Chapter 1

Introduction

This book is an examination of identity formation processes among a cohort of upper middle-class adolescent females set in Best Academy, a historically elite, private, independent, single-sex high school for girls.[1] For close to 150 years, Best Academy has served students from solidly upper middle-class, or, rather, professional middle-class backgrounds.[2] Over the past two decades, the population of relatively privileged youth traditionally served in this private school has been changing to reflect a student body increasingly stratified by social class, race, and ethnicity. A close look at the current demographic make up of the student body points out that the school continues to draw in girls from blue-collar working-class and lower white-collar middle-class families, a trend that began in the early 1980s. Changes in the class culture of the private school do not take place outside of social and political dynamics and are arguably one example of the impact that broader structural shifts in the local and global economy have had on private institutions. The lived effects of economic retrenchment first felt among the working class in the mid-1970s and into the early 1980s have not sidestepped the upper middle class where the relative security a middle class standard of living afforded for much of the post-war period is no longer a predictable part of life (Bluestone and Harrison, 1982).[3] The shift from "Fordism" to intensified capitalist competition on an international scale has spurred the growth of new employment categories and job descriptions, phasing out routine production jobs in the service sector and lower and middle-level management positions and replacing them with the problem-solving services of the symbolic analyst, drawn mainly from the professional middle class.[4] In the tide of corporate restructuring that has defined economic trends from the 1980s into the 1990s, major corporations tapping into the specialized training and skills of the middle class have merged and, in many instances, been forced to close (Reich, 1992).

Economic retrenchment following from deindustrialization and the shift towards a global market economy has not gone without significant impact on American cities. Best Academy is located in a northeastern, metropolitan

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center with a population of 328,123.[5] Typical of many urban areas in the U.S. during the mid-1970s and upwards of that time, it too, has suffered the injuries of structural decline. The city lost its place as an established center of manufacturing and commercial trade as large-scale plant closings and corporate mergers shifted the bread and butter of American production from manufacturing to the service sector.[6] Late capitalism has not only indelibly marked the urban underclass and working class, but it has also impacted on the standards of upper middle-class living as this group lives out and suffers its own forms of social and economic dislocation. New job categories and work relationships inside the American culture of work have an obvious impact on the organization of social relations inside school. An increasingly stratified class culture in Best Academy, for example, forces new tensions that arise at the intersection of competing class strata to the surface. In the main, this dynamic has not been part of this school's history. Forty-seven percent of the thirty-four girls that I shadowed in the junior class receive financial assistance in the form of grants-in-aid based on financial need. Only sixteen students are full tuition payers.[7] Of the total student sample represented in this study, sixty-two percent attended public grammar schools. While only one indicator of the changing class culture at Best Academy, the early public education backgrounds of these students suggests that parents across class strata are interested in providing their daughters with a private education at substantial cost to their families.

In his comparative ethnography of three all-American high schools, Philip Wexler (1992) describes students' varied responses to class-based norms and expectations of who they should be in the context of a working-class, a professional middle-class, and an urban underclass high school. Through collected narratives and observations of youth across these three settings, he discovers that schools, by and large, do not support the development of relational communities but, rather, discourage and block the production of meaningful relationships among school-age youth. Students respond to the fractured organization of school culture by working to "create a visible, differentiated and reputable self" in opposition to the felt emptiness of school life in each of these sites (p. 132).[8]

> In their own words, students are trying to "become somebody." They want to be somebody, a real and presentable self, anchored in the verifying eyes of friends whom they come to school to meet. . . . [T]heir central and defining activity in school is to establish at least the image of an identity. "Becoming somebody" is action in the public sphere, and this is what life in high school is about (p. 155).

Inside classrooms and corridors, youth engaged in the project of "becoming somebody" are working to shape felt notions of self across multiple and

intersecting discursive fields through which meanings are organized, mediated, and filtered (Foucault, 1980; Weedon, 1987). Socially constituted identities of social class, race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality form in/through discursive fields that map out meanings and social practices and set limits and possibilities for social relations in schools.[9] As systems of representation, they organize and mediate culture as lived experience through a range of subjectivities that form within and against structure, culture and ideology in educational contexts. The relationship between knowledge and power is at the heart of questions about identity formation and asks that we examine the "complex ways social, economic, political tensions and contradictions are 'mediated' in the concrete practices of educators as they go about their business in schools" (Apple, 1990, p. 2). For students no less, the project of "becoming somebody" is a matter of negotiating structures and embedded meanings as they make sense of who they are daily in schools. As schools bear the marks of structural change, so, too do shifts in the economy imprint on and complicate the production of youth identity in educational contexts.

