¹ This book is about them and their female classmates who made up the entering ninth-grade class at Alternative High School (A.H.S.) in 1988. Since that time, all have entered adulthood, some bearing a high school diploma and entering higher education, and others leaving school prior to graduation to enter an increasingly unequal and contracting urban labor market. The focus of this book is not about why some of the young women graduated from high school while others did not, but rather how in one historical moment in time—a time in which the massive restructuring of the U.S. economy was resulting in profound changes in gender relations as women's labor-market participation increased, and at the same time, exacerbating existing disparities in resources between rich and poor and African Americans and Latinos and whites—young working-class women of different

racial/ethnic² origins define the possibilities for themselves as adult women.³ How did these young working-class women at this historical juncture (in which messages about women's economic potential compete with the realities of declining urban markets), understand the possibilities for their future adult lives and how did they construe the use of schooling in attaining those future goals? But most importantly, how are understandings of and possibilities for the future shaped by young women's experiences within various racial/ethnic communities and economic contexts? And, what is the role of their school in shaping and creating those understandings and possibilities?

The answers to these questions and others raised in this book contribute to a small but growing body of knowledge on youth development from which new questions can be generated. For example, how do young adults at the end of the 1990s, especially white working-class and young adults of color, reconcile and understand the disjunction between their teenage aspirations and the realities of declining opportunities in adulthood? Only by documenting the lived experiences of different groups of young working-class women at one unique historical moment can we move forward toward a fuller understanding of how race, ethnicity, and social class shape the particular experiences of women throughout their lifetime.

THE DROPOUT "PROBLEM"

It has been well documented that urban working-class and minority youth drop out of school at disconcertingly high rates. In urban areas, approximately 50 or 60 percent of adolescents leave high school prior to graduation (Fine, 1989). In New York City, the percentage is even higher: youth advocacy organizations estimate that in some African American and Latino communities, up to 80 percent do not graduate from high school.

Much that has been written about the dropout "problem" has attempted to identify background characteristics predicting who will drop out, and to analyze schooling practices contributing to student "push out" before graduation. Very little research, however, has sought to understand either the students' perspective on dropping out or the social forces influencing their decisions to stay or leave.

Ogbu (1978, 1982, 1994) has posited an explanatory framework (discussed later in this chapter) that links students' responses to schooling to larger sociocultural forces outside of school. Ogbu argued that the black students he studied were apt to construct beliefs about their future job opportunities by observing which jobs were held by blacks in their

communities. He further maintained that not only the beliefs but also the behavior of black students were dependent upon their perceptions of the opportunity structure, which assumes the character of a "castelike" system for people of color. Thus, the lack of articulation between education and future occupations and earnings leads to disillusionment among black students about the value of schooling, and produces behaviors that ultimately are self-defeating. He did not examine, however, the role of gender in students' perceptions of opportunities available to their group.

The small but growing body of research addressing the effects of race on students' responses to school also suggests that identity formation among young people of color is distinctly different from that among white youth.

Matute-Bianchi (1986) has contributed one such study, comparing successful and unsuccessful students of Mexican and Japanese descent, and arguing that minority status *per se* does not account for differences in school success or failure. What is most salient is not "[the students'] objective material conditions so much as . . . their perception of themselves and others—and the value of their investment in education." Anticipating their future adult roles, students develop appropriate skills and behaviors to meet those expectations, and respond in terms of their perceived role in their future. The unsuccessful students of Mexican descent (there were no unsuccessful students of Japanese descent) tended to emphasize their collective ethnic identity as a socially disadvantaged group. Matute-Bianchi sees such identification as the "product of historical and structural forces of exclusion and subordination by the dominant group, as well as the vehicle of resistance that the group has made to structural inequality."

Working within a similar framework, Fordham's study (1988) of high-achieving black students suggests that students often develop a strategy of racelessness in order to attain success. Because of a conflict or tension that makes identity a problematic choice between the "indigenous Black American cultural system" and the individualistic cultural system of American society, students frequently find it practical to put social distance between themselves and other members of their group. This is particularly the case among high-achieving black females who, more than males, seem to be "more willing to be closely identified with the values and beliefs of the dominant social system" (p. 67).

