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Abstract

This dissertation is a qualitative investigation of 12 female high school graduates who had previously dropped out or were pushed out of public high school and who attended and graduated from “Conservation High School” (CHS), located in the Pacific Northwest. CHS is an alternative high school organized around an environmental conservation theme. In this study, participants describe how their relationships with peers and teachers in each school affected their commitment to finish school. I analyze participants’ awareness of how power dynamics were communicated to students through social organization, school practices, meaning making systems, constructions of identity, and others’ behavior. The youth interacted with peers and teachers based on their perceptions of their place in the social order of the school, reinforced by hearing such terms as “at-risk,” “dropouts,” “behaviorally-disordered,” and “special education.” I used Foucault’s concept of the self as a product of the disciplinary power of discourse to frame the study of these youth’s experience of being socially and therefore relationally positioned, a phenomenon I named “relational regulation.”

In Chapter 4 participants describe how institutionalized practices, such as the management of school space, time, and organization, and informal regulations, such as emotional expression and bodily representations, were managed in their relationships in school. Participants describe the relational possibilities they experienced at CHS in comparison to their public school experiences. Themes were developed from their narratives, including “getting to know you,” “being at each other’s throats,” and “schooling effects.” In Chapter 5, I consider how participants use the discourses of “being fake” and “being real” to inform themselves about the relational terrain. “Being

fake” is their term for a deceptive representation of self, while “being real” is their term for an honest one. I show how they use these discourses to resist and also reproduce some of the exclusionary politics they rejected in their public school that were central to their leaving school. In Chapter 6, I look at how the students negotiated the dominant discourse of “hygienic” femininity, while doing conservation work in the muddy outdoors. Last, I address why relational regulation matters and discuss implications for future research.

LEARNING LESSONS AND BEING SCHOOLED:
THE RELATIONAL LESSONS OF YOUNG WOMEN IN
AN ALTERNATIVE HIGH SCHOOL

by

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Dissertation

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Cultural Foundations of Education

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Chapter 1: Introduction

When I was principal of “Conservation High School,” a 44-student alternative high school for youth labeled “at-risk,” my students would tell me about how Conservation High School (CHS) was different than public school. My students would say “our” school was different because “we get to know each other.” Certainly, young people learn about relationships through the forms they take during 12 years of public schooling. Yet, coursework and curriculum rarely center on the relationships young people experience within school, beyond codes of conduct, unless there is an identified “problem.”

Like Foucault (1988), I am interested in showing the “interactions and the reactions of people. I believe in the freedom of people. To the same situation, people react in very different ways” (Martin, 1988, p. 14). What might students take from an “education” in an alternative school when they believe that they are being welcomed, cared about, and “known” by peers and teachers? How might students experience such an educational environment after attending public school, where they believed that their peers and teacher had little opportunity for or interest in getting to know them, and where their overall experiences with teachers and peers seemed either vacuous or hostile to them? This dissertation explores the meaning students made from such school experiences.

My purpose in this dissertation is to investigate how the 12 participants in my study understood the relational culture of both of their high schools. By relational *culture*, I imply that culture is transmitted to students through patterns of social organization, attitudes, behavior, values, and practices. Students learn from and negotiate school culture through their experience of interpersonal relationships. By *relational* culture, I

imply that interpersonal experiences in school take place within the context of power relations. Youth learn to interact with peers and teachers with reference to their perceived place in the social order of the school.

Participants in this study searched for relationships they believed should be “authentic” or “real” within school. By “authentic” and “real” they mean relationships based on shared experiences, such as working together, doing “team-building” activities, and talking about their actual circumstances and worldview, instead of basing their relationships upon representations, such as dress, fashion, and peer group membership. They specifically appreciate times when they can talk about what has happened and is happening in their world.

In this dissertation I ask: What lessons do the 12 young women who dropped out or were “pushed out” (Fine, 1992) or “evicted” (Kerr, 2009) from public high school say they learned from their interpersonal experiences at school? According to some estimates, more than 25 percent of all students do not graduate from high school on time, and the vast majority of these drop out (Legters & Balfanz, 2010). In the state in which this study was conducted, the U.S. Census Bureau reports a 34 percent high school dropout rate (2000). The percentage of students who do not earn a high school diploma is unacceptably high (Prevatt & Kelly, 2003). What do participants reveal about their relational experiences in public school that contributed to their high school exit and what kept them at Conservation High? Informants compare their experiences at public high school to the two-plus years they each spent at Conservation High School, an alternative school where I was principal and where we first met.

Traditional public schools organize time, activity, and physical space differently than Conservation High does. Participants herein identify aspects of public school life that they saw as impeding their ability to form relationships with teachers and peers. Taken together, these features of public school created a kind of systematic isolation for these students. At Conservation High, a conservation-focused school, students had ample opportunity to get to know one another, working side-by-side on conservation projects for weeks at a time and in traditional subject-driven classes. They attended state-required classes inside the school building and officially learned about environmental conservation while doing physical labor in the Pacific Northwest outdoors. In public school, few if any participants felt “known,” and most describe alienating experiences with peers and teachers alike; they describe the opposite at Conservation High, where they said they were “known,” “accepted,” and a part of their “crew,” the CHS word for “class.”