This book adds a missing link to existing culturalist critiques of identity construction through close examination of the ways in which upper middle-class, adolescent girls organize and problematize daily life in school within and against their experiences in peer culture, family life, and broader social dynamics. Individually and collectively, they continue the struggles that social analyses of identity have described over two and a half decades of research on youth cultural forms in schools. The difference between this volume and foregoing discussions is cast in the context, characters, and conditions that private schools face in this current historical moment. While public and private schools cannot avoid feeling the effects of changing market conditions, it is very much the case that the specifically market-driven character and near total dependence of the private school on private sources of funding leaves schools like Best Academy that much more vulnerable to economic downslides than their public school counterparts.

The crisis of public life brought about by a newly aggressive market economy has introduced real challenges for upper middle-class adolescent girls that speak to a need for more sustained and focused research on girls' identity formation processes. To that end, this study is based on a number of central questions. To what extent does the shift to a post-industrial, global economy impact the organization of social relations in the private high school? How do adolescent girls negotiate messages about class, race, and gender privilege structured into their educational experience and what forms do social relations of class, race, and gender take in this context? What accommodations do these youth make as they shape new identities? What types of counter-hegemonic strategies do they draw on in opposition to institutional arrangements and embodied ideologies?

That the bulk of research on identity formation in context has centered on the public school makes a strong case by its absence and omission for studying this issue in a relatively unexplored site—the private high school. As suggested earlier, the private school is more vulnerable than the public school to downward economic trends that threaten to further destablize what has been, up until now, a relatively stable class base. This reality is not only an argument for the significance of this study but also for the timeliness of research conducted in this site at this historical moment. Given the inextricable relationship between school and society, there is no doubt that identity formation wil be inflected by broader social change. Ethnographic snapshots of girls' subcultures at Best Academy set their project of "becoming somebody" against these conditions, deepening our understanding of the contradictions that structures introduce around meaning-making in an upper middle-class youth culture.

On Identity Formation: Sociological Theories in Context

Structuralist critiques of socialization dominating theoretical discourse in the sociology of education through much of the decade of the 1950s on up through the early 1970s, argued that youth identities reflected existing school structures and broader social relations (McCarthy and Apple, 1988). Research in this genre tended either to ignore narrative accounts of lived experience altogether or to privilege structure over cultural forms. Up until the last fifteen years, research on identity formation processes in schools has been squarely located in reproduction theory.[10] Attributing to schools a direct role in stratifying the labor force, reproduction theory holds simply that schools are socializing agencies that reproduce the norms, values, and ideologies of the dominant culture by outfitting students with the skills for work roles important to the maintenance of social inequalities on which the balance of a capitalist economy and society depends.[11] Structuralism would shape the direction of debate in the field significantly, beginning with the influential work of Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis (1976). Working from a class-reductionist model, they propose that schools are agencies of transmission that stand in a one-to-one correspondence with the social relations of production in a capitalist economy and society. Through class specific forms of training, power is unequally allocated to youth who are prepared for work roles appropriate to their class background. Not unlike structural frameworks that tend to cloak analysis of school culture in class models, economic reproduction theory frontloads examination of processes of transmission in schools but fails to consider the ways in which social actors articulate with existing institutional forms and practices.