By focusing on how students perceive their investment in education, Ogbu, Matute-Bianchi, and Fordham have contributed significantly to a deeper understanding of how minority youth respond to schooling. In other words, young people's consciousness of their group's social status exerts a powerful influence upon their response to schooling and their

aspirations for the future. Other influences remain to be investigated and more satisfactorily understood. For example, while the importance of peer culture has long been recognized, especially as a factor in the decision of students to drop out of school, we still know little about what creates and contributes to the identity of the peer group itself. More to the point of my project here, many recent studies either have not differentiated between female and male students or have not taken gender as a central problematic; there has thus been a failure or at best a feeble attempt to address how gender intersects with race or ethnicity and minority status to create different expectations and responses to education among women.

The above studies usefully draw attention to the radical disjunction between pedagogical assumptions and social reality for minority youth. Such disjunctions created contradictions exacerbated by an educational practice that does not adequately recognize and counter the power of students' perceptions of reality in determining their sense of the usefulness of remaining in school. Very little research has been undertaken, however, on how such responses to school may differ between males and females, and, most importantly for my study, how responses to schooling differ among groups of young women with different social and historical locations.

SCHOOL PROCESSES AND IDENTITY FORMATION

In this case study on young working-class Latina, African American, and white women, I explore female gender identity as it is constructed, defined, and maintained within a dropout-prevention program. I focus particularly on how the girls' understandings of themselves relate to their educational, occupational, and adult gender-role expectations and how those expectations are shaped and reinforced by their schooling experiences. Central to this analysis is the role that membership in a racial/ethnic and social-class group plays in how young women construe the possible use of schooling in their futures.

It has been well documented that schools are delineated by race, gender, and class relations that reflect other sectors of society and it is within this context (as well as within other social and cultural spheres) that students' race, class, and gender identities are constructed and reshaped. Yet little is known about exactly how such social forces are "marbled" into schooling processes and how they contribute to the shaping of identity.

I use the concept of identity to denote an individual's understanding, interpretation, and presentation of self as shaped within a complex

web of continually changing social relations. Identity formation is a dynamic process in which people actively refashion their social location within a hierarchy of social structures (Davidson, 1996; Raissiquier, 1994). The constitution of identity needs to be understood in part through an examination of the intersection of gender, ethnicity, and class as social relations within the school. What I mean by this is that we must examine the various ways in which ethnicity/race and social class interact and reshape the various dimensions of young women's feminine identities. Young women's identities, the ways in which they present and define themselves in relation to their positioning in the world around them, constantly shift in an ongoing process that is both fragmented and unstable (Irvine, 1994).

In this study, I specifically explore those processes through which female gender identity is constituted, defined, and reinforced for differently located groups of girls. My study challenges the premise inherent in previous research on youth cultural studies—the uniformity of identity formation among girls within particular social-class groupings. I will clearly show just how variable gender identity actually is among girls with similar social-class backgrounds.

This study seeks to press beyond the formal organization of the school as an institution to explore the cultural and social interactions that go on in school life and are implicated in the constitution of identity. As Kessler (1985) and her associates make clear, young peoples' identities and understandings of gender are formed, in part, in relation to a school's "gender regime." This they define as the "pattern of practices that constructs various kinds of femininity and masculinity among staff and students, [and] orders them in terms of prestige and power." And, they argue, through a school's gender regime, dominant versions of femininity and masculinity become hegemonic.

In a similar vein, Arnot (1982), utilizing the Bernsteinian notion of "code" developed the concept of gender code to analyze how messages defining "appropriate" models of masculinity and femininity are embedded within school processes and how these messages are both transmitted to and received by young people.