The participants’ experiences in large high schools and at CHS exposed them to different organizational formats that offered different interpersonal opportunities. For example, at CHS teachers made time to dialogue about how students were working together, while this was generally not done in public school. At CHS, students engaged in physical labor side-by-side with their classmates. Their teachers and peers often offered topics to discuss, team-building exercises, and games to do while working. This rarely happened in public school. At CHS, classmates all ate lunch together, whereas in public school students were free to sit at any table in the cafeteria, depending on the social climate. Participants note how these two educational environments employ different structures that, to them, serve to inhibit, control, or encourage interpersonal relationships.

In my analysis of these structures, I use Foucault's (1977) theory of disciplinary power, in which he describes techniques of coercion that impact one's experience of time and space, one's own experience of subjectivity, and the constitution of "legitimate" knowledge and the normalizing of assessment. "Discipline 'makes' individuals; it is the specific technique of a power that regards individuals both as objects and as instruments of its exercise" (p. 170). I call expressions of disciplinary power delivered through interpersonal relationships "relational regulation." By relational regulation, I mean the expressions of disciplinary power through everyday practices, organizational structures, and discourses that manage, direct, inhibit, or encourage relationships. Relational regulation is further defined in the Review of Literature. I am interested in how informants contrast their relational experiences in the two school environments: How did they experience these differences and what, in their view, resulted from the different relational structures? How did they construct identity in each educational environment? And what lessons did they learn about themselves as diverse girls labeled "at-risk"?

Initially, I wondered how these young women constructed school success in an alternative school, given a history of being labeled "school failures." How did they negotiate the discourse of school failure and success in two different high school environments? My initial interviews with participants began with questions about how they became successful at school. While high grades were important, my students speak primarily about the differences in social climate, comparing CHS to their public school. In those comparisons, CHS is almost always preferred. This is not a dissertation about that choice, about which education is better or worse, but about their expressed desire for personal relationships that are developed during school. For example, they say things

like, “CHS is like a family,” “You can be real at Conservation High,” and, “Everyone is *known* at CHS.” I began to question how the character of “being known” and “being real” reached beyond the “everyday” conflict I witnessed between students at CHS to a form of relationship they called “family.”

Campbell’s (1994) perspective on conflict is similar in *Being Dismissed: The Politics of Emotional Expression*. She claims that a community’s cohesion may be strengthened by curiosity about and tolerance for interpersonal disagreement or conflict—in other words, conflict is not antithetical to relationships. Since I tended to see conflict as undermining relationships, the form of community I wanted for my students was ultimately impossible at a school where arguments frequently occurred. Importantly, I found that my students saw conflict in a way similar to Campbell’s (1994) conception. They saw conflict not as a threat to relationships, but as a process that may (or may not) inform students of each others’ differences, which may in turn serve to strengthen their relationships.

Participants noted their interest in “being known” and “being real” in relationships with others at Conservation High, and contrasted this with the “fake” relationships that were prevalent in their public high school. How is this difference in quality of in-school relationships related to those difficult circumstances they faced in public school, those that led to their dropping out or being dismissed from school? Later, I learned that their difficulties in public school did connect to their assessments of relational regulation through school structure and organization.

Participants name covert and overt regulations that they saw as positioning them in the social order of their public school, such as intraschool segregation, whether based

on racial/ethnic affiliation (Tatem, 1997; Carter, 2010; Walsemann, 2010), class, or ascription to a youth cultural group (such as poor kids, skaters, jocks, stoners, and Goths) (Kelly, Pomerantz, & Currie, 2005; Ortner, 2002). The small school environment at Conservation High offered a break from such social organization and isolation, not only because CHS students had histories of school failure, but also because, as they report, the culture of CHS gave them an opportunity to co-create social meaning and to resist marginalizing others, which in turn offered them ongoing opportunities to get to know one another. I wondered, What do young, diverse working-class women, who grew up with media-saturated representations of culture and group membership, mean when they talk about themselves as “real”? How do they make sense of their school experiences?

This dissertation works to create a space for young women’s voices. Conservation High’s young women in a nontraditional women’s field (i.e., environmental conservation) learned lessons that they are likely to use throughout their lives. I wanted to know what unofficial lessons students might have learned in their school experience—the hidden curricular lessons of negotiating relationship regulation.

On Learning Lessons

In referring to *Learning Lessons* in the title, I do not mean the official curriculum objectified in teachers’ lesson plans, although it is implied that lessons are learned in school. I do not mean how well students learned mathematical formulas or geographical relationships or even the grades they received. I am more interested in what I see as the lessons young women learned from the different relational educational structures in schools. When they negotiate identity, they are learning lessons. What did they learn

about themselves, their peers, and their place in the world in an age of media-saturated representational youth culture?

Conservation High's relational culture marks a shift away from dominant Western, middle-class school cultural capital. Bourdieu and Passeron (1976/1990) suggest that the public school, a middle-class establishment, rewards those students privileged with cultural capital that is consistent with the school's values. This includes particular language use, communication styles, social interactions, and knowledge. Lower-class students, whose cultural capital is worth less in exchange, are left at a disadvantage. Bourdieu (1992) also explains that "social capital is the sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a *durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships* of mutual acquaintance and recognition" (p. 119). Marginalized youth in school lack this network with other student and with teachers. I use cultural and social capital as frameworks for participants' stories. This theory offers an explanation of these students' social marginalization and the perspective and skills they develop from it.