With the rise of the New Sociology of Education in the early 1970s, first in the United Kingdom and shortly afterward in the United States, research in the sociology of education turned toward study of the organization and stratification of school curriculum.[12] Sociological examination of school knowledge raised questions about the ways in which knowledge is presented in schools and the differences in the content and delivery of information to different groups in school. The shift in focus to curricular form paralleled the emergence of cultural reproduction theories in education and helped to extend understanding of the relationship between schools and the class structure. Cultural reproduction theory moves beyond the strict class analysis of economic reproduction models to examine how school knowledge embeds class differences in cultural forms, patterns, and styles of communication (Bennett and LeCompte, 1990). In this regard, Basil Bernstein's (1977) important work put forward the notion that specific linguistic codes reflect the structures of family life based in different class cultures. Children from middle class backgrounds will adjust more easily to school since middle class patterns and styles of communication tend to dominate in schools. Children from working-class families, on the other hand, have the opposite experience. Different linguistic competencies funnel children in different directions, overwhelmingly training working-class youth for skilled or semi-skilled waged labor while preparing middle-class youth for more specialized professions. In short, children's school experience is influenced by the social and cultural resources and linguistic competencies that they bring with them into school, and the school plays a central role in reproducing inequalities along class lines.

Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron (1977) built on Bernstein's notion of linguistic codes with the concept of cultural capital. Cultural capital extends our understanding of the role that schools play in cultural reproduction from one generation to the next. Upper-class children are said to inherit more cultural capital, meaning general cultural background, knowledge, tastes, and skills, than do children from working-class backgrounds. As sites for the transmission of class interests and ideologies, schools sort and select children by rewarding the cultural capital of the dominant classes. While public schools claim to be democratic spaces committed to providing equality of educational opportunity, some children do arrive in school with a distinct cultural advantage, and schools tend to recognize and develop middle class competencies. Distributing power differently, though, by sorting and selecting students, effectively contributes to the marginalization and silencing of children from relatively less privileged backgrounds (Weis and Fine, 1993). The knowledge and competencies that middle and upper middle-class children bring into school are summarily reinforced, passing class status onto them and securing their place in the class continuum.

Despite a shift in focus, the cultural dynamics of schooling still tended to be narrowly treated through class analysis and the overdetermined logic of reproductive frameworks. Categories of race, ethnicity, and gender were virtually missing from discussions of school form and practice. Analysis based mainly on class inequalities privileged structure over culture and failed, once again, to narrow the gap between them. In recent years, however, sociologists of education have begun to re-examine the longstanding divide between structure and culture and have chosen to reframe their analysis of identity construction in culturalist terms that foreground the complex and creative work of school-age youth around the project of "becoming somebody." Redressing this imbalance, Michael Apple and Lois Weis (1983) exploded the boundaries of cultural reproduction theory, pushing new theoretical models to the center of debate. Cultural theorists speculated that schools *could* be sites for semi-autonomous identity production where social actors do more than simply mirror and accommodate themselves to dominant structures. From a site of uncontested socialization, schools were refashioned at this critical moment as spaces for the creative production of self. As culturalists, they forced structures to take a disciplinary back seat to culture and refocused their analytical lens on the dynamics of school culture as lived experience. Identity formation analyzed through a culturalist lens catches youth in the act of making the everyday problematic as they configure meaningful lives in the context of shifting social relations inside and outside school (Smith, 1987). Given this disciplinary seachange, it was no longer possible to speak of identity formation in terms of "additive models of double and triple oppression" (McCarthy, 1988). Instead, identity production was newly reconceptualized as a complex set of interlocking processes based in multiple social relations that closely articulated with defining structures inside and outside schools. Culturalists had substituted dimensionalized and fluid accounts of school life based in conflict, contradiction, and contest for overdetermined analyses of socialization. Students, teachers, administrators, and parents were now restored as subjects and agents of knowledge production in context.

Contradictions in Culture

One of the earliest attempts at theoretically unpacking the lived effects of class culture in school appears in Paul Willis' narrative of identity construction among white, working-class lads in a British comprehensive school for boys (Willis, 1977). In his now classic study, Willis illustrates that working-class schools are reproductive as well as productive sites of self-determination. For these working-class lads, shop floor culture celebrates manual labor which they associate with masculinity while school culture

values mental labor which they link with femininity. Against the backdrop of shifting economic trends in Britain, formal school culture promises little in the way of maximizing life chances for a group of young men destined, like their fathers before them, for factory jobs. That school knowledge has no intrinsic or extrinsic value for them becomes the basis for their strategic resistance to formal school culture. Through a meaningfully constructed set of discursive practices that finds them taking schoolwork less than seriously, these working-class lads actively contest middle-class norms and values central to offical school culture. Countercultural forms of resistance raise levels of class consciousness for the working class but are only partly successful in bringing about real changes in the conditions of their working-class lives. In the final analysis, the responses of the working-class lads serve only to "partially penetrate" offical school culture, and their location of structural subordination in the British labor market is reproduced.