For example, ethnographic research by Kelly (1993) and Schofield (1995) have highlighted the ways gender codes operate through everyday schooling processes. Kelly's study of two continuation high schools (schools for academically disengaged students) in California documents many ways in which young women's schooling experiences tended to foster and recreate prevailing models of femininity through the formal and informal curriculum. For example, elective courses were strongly sex-segregated (e.g., only girls in home economics and typing and only boys in drafting and wood shop), and future vocational options dis-

cussed with students were extremely sex-typed (girls encouraged to pursue jobs in cosmetology, nursing, etc. while boys were steered toward construction, welding, etc.). Kelly also describes gender-differentiated expectations by the staff in terms of boys' and girls' conduct and clean-up tasks assigned to students in the classroom. School staffing patterns also reflected a strong gendered division of labor where men held top administrative positions and taught subjects such as math, science, and wood shop, and women generally supervised social activities and taught subjects such as language, art, and child development.

Similarly, Schofield's (1995) study of computers and schooling, in which she argues that student access to technology is structured by gender (and race) relations within the school, documents a range of school processes that reflected or reinforced "traditional" gender relations. As Kelly found, Schofield documents the tendency of some teachers to encourage narrowly proscribed career choices for girls in explicit discussions with them as well as in jokes and comments in the classroom. Patterns in staffing and course enrollment also reflected the kinds of gendered breakdowns that Kelly found: high-level administrators were all men, although half of the faculty were women, and men tended to teach math and science while women taught English. Course-tracking patterns also steered female students to business classes that taught office and secretarial skills. Schofield also suggests that part of the reason why girls may have been discouraged from enrolling in high-level computer courses was because of a considerable amount of gender stereotyping in computer-science texts. In an interesting analysis of the gendered and raced dynamics of the "gifted" program, Schofield illustrates how young women are marginalized both by boys in the program and other girls outside the program thus creating an atmosphere that discouraged girls from participating in higher level computer classes.

Throughout this study, I examine the school's gender code, that is, the kinds of practices and messages that encourage particular forms of femininity and discourage others. However, as Connell (1985) has pointed out, practices and messages within a school are not always consistent. For example, girls may be encouraged to take courses in mathematics or science, all of which then turn out to be taught by men.

A central contention of this study is that even within a "progressive" educational institution, contradictions exist in the school's gender code. Through various processes, the gender code of the school promotes occasionally contradictory versions of femininity, sometimes emphasizing academic mastery and economic self-sufficiency and at other times condoning "traditional" patterns of gendered cul-

tural and social interaction. It is within this context, in which contradictory messages compete, that the young women of different racial/ethnic backgrounds struggle to construct meaning in acquiring educational credentials.

THE STUDY

I intend this book on young women's identity formation to be a contribution to the tradition and development of feminist research. One of the hallmarks of such research is that "it generates its problematic from the perspective of women's experiences" (Harding, 1987, p. 7). Feminist scholars have argued that what in the past has been deemed worthy of study directly reflected the interests of privileged white men and thus reflected their experience—a truncated or distorted picture of social life. As Stanley and Wise comment:

Our experience has been named by men, but not even in a language derived from their experience. Even this is too direct and too personal. And so it is removed from experience altogether by being cast in abstract and theoretical terms. We need a women's language, a language of experience. And this must necessarily come from our exploration of the personal, the everyday, and what we experience—women's lived experiences. (1983, p. 146)

The focus on the everyday world can reveal in important ways how larger social and economic forces, both ideological and material, shape the way women experience the world. Dorothy Smith suggests:

The everyday world, the world where people are located as they live, located bodily and in that organization of their known world as one that begins from their own location in it, is generated in its varieties by an organization of social relations which originate "elsewhere." (1987, p. 176)

In other words, we would do well to conceptualize women's experiences as multifarious and linked to the unequal class, race, and gender social relations of society. Indeed, as Bonnie Thornton Dill (1987) has argued, white bourgeois women not only have been taken as representative of the category "women" but this category itself has been construed as racially and culturally homogenous. Dill argues that an accurate analysis of social reality must include critical accounts of women's situations in every race, class, and culture.