As this informant's narratives suggest, at CHS, the cultural capital that "paid off" differed importantly from that in their former public schools. CHS teachers and staff found that facilitating conflicts, when classes were unable to work together, often resulted in a strong social cohesion among students, even if the seeming "cause" remained unresolved. There was a payoff for students and teachers in finding out more about each other. "Knowing each other" is a reason to stay in school, despite interpersonal struggles. Being alienated is a reason to drop out. This alternative cultural capital does not "buy" the same privileges enjoyed by students who are "successful" in the middle-class

dominant culture of schooling. Teachers, likely to have cultural capital that eased their own success in public schools, may be unable to locate value in the relational cultural capital that Conservation High students were so active in introducing. It seems that when students seek such relations and are resistant when such relations are not recognized or encouraged, they may then be subject to the socially produced “at-risk” label.

Examples of Learned Lessons

“I change you, you change me.”

—Modoc song

“Fern” (pseudonym): It is like everything you do kind of makes you who you are and being there [in public school] wouldn’t have been who I wanted to be.

Fern, an Italian-American and one of the few middle- (versus working- or poverty-) class young women at Conservation High, resists the effects public school had on her. She echoes the point of the Modoc song above, about how everything one experiences is a part of the ongoing process of becoming. Fern’s message and that of the Modoc song reflect the malleability and fluidity of identity. Fern saw school as changing her in ways she did not want. Is not schooling intended to support young people to become better, especially those that struggle? Fern, at 13 years old, was labeled an “at-risk” teenager and seen as behaviorally disordered, a juvenile delinquent; she was psychologically pathologized. Later in her interview, Fern discusses feeling like a “fuck-up” kid in school. Feeling like a failure was an outcome of Fern’s learning environment. While not all of Fern’s experience or resistance was a product of school, feeling like a failure does inhibit learning, goal setting, and achievement.

“Carmen” (pseudonym), an analytical young woman, introduces some aspects of

Conservation High's culture and some examples of lessons she learned at CHS:

Michelle: You are saying there weren't cliques?

Carmen: Right, you really can't have that with just 10 people (in a class).

Between 10 people, I mean you are not going to like all of them, but one, because there is 10 of you and you all come from different places and you all didn't grow up together and go to the same middle school and be like, "Oh, this is the person they don't like." And not knowing these people, you can't make a clique. You can't like everyone on your crew. It doesn't work that way.

Michelle: How does it work?

Carmen: You won't even like half of them when you first get there. And when you do, you are going to learn to like them, but it is not like it is going to be everyone but one person. You can't like exclude someone like that. You either learn to like them or you spend every day hating them.

Michelle: In my perspective a few kids did that.

Carmen: Like they don't really. Like they say they hate it but they are like, "I don't want to be here. I don't want to do this." But if they really didn't want to be there then they wouldn't. It is also the only security that they have, saying they hate it. It is more like you hate it because people train you to think that being in the mud, it sucks, or not taking a shower for a week is horrible. That is the way society thinks about things, so that is how you get trained to think about it. But like once you get out of that, you are like, on the outside saying, "Oh, I hate this, this is dirty." And you start to realize what you are really doing, like, "What am I talking about. Why do I hate this? What is to hate?" I mean, "Oh well, I am dirty.

Big deal.” Think of other things you have done in your life. Like people that have way worse situations. Like crying in the mud, come on, people are starving to death. It’s not a big deal.

Carmen, of Mexican-American and Irish-American heritage, notes that Conservation High students refuse to use one student as a demonstration of the group’s social hierarchy, an important characteristic that she sees as based on the group size and recent history. She challenges my assessment that some students seem to spend every day hating everything—a challenge that demonstrates something about the quality of our relationship. Without knowing it, Carmen talks back to Fern’s experience of being physically but not mentally present in school. Carmen uses an individualistic empowering perspective: “If you didn’t want to be in school, then you wouldn’t be there.” Such a perspective may miss competing interests in school attendance and it does not take into account diverse and subtle experiences of school withdrawal, such as Fern’s trick of withdrawing everything but her physical self. Such withdrawal seemed to be part of Fern’s public school exit. Her mind/psyche left school first and then her body.

When Carmen notes that “saying they hate it is the only security they have,” she demonstrates that she has observed and considered the social dynamics of her classmates’ initial transition to Conservation High. Carmen also shows respect for students’ actions (attendance) rather than their words. She gives them a complaint allowance as a form of security, a just-in-case ticket, or a kind of complaint cultural capital, rather than taking all words at face value. In this she demonstrates insight into group dynamics.

Further, she notes relational choices to overcome disliking others, something likely in every social environment. Such observations and skills, if the lucrative self-help

industry is any measure, are much sought after. In this way, she brings up primary concerns, not only for educators, but primary struggles in American society: targeting and exclusion, conflict, working closely with people one does not like, communication, the difference between a drama and a real problem, and learning to take the mud in stride.