Up until a decade ago, research on school socialization and identity formation processes were almost exclusively focused on boys' school experiences. Feminist social theorists roundly criticized Willis for privileging male cultural forms and failing to examine the virulent and pervasive sexism of male subcultures (McRobbie, 1991). This emergent critique drew attention to a missing piece in the literature on socialization, identity construction, and school engagement. In the early 1980s, feminist researchers began to redress this imbalance through questions about the relationship between class and gender and its impact on the organization of social relations in schools. Socialist feminists understood that patriarchy and capitalism combined to produce and legitimate the sexual division of labor, restricting women's activities to the private sphere and men's responsibilities to the public domain (Deem, 1978; Eisenstein, 1979; MacDonald, 1980; Wolpe, 1981; Arnot, 1982).[13] Linking together gender and social class, feminist theorists found that schools distributed messages about normative gender roles reflecting inequalities in the social relations of production responsible for blocking women's full participation in the market economy. Findings along these lines seemed to indicate a general willingness by female students to fold in and internalize roles for women based in the traditional sexual division of labor.

While there is much to suggest that schools are implicated directly in reinforcing structural inequalities along gender lines, studies on girls' school experiences begun in the early 1980s provided empirical support for their active resistance against and negotiation of dominant school forms and practices. Gail Kelly and Ann Nihlen (1982) found it interesting that girls, although proportionately fewer in number than boys, continued onto college and university in spite of prevailing school messages that urged more circumscribed experiences and roles for women in the private domain. What these findings implied for these researchers was that somehow, there were girls who were

rejecting dominant ideologies and managing to find their way into higher education. Reproduction paradigms had evidently overlooked equally salient expressions of resistance among a significant part of the youth population. While not unproblematic, Kelly and Nihlen's analysis importantly directs those in the field to take serious account of girls' cultural forms that have been overlooked consistently, in part, because of the limitations of reproduction frameworks. With inroads into the possible forms of creative contestation among school-age girls yet to be explored, critical feminist researchers began in earnest to examine schools as sites where girls, and not boys alone, were actively engaged in counter-hegemonic moves both in accommodation of and resistance to school structures and sex stereotyped messages.

Work focused on critique at the level of girls' lived culture would reshape the direction of research on socialization in school. Formative analysis of anti-school movements among girls would come in the pioneering work of Angela McRobbie (1978) whose ethnographic examination of female subcultures in a comprehensive high school in working-class England would provide strong evidence for the development of counter-hegemonic sub-cultures among adolescent females. Like Willis' working-class lads who opposed formal school culture by "having a laff," these girls enacted a set of discursive practices tightly wrapped in an ideology of romance played out through the reappropriation of feminine forms. In their preoccupation with fashion, beauty, dating, and marriage, they were, in fact, rejecting the official school culture of middle-class norms and belief systems. For these girls, counter-cultural expressions of opposition to school came directly out of feminine ideologies so that the anti-school culture they forged was specifically female. Not unlike the lads who valorized masculinity in connection with shop floor culture, working-class girls strategically draw on and use sexuality in opposition to formal school culture and its middle-class valuing of *acceptable* forms of femininity. Angela McRobbie finds that the production of working-class, female counter-cultures ultimately depends on the partial rejection of ideologies undergirding the historical subordination of working-class women. Strategic resistance to formal school culture among working-class females in school contexts is consistent with this early study (McRobbie and McCabe, 1981; Thomas, 1980; Lees, 1986).