The production of knowledge derived from everyday experiences,

however, must "go beyond the microscopic and the anecdotal" (Raisiguier, 1994, p. 7). Although critics contend that ethnographic case studies are nongeneralizable, as Spindler (1982) has noted:

"ethnographic inquiry by nature focuses on single cases or at most on a limited setting of action. . . . Ethnographers also usually feel that it is better to have in-depth accurate knowledge of one setting than superficial and possibly skewed or misleading information about isolated relationships in many settings. (Cited in Valli, 1986, p. 215)

Furthermore, as Smith points out, in-depth case studies use people's lived experiences as the starting points that then proceed to allow us to "see the 'micro' and 'macro' sociological levels in a determinate relation" (Smith, 1987, p. 99).

With the above in mind, this book is based on a single case study of an alternative high school in which I closely followed and interviewed a group of thirty ninth-grade female students ranging in age from fourteen to sixteen years old.

In my original research design, I had proposed to study a group of young white, Latina, and African American female students enrolled in a drop-out prevention program within a traditional high school in New York City. After a year spent trying to identify schools with such programs and then trying (unsuccessfully) to obtain permission from principals to conduct my research, I decided to focus only on alternative high schools, which I believed would be more open to having a researcher "hang around" for a year. I was right.

The first alternative school principal I contacted (a woman) met with me in early June. During our meeting I handed her a one-page prospectus outlining the research design. She enthusiastically agreed to allow me to begin my research the next fall and introduced me to a female guidance counselor who was to help me get acclimated, and she in turn introduced me to teachers and students. The only stipulation the principal insisted upon was that I limit my focus to female students who were entering the ninth grade, since the year of my data gathering would be the first year the school admitted ninth-grade students. While I had the approval of the principal, I still needed to get permission from the teachers whose classes I would be visiting. It was also agreed that I would obtain official Board of Education clearance during the course of the school year, as well as parental permission from any student I interviewed. That meeting proved to be invaluable. Not only did I finally gain official entry to a school, but the guidance counselor introduced me to a group of six young women with whom I could pretest my interview questions.

Conducting my research in an alternative high school met the specifications of my original proposal. My main criteria for choosing a site were that the program be designed for students with histories of academic failure and poor attendance and who were considered to be potential dropouts, and that the student body be racially and ethnically diverse. Alternative High School met both criteria.

Situating my study within an alternative high school setting allowed a unique opportunity to analyze the various processes that contribute to the transmission and acquisition of gender identities. At the time this study was conducted, the girls had just entered the ninth grade. For the most part, they had experienced past educational failure (including truancy, suspensions, lack of academic achievement, etc.) and were likely to eventually drop out of school. Having been unable to interview the girls prior to their enrollment in the school, I therefore had to assume that their previous lack of success was related, in part, to the lack of articulation between their actual schooling experience and the expectations they had of themselves as adult women.

Alternative High School is unique among regular or alternative high schools in that it functions as a collaborative high school-college program and is housed in one of three buildings that comprise a community college. Throughout the day, students circulate among all three buildings. A.H.S. students are given college IDs and have access to all college facilities; no college areas are off-limits to high school students.

In addition to this collaboration with a community college, A.H.S. is also unique in its offering of a career education internship program. Each student is required to complete a full or part-time internship during three of the four years spent in high school. Students earn academic credit, not money, from these internship positions, which typically entail community service (hospitals, schools, police stations, social service agencies). Each student in internship is assigned a career education supervisor who maintains a close relationship with the student throughout the four years.

Another feature of the school that differentiates it from other high schools, both regular and traditional, is its counseling component. As stated in school documents, a major goal of A.H.S. is to develop in each student a sense of belonging to the school community. All staff members⁴ (teachers, counselors, paraprofessionals, administrators, secretaries, and security personnel) are charged with the role of "an adult able to make an impact on the lives of students." A.H.S. is divided into three clusters designed to create a feeling of "institutional caring." Each cluster is divided into "houses" with twenty to twenty-five students, a house teacher, guidance counselor, and a house "mom" (paraprofessional). One third of all students participate in group counseling each

day during the school year, designed to help students develop "coping strategies."