The lessons Carmen learned at school and elsewhere included learning to have a larger and critical perspective of knowledge, relationships, and what constitutes a real problem. For her the experience of getting dirty inspires introspection and a critical look at the role of fashion, oneself, and larger social prescriptions. She learned to approach problems rather than avoid them. She questions their severity and relevance. Putting fashion in its place, she encourages overlooking fashion sense, given real-life practicalities, like getting muddy while doing conservation work. She notes that institutionalized messages about hygiene were barriers to be overcome when peeing in the woods and going without a shower (versus a washcloth) for five days. She questions hygienic training. When she observes that the basics in the natural world, like getting dirty, are constructed as distasteful, and that not being able to take a shower is almost unthinkable,¹ she reminds me of Michael Apple's work, which investigates the preoccupations of constructions of knowledge (Apple, 1982).

Such lessons changed Fern and Carmen. These are kinds of hidden curricular lessons I reference by the title "learning lessons," which also plays on the school-marmish question, "Did you learn your lesson?" For example, Carmen learned from being the target at the bottom of the pecking order in her elementary and middle school class, while teachers looked on. Carmen reflects on how the practice of excluding one

¹ She refers to "Spike," a week-long camping/work trip where students get one weekly shower and can sponge off on other days.

person polices all of the other students in a class. In the above example, she refers to this cruelty/regulation twice and that such cruelty does not happen at CHS. All this from two young people labeled as “high-risk dropouts,” and one as a juvenile delinquent with mental health “issues.” Such constructions on the part of adolescents counter a powerful social force and critique. That is why I am writing about them.

Setting and Project Evolution

Conservation High School is unique in that it was initiated by a nonprofit youth corps organization that utilized progressive state legislation for alternative schooling. My project looks closely at 12 (out of 14) graduates of CHS from winter 1999 to spring 2001. Conservation High, which used environmental conservation as a theme to integrate academic disciplines and to develop community, was targeted by local public schools as a place for “dropouts” and “at-risk” youth. Public schools primarily sent students who did not fit well within their system, students who had dropped out or with whom they had trouble.

Conservation High was a new experience against which participants contrasted their time at their former high school. Certainly initial conversations between students already there and new students consisted of how the new students came to CHS. Conservation High’s structure differed from that of traditional public school in that working in the field left students’ talk less regulated than it was in public school or even in CHS classrooms. Exercises labeled “team building” required that students talk about working together for a common goal—often the completion of work projects out in the community. Classes encouraged class discussion, with flexibility around time and subject. Further, students in classes (named “crews”) stayed together, and lessons plans

were postponed when “teachable moments”—relevant to classroom community—were chosen by teachers to take priority. Students went on “Spike,” a week-long camping/work trip twice a year. This structure differed from what they had experienced in public school. Students often compared the two kinds of school, with encouragement from CHS staff. “Teaching strategies” included dialogue about how crews were working together.

Such group facilitation was not always timely or even well done. My purpose in this dissertation is not to promote the specific procedures of CHS, but rather to document some teaching styles and structures that used youths’ voices and perspectives as an integral part of its pedagogy. Students were also encouraged to dialogue in the field, sometimes in crew-leader-organized exercises and sometimes as part of unsupervised student-led discussions when crews worked in an area much larger than a classroom, such that teachers were out of hearing range.

The state in which Conservation High exists has alternative school legislation. There, “alternative school” has a “school-choice” connotation, rather than a “place for ‘at-risk’ youth” connotation. Conservation High was the vision of the executive director of a large youth corps organization in the Pacific Northwest. He believed that high school students interested in a career in forestry and/or environmental conservation could be well prepared in a school such as Conservation High. One of his summer staff members, a high school science teacher, was funded to write the application. Conservation High gained certification by the state as a private, nonprofit 501(c)3 public school in 1996. Subcontractual arrangements were made with 13 local school districts to serve their students. While the executive director’s vision for Conservation High was the establishment of an environmental conservation-based magnet school, the school’s

primary purpose became the use of environmental education to engage “at-risk” youth and offer them employment opportunities in forestry and conservation. And so the director and the leaders he hired were soon to learn about the politics of “school choice.”

While “school-choice” has become a matter of public debate over the last decade or two, Leiding (2008), in a review of the history of alternative education, shows that “alternatives in public education have existed since the very birth of American education. Differences based on race, gender, and class set the stage for the constantly evolving nature of the educational system in America” (p. 3). The state in which Conservation High is located approved alternative school legislation in the 1970s, making it possible for K–12 alternative schools to develop through state certification. Such schools are almost all small schools, with under 100 students. The application included school organization, staffing and teacher credentials, program description, curricular approaches and context, and sample curricular units and lesson plans. Approved schools, such as Conservation High, then qualified to receive funding based on 80 percent average daily membership from school districts whose students attended CHS.

The legislation offered parents the choice of where their students could attend school, without having to prove educational failure or liability of public education to gain access to schools of “choice.” However, the school districts themselves direct the process, choosing which students they are willing to fund elsewhere. The students they chose to move to alternative programs are often ones they have labeled “at-risk”—a broad category of students that includes nonattenders, students with Individualized Educational Plans, and those labeled as having behavioral and/or psychological problems. Public school districts became increasingly competitive regarding the “kind” of student

that they referred, some even developing their own alternative programs modeled after Conservation High.