Critical ethnographic research on girls' subcultures in working-class schools carried out in the 1980s would extend our knowledge of the central place that domesticity continued to hold for girls in their decisions about coursework and future work roles. That the form, content, and distribution of knowledge in working-class schools has typically encouraged reproduction of marginalized labor identities among school age students has been well documented (Anyon, 1980; Apple, 1982, 1990; McNeil, 1983). High school clerical training programs, for example, tend to attract working-class girls and

guide them toward entry-level jobs after graduation (Gaskell, 1985; Valli, 1988). Girls are discouraged from educational and professional avenues that might open the possibility for them to enjoy greater personal and financial autonomy in their futures. This does not necessarily mean that working-class schools are not contested sites of identity production for school-age girls. On the contrary, research has documented that girls are not as oversocialized into dominant ideologies as reproduction theory suggests in analysis of working-class settings. Working-class girls do choose, in some instances, to enroll in business courses rather than undertake coursework in the academic track (Gaskell, 1985). In part, they participate in reproducing the traditional sexual division of labor. What is important, though, to extrapolate from these studies, is that girls' identity formation is more complex and contested than earlier thought and that girls might engage in accommodation and resistance at one and the same time (Anyon, 1984). Lois Weis (1990) presents somewhat of a departure from earlier studies of girls' identity processes by pinpointing an emergent "moment of critique" among working-class girls who begin to construct primary identities around a culture of work. Facing the harsh economic realities of urban de-industrialization in the mid-1980s, girls recognize that they can no longer depend on their future husbands for financial support in the wake of urban displacement, factory shutdowns, growing unemployment lines, and rising divorce rates. Projecting the very possibility that they will be forced back on their own resources, white, working-class girls begin to narrate, instead, the importance of centering waged labor in their lives not only for themselves but, more importantly, for the welfare of their families.

The cultural forms and expressions of youth of color have received attention in a number of studies of the social construction of race. In her study of racial identity forms among a cohort of black youth at urban, public Capital High School, Signithia Fordham (1988) found that black students adopt strategies of racelessness perceived as a way of increasing their chances for vertical mobility in school and in their future work roles. Racelessness is arguably a form of accommodation to dominant racial and class structures in the public school. Interestingly, James Stanlaw and Alan Peshkin (1988) discovered different cultural responses in their ethnographic investigation of black youth culture in a predominantly white, public high school. At Riverview, conditions were in place for black students to integrate themselves fully into school culture, enjoying what these researchers described as a "positive black visibility." John Ogbu (1988) documents that racial stratification of black youth, based in their historical exclusion from the opportunity structure, is largely responsible for the emergence of cultures of opposition in predominantly white school contexts. That black youth tend to reject school meanings and formal knowledge is based, he argues, in a history of collective

struggle against white, supremacist culture and is in contention with their
desire to be academically successful in school. The double-sided nature of
oppositional cultural forms among black youth underlines the contradictions
of racial identity formation for this group.

For youth of color, research on racial identity formation to date has
emphasized the experiences of the black male, although this, too, is a piece
that has yet to be rounded out in the socialization literature. Mary Fuller
(1980) helped to balance the equation with her formative study of the
identity development of girls of color, a gap in the relational construction of
race that Ladner (1971), Grant (1992), Fordham (1993), Hemmings (1996)
and others have begun to fill. Having interviewed and observed African-
Caribbean and Asian girls in a London comprehensive school, she learned
that these British West Indian girls resisted existing school structures through
non-conformist behavior that masked academic competence and their desires
to achieve in school. Fuller's findings suggest that the cultural strategies that
girls of color adopt are both gender and culturally specific. Working across
multiple locations of race, class, ethnicity, and gender, these girls engage
identity production differently than has been found to be the case for white
girls and boys of color as well.[14]