Alternative High School boasts a low dropout rate of 5 percent or an institutional retention rate of 85 percent over a ten-year period. Estimates of dropout rates in regular New York City public schools range from 35 to 80 percent. The average daily student attendance rate at A.H.S. is approximately 81 percent compared to 69 percent in other alternative high schools in New York City.

Approximately 40 percent of the incoming students⁵ are determined to be more than two years below grade level in reading skills, and about 55 percent are below grade level in mathematics. The school maintains an enrollment of approximately 450 students. According to school records, 60 percent of the students' families are on public assistance and 70 percent of the students come from single-parent homes. Table 1.1 provides the sex and ethnic characteristics of the student population during the 1988-89 school year.

After gaining entree to the school, I spent, on average, three full days (Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday) each week at the school during the course of the school year. During the first three months (October, November, and December), I conducted classroom observations. I did no formal interviewing during this time, preferring instead to establish familiarity with students. During the mornings I observed two classrooms back-to-back (9:20-10:30 and 10:40-11:50) and spent lunchtime and early afternoon in the cafeteria. The cafeteria provided a rich source of informal interview and observation data. I also attended school functions such as awards assemblies and basketball games.

Thirty ninth-grade female students ranging in age from fourteen to sixteen years old participated in the study. The following remarks

TABLE 1.1
Composition of A.H.S. Student Body, 1989

<i>Ethnicity/Race</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percent</i>
White*	183	40.9
Hispanic†	151	33.7
African American	102	23.4
Asian	9	2.0
Female	260	58.0
Male	185	42.0

* Includes students of European-American backgrounds.

† Includes students of Puerto Rican, Dominican, and South and Central American descent.

describe the ethnic and racial backgrounds of the young women who comprised the sample. Ten girls were of European American descent. Of these ten young white women, one with a first-generation Irish American mother and a father born in Puerto Rico considers herself Irish American; one was first-generation Rumanian; two were second-generation Italian; and six were mostly third- and fourth-generation white European. Seven girls were of Puerto Rican descent; all were born and raised in New York City, as were most of their mothers and some of their fathers. Three girls were of African American backgrounds, all born in Queens, New York, and all had close relatives in the southern United States. The group of ten immigrant Latinas included four girls of Dominican descent—three born in the Dominican Republic, and one born in the United States; four girls of Colombian descent—three born in Colombia and one born in Miami; and two girls of Ecuadoran descent—both born in their country of origin.

Without exception, the young women who were born outside of the United States immigrated with their parents as young children and spoke English with native proficiency.

Determining the social-class background of many in the group of young women was somewhat difficult since the social class of the male head of household usually determines the social class position of the family. Historically, a family's class status is defined by the husband/father's relationship to the production process (Wright, 1985). However, given the changing social and economic realities in which wives/mothers are often employed or seek paid work when their husbands become unemployed or underemployed, this definition no longer aptly defines a family's "objective" class position (Mirza, 1992). Moreover, as Mirza makes clear, given vastly differing historical, social, cultural, and economic factors among people within a social-class category, traditional definitions of class position no longer hold.

Thus, in determining the social-class background of the girls under study, I utilized Mirza's redefinition of class background that she employed in her study on young women in England of West Indian descent. She observed that many West Indian women make reliable and long-term contributions to the family income—that they, in other words, often meet the conditions that determine status according to conventional stratification analysis. These women, therefore, should qualify as principal determinants in the definition of their families' social-class status. The researcher must consequently be prepared to assume that either the mother or the father will direct social classification of the family, each case depending on the researcher assessing who most appropriately satisfies the determinant criteria.