After being the administrator of CHS for two years, I began to believe that aspects of our program were making a difference in the lives of these youth. When I first conceived of this study, I was particularly interested in students' experiences of school success at CHS; after all, the students' former school failures and often-difficult lives surely had a significant bearing on their experience in school. In particular, many had histories of family upheaval. Participants' social locations—over half are biracial young women from low-income, single-parent families—put them on the outside of the dominant culture of schooling because they lacked the requisite cultural capital (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977).

The small school environment offered more personal interactions between students and staff and among students. I saw this environment as the context of the study rather than the focus of it. Initially, I thought about the project from my perspective as the principal of a school with youth who experienced multiple forms of adversity. Then my dissertation committee member, Dr. Joan Bursytn, suggested that I meet a leader in the field of violence prevention. After hearing about my experiences and interests, this national leader suggested I read Mark Katz's (1997) book, *On Playing a Poor Hand Well*. Katz describes research about people who rise to the challenge of having been dealt a poor hand. He discusses people who have experienced a range of childhood adversities, such as poverty, barriers to learning, witnessing a great deal of violence, and exposure to “inescapable, enduring and potentially traumatizing experiences” beyond the child's ability to alter. He suggests that “herein lies the awful paradox. Rarely will this child be

able to communicate his pain in a language we can understand” (xiv). Katz (1997) asks educators, researchers, and clinicians:

Are we aware of the potential emotional and behavioral effects that exposure to inescapable, enduring, and overwhelming stressful conditions can have upon a child? And have we ever examined the consequences of treating the resulting emotional and behavioral displays that arise from a child’s attempts to adapt to these conditions as being due to oppositional motives? (p. xiv)

Typically, research on “at-risk” youth in alternative schools constructs their behavior as due to oppositional motives or organic disorders such as those that identify special education students, as in Becker’s (2010) study about constructions of students that *are problems or have problems*.

Most of my students were considered to express (actively or passively) oppositional motives and behavior at their former schools and at times by staff members at Conservation High. After all, almost every student had been identified by former public school personnel as a troublemaker or as a dropout. Katz highlights the power of professionals’ approaches to young people enduring difficult circumstances. He writes about how the manner in which these questions are answered in educational practice can provide vulnerable children and families with sources of strength and protection, which he calls “protective factors,” that support individuals to overcome adversity.

On Playing a Poor Hand Well spoke to me. I found Katz’s questions to be relevant to many aspects of education and psychological diagnoses that pathologize a young person’s responses without taking the time to understand the youth’s context and experience. Without prompting, in interviews quite a few participants (“Fern,” “Becka,”

“Carmen,” “Helen,” and “China”) report that teachers or administrators rarely took the time to find out the basis of their particular problems in school. I found the children and young people Katz talks about very much like the young people that populated Conservation High, many of whom survived traumatic experiences. Brown (2008), author of *Beyond the Flashback: Culturally Competent Trauma Treatment*, describes insidious trauma as the experience of repeated instances of aggression.

I thought that my students had been regarded by school authorities as merely oppositional, not as people responding to both their life circumstances and to the ways they had been regarded by former (and CHS) school personnel. However, I recognized that I must not construct them as “victims” without agency. I learned of their experiences from my conversations with referring school counselors, and also from my initial interviews with the students and from being with them. Once, while implementing a modified version of a curriculum about school community, I asked a Conservation High class to consider standing up if certain statements were true for them, such as, “Please stand if you have been followed in a store by security personnel,” “if you have been cursed at by an adult who is in a position of being a role model for you,” “if you have ever been physically or sexually abused.” I remember some of my students’ faces. Almost every student stood up for all three of these statements. The repetitive standing was a statement to their teachers, their peers, and me. Then we discussed what such experiences were like for them as well as how they could participate in communities so as not to perpetuate these kinds of situations.

I thought about students at Conservation High as young people with experiences that made them vulnerable to being marginalized. For example, one quarter of

Conservation High students (and participants) had active Individualized Education Plans that labeled them with “learning” and “emotional/behavioral” disorders. Eighty percent of students at Conservation High qualified for free or reduced-cost lunch by federal poverty standards. Katz’s question about the consequences of assessments of young people’s motives spoke to me in relation to how I thought about these “multiple barriers.” At faculty meetings we discussed how we think about and describe youth. I had evidence that we were serving youth well in some ways and not so well in other ways. I knew we were making important strides. For example, for every one year that students attended CHS, they progressed, on average, two grade levels in mathematics and English. I heard students tell us that they felt safer and more cared for and included at CHS. I also felt and witnessed frustration, complaints, and anger between students and staff. Yet, I had not heard firsthand about the *collective* experience of young people at CHS.

As a principal, I made meaning from the stories they shared about their public school exit, after which they entered Conservation High. I often concluded that they had been “pushed out” (Fine, 1991) or evicted (Kerr, 2009) from public high school; some were subject to educational neglect, zero-tolerance policies, or, what is called in the workforce, a “hostile environment.” No student came to Conservation High out of a primary interest in environmental conservation, even though our public material billed our school as a specialized magnet school. In actuality, Conservation High students were referred primarily because they were seen as (potentially) dangerous, were expelled, had dropped out, or were seen as at high risk of dropping out. With the exception of one student who was home schooled and chose Conservation High, all others were either looking for an “out” of public school or being pushed out.