Until very recently, research on racial identity formation has focused
exclusively on youth of color. For the most part, race has been neatly
categorized and delimited in terms of the black experience. Equating race with
blackness overlooks the fact that identities are relationally constituted and
that the production of racial identities among folks of color has historically
depended on negotiation of forms and practices specific to the white, western
Self. Whiteness is not recognized as a social and political category of experi-
ence but remains unnoticed and unnamed as the invisible cultural center
(Frankenberg, 1993; McLaren, 1997). Where the socialization literature takes
up identity construction among youth, "white" as a racial referent is typically
neither named nor decoded as a symbolic marker of power and privilege. Best
Academy enrolls a largely white, European-American student population.
Statistics documenting the racial and ethnic composition of the student body
indicate that eighty-five percent of the school population consists of white,
non-Hispanic Americans. The remaining fifteen percent articulate at nine
percent African-American, one percent Native-American, four percent
Hispanic-American, and one percent Asian-American. Of the thirty-four
students constituting the study sample, four are African-American, one is
Hispanic American, one identifies as Native-American and one is the child of
a bi-racial marriage. As a predominantly white high school, Best Academy is a
site of structural dominance where those located at the cultural center are
blind to their own condition of "raceless subjectivity" (McLaren, 1991;
Frankenberg, 1993; Gallagher, 1994). Studies of identity construction among

white girls have fundamentally *assumed* whiteness, taking it for granted as an identity dimension, without taking critical steps towards detailed investigation of how being white informs ethnic, gender, and class subjectivities. Joining an emerging body of research on the social construction of discourses of whiteness in context, this study of private school culture fixes attention on the racial center, asking much needed questions about what it means to be white and the ways in which a dominant yet strikingly invisible racial location informs human behavior (Fine, Weis, Powell, Wong, 1997).

Studies of student performance have mined the private school for its proven effectiveness in raising levels of student achievement, providing rigorous instruction, and enhancing educational opportunity, access, and outcome (Coleman, Hoffer, and Kilgore, 1982, 1991; Coleman and Hoffer, 1987). With the turn away from outcome-based measures toward detailed investigation of cultural forms in school, research to date on the relationship between class and education has focused on the linkages between the content and authority structure of working-class schools and the production of working-class identities (Willis, 1977; Everhart, 1983; MacLeod, 1987; Weis, 1990, McLaren, 1994). Absent from this discussion is any in-depth examination of elite culture, particularly around middle and upper middle-class youth cultural forms.[15] Richard Connell (1982) provides a missing piece early on in his comparative study of working-class, state and private, ruling-class secondary schools in Australia.[16] Through detailed ethnographic work, he gathers strong evidence to support the fact that private, ruling-class schools, by design, transmit ruling-class capital from one generation to the next. This is hardly surprising, given what Bourdieu (1974) explained as the conserving role of the upper-class school. Where Connell shifts direction from others in the field at this moment is in his contention that ruling-class schools reflect and respond to structural changes on the outside. As a market driven institution responsive to shifts in the local and national economy, it was increasingly problematic for educators to continue to see the private school as a homogeneous and static class culture. Rather, he argues for the importance of revisiting the private school as a dynamic space that moves with and against broader structural ebbs and tides. Connell lands squarely on what we now know to be the case in the class and education literature, that class relations fluctuate continuously and take multiple forms in school contexts. This is not to suggest that the private school does not continue to play an important conserving role because it does. It is simply to add that it is also a complex and interactive space, more dynamic than ethnographic studies have portrayed up to this point in time.

Along similar lines, Peter Cookson and Caroline Persell (1985) find evidence for the maintenance of upper middle-class power in college preparatory high schools.[17] Such private institutions depend on a student body that

sees itself as part of an elite collective shaped in the shadow of the organ-
ization and mediated messages of class status, prestige, and resources. A shared
cultural identity around which students and faculty rally encourages the
development of cohesive school communities based in commitment rather
than compliance (Hannaway and Abramowitz, 1985). This is not to suggest
that private school culture does not suffer the realities of social dislocation
among its students as Wexler (1992) finds to be the case in his comparative
ethnographic study of three public schools differentiated by social class. What
he uncovers is a growing sense of social disaffection and loss of meaningful
relationships among youth in three different schools whose expressive forms
illustrate the emptying of the social center and the extent to which the crisis
of American public life has crossed and penetrated class cultures.

Close to fifteen years earlier, Ralph Larkin (1979) traced the emergence
of the loss of a felt sense of legitimacy and promise for the future among white,
suburban, middle-class youth in Utopia High School to the conditions of
monopoly capitalism—surplus absorption and coerced consumption. On the
threshold of entering the decade of the 1980s, middle-class suburban youth
began to notice the growing competition they faced for scarce resources. Their
anxiety was a clear signal that the fortunes their parents before them were able
to secure in the post-war years were potentially unattainable for their genera-
tion, now facing downward shifts in the marketplace. While these studies do
not center on youth subcultures in the private school, they do spur questions
about the nature of identity construction in an educational setting driven by
market trends in an urban context that has and continues to suffer the effects
of de-industralization and inclining levels of unemployment.