The backgrounds of the young women of white European descent

were easily established as working class. All (except one) of these young women had employed fathers who qualified as the main income earners in the family; they all held jobs in which they either lacked significant control over the labor processes involved in their work (as chauffeur, doorman, factory worker, roofer, bartender, etc.) or were self-employed as petty entrepreneurs (as truckdriver, landscaper, etc.). Of this group of girls, three had mothers who were not in the labor market, and seven had mothers who were generally employed (not necessarily fulltime) in office work, babysitting, or the service industry (as waitress, cashier, etc.).

The three African American girls were also considered to belong to the working class. Although none had fathers in the home or who contributed substantially to the family income, all three had mothers who were employed full time (as secretary, post office employee, and municipal traffic officer).

The social-class backgrounds of the group of Latina girls were more difficult to determine. This group showed a great deal of complexity in the employment backgrounds of their parents—a complexity no doubt partly attributed to such factors as immigration status, length of time in the United States, relative fluency in the English language, and so forth. Of the group of seven girls of Puerto Rican descent three had fathers or stepfathers in the home; of those, two fathers worked as hospital aids (one mother worked as a secretary and one mother was not employed), and one father was unemployed (as was the mother). Of the group of ten non-Puerto Rican Latina girls, three had fathers who lived in the home but did not contribute to the family income, while one mother was employed as a factory worker and the other was unemployed. Of the remaining seven girls (without fathers in the home), five had mothers employed in such occupations as nursing, factory work, babysitting, and secretarial work; and two had mothers drawing public assistance. None of the fathers living outside of the girls' homes contributed substantially to the family income. While the above employment and family descriptions of some of the Latinas may suggest families living in poverty or at subsistence level during the time of the interviews, I chose for emphasis the fact that during most of the girls' childhoods, one or the other parent or both parents had held jobs, ones in which they lacked sufficient control over the labor processes at their work (Roman, 1988).

In general, all the mothers of the young women in the study had completed more years of education than the fathers. However, there were important educational differences between the girls' mothers. For example, while almost two thirds of the mothers who were white, African American, or of Puerto Rican descent had completed high school, nearly none of the mothers who had immigrated to the United

States from the Dominican Republic and South America had a high school degree. (One mother of Dominican descent, however, had completed two years of college in the United States.)

In order to gain insight into girls' lives and their future expectations, I decided it would be best to utilize mainly qualitative research methods. These included loosely structured, in-depth formal and informal interviews with individual girls or groups of girls and teachers, and systematic observations in classrooms, hallways, the cafeteria, and the surrounding campus. In addition, I had access to the girls' academic attendance records and other school documents.

I was given permission by two sets of team teachers to observe their classrooms for the year. During my first visit to each classroom, the teachers introduced me as a college student who was doing research on young women. I briefly explained that I was interested in learning about what school was like for ninth-grade girls and that I would be at the school for a year. I was generally greeted by questions from both boys and girls who inquired about my age, whether I attended the college across the street, what my purpose was in the study, and so forth.

Since A.H.S. is housed on an urban community-college campus, I was able to comfortably "pass" as a local college student. Being identified as a student was beneficial to me as a researcher in this setting because I was not perceived as a teacher and thus part of the authority structure. Because I was much older than the girls in the study, however, I did not try to establish myself as part of their peer-group culture either. I believe I was received as a visitor, but clearly sympathetic. I realized this one day as I was sitting in the cafeteria with a group of girls who were cutting (not attending) class and the principal walked in: one girl urgently whispered to me, "Could you pretend you're interviewing us, then she'll leave us alone." (See appendix A for a more detailed description of my research role.)

Aside from being perceived as a college student who attended the "college across the street," I had little else in common with the young women whom I followed and interviewed. As a white middle-class woman of European background, I shared neither social-class background nor racial/ethnic group affiliation with the majority of young women whom I studied. Although I did not feel that my access to the young women or the confidentiality of our interviews was compromised significantly, it does raise important concerns regarding the interpretation and representation of the young women's narratives and experiences. One concern is the question of subjectivity that arises in any qualitative research. Stanley and Wise (1983), however, argue that subjectivity is necessary in the study of women and has been submerged by a quest for "objectivity" (Mirza, 1992, p. 9). Readers must continu-