While the responses of young adults to such experiences is worth studying, I initially heard these young people's stories not as a researcher but as a principal, as someone who was responsible for them and for their well-being in our school environment. I thought most of them were over-stimulated, even in a small classroom, not to mention public schools with 3,000 students. While principal, I did witness camaraderie, bonding, and laughter among students, yet I was still surprised to hear from students that Conservation High's culture was instrumental to their school success. This is because, as principal, I also dealt with problems between students, and I observed a significant amount of nastiness. Participants reminded me that the problem is not always the nastiness itself, but the willingness on our part to talk about how to resolve it, and to learn from the relationships built out of that dialogue. I found out that this willingness on students' part to engage conflict was a form of "cultural capital," which marked students' exit from public school alienation. I saw their public school exit as inherently tied to the context of their former school, which lacked dialogue; that school formally organized and passively condoned their marginalization. However, I don't mean to suggest that well-meaning teachers did not in fact make inroads with students there either; they did.

I began to formulate a research question. First, I had to review my preconceived notions, because many were based on conversations I had had with the students when I was their principal. In interviews, I noticed that *how* students described what went into their school success was broad in scope. Open-ended questions facilitated participants' descriptions, which brought some of my assumptions to the forefront. I became interested in describing how they explained their own experience and their resistance to the ways they had been regarded, as Katz (1997) indicated. I was drawn to the concept of

resiliency as a way to describe my students. I decided to study participants' experiences of school success, based on the fact that they had earned a high school diploma against obstacles. What did it mean for these young women to do well in school? What contributed to that success and what was the transition from public school like for them? Since young women in alternative school programs typically do not make as much progress as their male counterparts (Kempf-Leonard & Sample, 2000), I was particularly interested in their experiences. I saw them as more institutionally vulnerable.

I wanted other people to hear what the youths had to say about the climates in which they lived while "being educated." I wanted to challenge constructions of these diverse young women as at-risk, behaviorally disordered, and/or in special education. What motivated me to embark on this study were the serious conversations about school that I had with youth on a rather regular basis. I wanted to know more about how participants had been positioned in school to face decisions about leaving school. In other words, because I knew the students in this study, I had a sense before the project began that all I had to do was ask a good question.

My conversations with students demonstrated what Luttrell (2000) calls participants' "'narrative urgency to tell it like it was,' as an expression of the emotional salience of school and its formative role in shaping women's identities and self-understandings" (p. 502). Importantly, many of these conversations were a product of difficult life circumstances that I would not want for my children or relatives. I wanted to achieve a "goal of critical race methodologies" and "to offer *testimonios* and counterstories that challenge deficit narratives circulating in dominant discourse" (Dance, Gutierrez, & Hermes, 2010, (p. 331). As an education scholar and principal, I felt that I

had more access to and potential authority in the realms of school policy, structure, and teacher education than did my students, and thus believed I could effectively describe their processes of contemplating and negotiating the costs of attending traditional public school.

I must also mention that there were costs for participants in attending Conservation High. Their high school credentials from CHS weighed less than those from public high schools. State legislation allows high schools to grant an adult high school (AHS) diploma as opposed to a standard high school diploma. The AHS diploma was originally intended for former dropouts who returned to high school as adults, and it required half the credits of a traditional diploma, although some professionals considered those credits to be accelerated. About three quarters of CHS students earned an AHS diploma. Other costs included shifting class composition, and established organizational barriers to relationships, dialogue, and community development.

I became especially curious about what the experiences of change and success at CHS were like for them, given the challenging nature of our school. I was curious how, given the difficulty of some student's relationships and behaviors, students talked about CHS fondly as a family. What was it in their experience at CHS that inspired school commitment in them? I was especially interested in the young women's experience of success at CHS, as young women are often the minority in co-ed alternative educational programs and rarely benefit as much as males do from them (Haag, 2000; Pollard, 1999).

I began this project as a principal of a small, alternative high school who wanted to understand students' experiences of educational transformation and success in a school mostly composed of former "dropouts." Some researchers would see this as a study of

success by students who “built resiliency” to their difficult life circumstances, who made it anyway despite enormous odds, since their educational and personal histories were full of experiences of struggle, pain, loss, neglect, or failure. I conducted initial interviews with the assumption that school success was important to recent graduates, especially those that had had such difficult experiences in public high school. What I received was a simple, blasé confirmation of the importance of academic success, but nothing more. Success meant something different to them than it meant to me.

For participants, school success had to do with the *relational process* of school, not just the fact that they earned a diploma. I had been thinking too much like a principal about end results: grades, graduation rates, diplomas, and standardized test scores. Participants focused upon CHS as a family where “you could be yourself.” Almost everything seemed to center on that. It was too dominant a theme to go undertheorized. As my research progressed, themes and then chapters emerged that dealt explicitly with differences in students’ educational experiences, the kind of family CHS became for them, and how they saw themselves differently under these new circumstances.

The stories of success contain many aspects. Although gaining their high school diploma was crucial, it was not the most common aspect. They speak about how they changed as they became part of the “family” experience of CHS. They finally felt at home. Students felt known by each other, despite disagreements (which were often and many for some), and that they could be their “real” selves. They had carried a weight when they felt required to perform. Participants came to see “performing” or “posing” as a hallmark of the public schools they had left behind. That culture had its own constructions of “in” and “out” groups and modes of social control.