From the post-war period on, educators hailed co-education as the most
natural approach to children's schooling (Tyack and Hansot, 1990). Claims
that co-educational schools are gender-neutral have been undermined seriously
by a spate of research findings that question the educational and social
benefits of mixed-sex schools for girls.[18] Over the past two decades, support for
the economic and social benefits of co-education has been challenged by
feminist researchers and others who have argued that co-educational schools
emphasize social interaction over academic achievement and block girls from
achieving at levels competitive with their male peers (Jones, 1990). Research
to date on gender and schooling has found that girls generally perform at
higher levels in single-sex schools (Finn, 1980; Jimenez and Lockheed, 1989;
Riordan, 1990) and that these types of institutions directly promote increases
in levels of confidence, self-esteem, and locus of control (Cairns, 1990; Foon,
1988; Gilligan, 1990, 1992). Positive effects on women's affective develop-
ment play themselves out in the form of higher educational aspirations,
committed political involvement, and increased satisfaction with academic
and social dimensions of college life (Lee and Marks, 1990). Altogether,

studies index the single-sex school as an environment that is strongly supportive of academic and social opportunities and outcomes for girls because they are less conditioned by sex stereotypes and gender-based norms for academic performance and school engagement (Keohane, 1990).

Toward Re-definition of Identit(y)-ies

Shifting attention to girls' experiences in private, single-sex schools names and locates gender as a fundamental organizing principle of everyday life (Lather, 1991). Gender identities are shaped out of a particular location or positionality, where "the identity of a woman is the product of her own interpretation and reconstruction of her history as mediated through a cultural discursive context to which she has access" (Alcoff, 1989, p. 324). Subjectivity or identity is a matter of local positioning or, as Donna Haraway (1988) suggests, partial or situated knowledge where women validate their subject status as agents, themselves, of knowledge production. Nancy Lesko (1988) and Dorothy Smith (1988) remind us that the discursive construction of femininity is often a matter of the ways in which girls and women reappropriate and mediate cultural icons of femininity that sweep across popular culture in television, magazines, and newspaper advertising. Femininity is constructed by way of negotiating meanings about what it means to be female that swirl through these representational forms.

The public spectacle of an idealized, fictionalized, popular female self seriously threatens meaningful identity work for adolescent girls and adult women alike. Given these conditions, it is no longer possible to speak of identity as constituted in one-to-one correspondence with the logic of school culture and society. Borders of self-definition are unclear as students living in the midst of the postmodern condition struggle daily to build lives with and against a sexy, hyper-saturated and -mediated culture.[19] Mapping their way toward self-definition involves continuous negotiation of the lived contradictions that class, race, ethnicity, sexuality, and gender present against a challenging urban backdrop. Because identities are not unitary and static, changing in relationship to the contexts that individuals find themselves participating in, students are forced into the uncertain terrain of the borderland, that space that Gloria Anzaldua (1987) describes as "a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary" where one "is in a constant state of transition" (p. 3). Different from the familiar usage of the "borderland" by post-colonial feminists who write about negotiating multiple identities at the interface of European and American cultures, I reappropriate this concept to describe the active repositioning of identities inside a school site of structural dominance.[20] Renato

Rosaldo (1989) reminds us that the borderland is that invisible site where a closer look reveals creative acts of cultural production. The narratives that Best Academy students, school officials and parents offer, take us into this newly named territory. As a predominantly white, upper middle-class, all-girls' high school, Best Academy is a site of dominance where discourses of whiteness, privilege, and femininity presume an undifferentiated school culture. Where dominant discourses define a united school front, conflict and contradiction remain virtually invisible to the naked eye. Put another way, the prevailing culture and ideology of private schooling filtered through dimensions of whiteness, privilege, and femininity paradoxically combine to create a site of absence. This complication introduces the possibility of complex and strangely meaningful identity productions where those at the historical center now find themselves actively decentering class, race, and gender locations as they work at becoming somebody. Whether girls' responses to the organizing codes of life in Best Academy involve reproducing or creatively producing existing structures and ideologies will decide the extent to which the content and authority structure of the private school shapes who they are. Their work opens up the possibility for critique and creative cultural production in multiple borderlands where none was thought to exist before.