My interviews with participants initially focused on how they came to see themselves as successful at school. They answered this question as if I had asked something else: “How did they come to feel accepted by other students and be themselves in school?” Interview responses reflect their prior educational experiences—mostly stories of struggle, disappointment, rejection, and failure. These young people talk about their own transformation and how they experienced the two different school environments. Last, they discuss what it meant to them to be able to be “real” in the CHS environment. The data chapters follow that sequence. In addition, I added a chapter on the construction of raced, classed, and gendered spaces. Entitled “Dirty Femininity,” it discusses girls’ experiences of being dirty while doing fieldwork.

Overall these participants experienced significant psychological distress during their time in public school. All participants talk about some kind of psychological distress while attending their former schools, whether being suicidal, depressed, withdrawn, or always angry. To differing degrees, they experienced being alienated from the school establishment, teachers, peers, and the dominant culture of schooling.

While most participants had parents who struggled in the educational system, most of those parents had hopes of their children succeeding where they had not. Participants did not see the school establishment as an institution that did not support them or their culture in particular; rather, they saw it as complex, and some acknowledged that school was not for their parents or them. Many African-American families prepare their children for the racism they are likely to face personally and institutionally in school (Ward, 2000, 1990; Powell, 1983). At some level, the students all believed in the educational dream; they wanted to be successful at school, and they knew

that school success could bring opportunities. Many eventually learned that school was not a place where they could be successful, for many different reasons (as shown in Chapters 4 and 5). When I realized that some participants were not as prepared as their African-American counterparts, I began to ask participants another question. Many spoke of “being themselves” at CHS. I found that term vague. However, whatever the term meant to them, it altered the course of their educational lives. I asked them how they experienced themselves in the different school environments and what it would have cost them to stay in public high school. Some participants said it would have cost them their “integrity,” “honor,” and becoming a better person. These answers reflect an awareness of some informants of the possibility of having experiences in which a person gains “integrity,” “honor,” and becomes a better person. This point alone has made this project worthwhile for me, to witness and experience young people’s interest in being the change they want to see in the world.

Participants describe how, by contrasting their alienated versus connected circumstances, they figured out who they were. I suspect that regular facilitated discussions about how classes were working together strengthened their ability to participate in “discourses of emotion.” As Boler (1999) notes:

Histories of education have largely neglected a vast and untold story: the subterranean disciplining of emotions. A primary goal of education is to discipline young people’s social and moral values and behaviors. This moral conduct is inextricably tied to emotional control. Although social control is directed at all who participate in education—teachers, administrators, and students—discourses of emotion in education are most consistently present and visible in relation to

women. Women are the repository of emotion in Western culture. . . . Despite the rare appearances of explicit discussions of emotion, emotions have been consistently educated, whether explicitly or inexplicitly, in every classroom throughout the centuries. (pp. 30–31)

For participants, such emotional regulation, whether from administrators, teachers, students, or participants policing themselves, comes out in the presuppositions of statements such as the following:

“Autumn Moon” (pseudonym): [Other students] were so judgmental, so I just stopped going to school.

“Amelia” (pseudonym): I just couldn’t be who they wanted me to be.”

“Crystal” (pseudonym): [Having teachers tell me I would not] make it in school, just broke my spirit, really.

Thus participants talk about perceptions and concrete incidents rather than the mechanisms of social control to which they were subject. They do not reflect on the school’s responsibilities as an institution—like those analyses taught from an early age in Ward’s (2000) families.

Hidden Curriculum: Why Relational Regulation Matters

Inside schools, meaning, resources, and social organization are negotiated, as are social positioning based on language, race, class, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, geography, and ability. Labels that function in schools to separate and marginalize youth include identifiers such as “at-risk,” “behavior disordered,” “learning disabled,” and “dropout.” Such cultural constructions marginalize some young people, while privileging other students. The middle-class culture of public schooling serves particular interests. In this

way, schools are too often corrupt dispensers of educational resources, institutional access, privileged/marginalized status, and, therefore, institutional violence (Epp & Watkinson, 1996).

Schools offer an overt curriculum, which constitutes specialized academic learning, and a hidden curriculum, where complex and competing cultural prescriptions interact as a student's sense of identity is produced and coproduced. Many researchers and theorists study the multiple and complex ways students are alienated through hidden curricula, social meaning, and the material practices of exclusion and imbalanced allocation of resources (Fine, Burns, Payne, & Torre, 2004b, Acker, 2007, Weis & Fine, 2005).

High schools are institutions where the hidden curriculum of identity—who one is supposed to be as opposed to who one is—is played out and negotiated through everyday social interactions. Often students remember lessons on who they are supposed to be, how they are suppose to act and feel in school, and who they were never meant to be. Some remember this more than the purported academic mission of their school (Ortner, 2002). Students negotiate the meaning derived from living within educational structures and the circumstantial conditions of their hidden curricular education, such as the messages they receive from high teacher turnover, large class size, and lack of teacher attention (Fine, et al., 2004a).