To this end, chapter 2 works its way through school structures, curricular forms, and practices that organize social relations in the private, single-sex high school, looking for evidence of social class as one of the principle organizing codes of social relations at Best Academy through which other equally important and interrelated dimensions are filtered. As I point out, class dynamics are particularly difficult to see, a condition further complicated by the fact that class is generally unspoken and tends to be accessed through alternative categories of social analysis like gender, race, and ethnicity (Ortner, 1991). For those inside a class structure that is seen by most Americans as the universal class location, meaning that the middle class has come to be seen as representing everyone, it is difficult to uncover a dimension invisible to most people. Once brought to the surface, it is possible to raise questions about the conserving and constructing role class culture plays in the private school and the resulting implications for girls' identity formation.

Having sketched the broad outlines of life in the private, girls' high school, chapter 3 moves to the lived voices and experiences of Best Academy students as they begin to narrate and elaborate class identity processes. In a school whose historical mainstay has been the children of upper middle-class families, it is most likely that one would find youth accepting of class-based norms, values, and expectations. A diversifying class culture has, however, introduced competing forces and new dynamics among girls in the private school, planting the seeds for complex and conflicted articulations of class identities to develop along the way. To this end, I make a case for class as a

border zone, where girls are actively reshaping what it means to be classed and gendered, repositioning themselves as upper middle-class girls in relation to meanings and social practices that have been presented to them.

Chapter 4 explores the constitution of race identities inside a predominantly white school where white girls engage their own particular struggles around what it means to be white in an otherwise "white-washed" educational site. In this chapter, I take seriously the notion that whiteness is a racial category that structures girls' lives—white girls as well as girls of color. Like class privilege, whiteness is a site of absence, doubly difficult to see because this discourse *whites out* racial difference, tension, and conflict (Fine, 1997). Among girls of color, a relatively underrepresented but vocal group in Best Academy, steps taken to guard as well as cross color lines emerge from the data. Students of color at Best Academy will narrate dual struggles around visibility and invisibility, positioning themselves at once separate and different from but also part of the dominant cultural codes in the private school. White girls also engage their own unique forms of borderwork. As they move into consciousness of what it means to be white, they begin to unearth the lived contradictions of race privilege in a school site that has worked hard at managing and containing difference.

Girls' future projections along trajectories of career, marriage, and family laid out in chapter 5 need to be situated at the frontiers of post feminist ideology and broader structural shifts in the economy. Internalizing messages around girls' academic potential and professional development for the future, girls educated in the private school tend to center salaried labor in their projections for the future. They begin to see that their plans for marriage and family might conflict with professional expectations, and find themselves raising questions about the viability of being able to have it all, in spite of messages floating through school and society that tell women they can have it all. We will also hear a remarkable realism in the voices of these girls who cast their desires for marriage in the shadows of separation and divorce, sounding strikingly similar in substance and tone to working-class girls who are looking to develop themselves as resources for their own survival in a moment of structural decline.

In chapter 6, we hear the voices of parents around issues of school choice and expectations for their children's future. Their narratives will be contextualized in terms of the lived effects of a changing economy on the upper middle class who begin to see that the benefits of relative privilege that they remember a generation earlier are no longer guaranteed in a time of economic dislocation and delayed gratification forced by a narrowing job market. This discussion will bring into sharp relief the felt descent of upper middle-class parents and their hopes that their children will be able to exercise control over the conditions of their lives in spite of very real

dynamics that have the potential to limit the possibilities that membership in upper middle-class culture traditionally guaranteed. These chapters are pieces of a bigger story that come together in chapter 7 with a review of the main findings and implications of this study along with recommendations for meaningful work that has yet to be done as we continue to broaden and deepen our understanding of the complex realities of girls' lives in school contexts.