A major part of the teenage years occurs within schools. “Adolescence” is popularly understood as the primary time when young people negotiate identity, and as a period marked by an identity crisis, hormones, pimples, resistance, mood swings, and involvement with peers (Lesko, 2001). The construction of adolescence in age-segregated

education emphasizes using the marker of age (Lesko, 2001). Youth negotiate these social constructions. In a small school context students can negotiate their identities in a setting where they get to know their peers. Possibly, this setting makes it more apparent that students both critique the messages concerning their place in the larger society through their critique of school, and internalize their struggle or failure in that system by feeling like “messed-up kids” and blaming themselves (Fine et al., 2004b). It is interesting that some young people’s critique of school is turned back onto themselves as their own irresponsibility. Irresponsibility is also a marker in the social construction of adolescence.

In the last few decades, there has been an emphasis on girls’ lives and their experience in school across social class and race (Bettie, 2003; Fordham, 1993; Fine & Macpherson, 1992; Orenstein, 1994; Proweller, 1998; AAUW, 1991; Jones, 2004; Lesko, 1988; Lopez, 2003; Lutrell, 2000; Sarroub, 2005; Weiler, 2000). Certainly identity is informed by everyday personal, familial, and social experiences that occur in relationship to others inside and outside of school. Much literature has shown powerful, creative, and complex forms of agency, resistance, and negotiation on the part of diverse marginalized students in school as well (Eckert, 1989; Castagno, 2008; Deutsch & Theodorou, 2010; Fordham, 1988; Perry, 2002; Pollack, 2008; Proweller, 1998).

Research on the hidden curriculum often focuses upon resistance and agency and spans broad educational topics. For example, Eckert (1989) studied segregated groups of students, revealing a relational curriculum of social fragmentation. She found abundant lingual creativity among marginalized students in comparison to more successful, yet lingually stagnant, students. Perry (2002) compared constructions of Whiteness by white

students in two high schools, one in a mostly Caucasian middle-class school and one in a highly racially and ethnically diverse working-class high school. She finds that white students in the diverse school had advanced and complex readings on constructions of Whiteness, while students in the primarily Caucasian school had often not thought about their own racial identity and its meaning.

Fine, Burns, Payne, and Torre (2004a) show in “Civic Lessons” that Black urban youth, in schools serving primarily poor youth of color, watch their hopes for a rigorous academic education pass them by, and that they “read” the conditions of their schooling as a societal message of their social disposability and marginalization. These scholars document inequities in California’s urban schools, from cleanliness, to lack of texts, desks, and qualified teachers. They find that students show resistance to and anger about their educational neglect, as well as shame and self-blame for their lack of skills. I find similar sentiments to those found by Fine, et al. (2004a) in my study, with regard to Caucasian and biracial young women in significantly more stratified, suburban schools in the Pacific Northwest. In the current case, however, the students are often not as conscious of the institutionalized racism and classism as were Fine et al.’s participants. The participants in my study have another standpoint from which to view public school. They recently graduated from a small, conservation-focused alternative school experience where they spent one or two school years. That school offered them a different relational experience from which to reflect upon their school experience and themselves. While people who experience forms of oppression and marginalization are far from powerless, concrete forms of institutional violence, such as lack of resources and curriculum, do marginalize students. I use cultural/feminist standpoints from which to describe, admire,

and investigate stories of young women labeled “at-risk.”

Young people “read” situations of being “othered,” where adults in charge passively or actively sidestep responsibility or refuse to systemically intervene in hostile and exclusive environments and the ethos of schools. Such a complex yet also divisive culture is reflective of the larger society’s gendered, raced, and classed relations. Young people herein made meaning of their experience of marginalization. Participants herein found that the experience of “being themselves” had social costs in public school. The dominant school culture of “fitting in” in consumerist-oriented schooling often seems opposed to the nonconformism of “being yourself.” So, participants describe bushwacking their way through educational systems in order to balance inner and outer lives, fighting for or giving up on their needs, posturing, defending their economic life chances, or giving up to their social positioning as mostly lower-class, biracial girls who have been seen as having problems.

Having to negotiate marginalization can be a significant price to pay for 12 years of school. Such negotiation can take many forms, like making sense of being isolated in ill-equipped, run-down schools for primarily students of color (Kozol, 1991; Fine, et al., 2004a) or being marginalized in an alternative school for so-called violent or at-risk youth (Williams, 2005). They may be taught as if their race, class, or gender is the reason for a second-class education (Fine at al., 2004a, 2004b; Orenstein, 1993), or be forced to negotiate the organizational dynamics of schools that produce underachievement (Croninger & Lee, 2001; Fine, 1991, 1992; Kelly, 1993; Herbert, 1998; Kim, 2006), or be taught in ways that deny primary cultural beliefs, as in the case of many Native

Americans (Deloria, 1997; Deyhle, 2007). How do they see such organizational dynamics and negotiate expressions that deny their experience?

Chapters: Sequence and Content

Following this introduction, Chapter 2 reviews literature in which this study is situated in four areas. First, I review scholarship about alternative and small schools throughout the United States. Alternative schools tend to be seen as places for “at-risk” students, yet “at-risk” is variably defined across the United States and is often used to describe what in students’ lives disrupts their school completion, rather than focusing upon conditions they experience inside the school building. Second, I summarize theories of cultural reproduction and resistance in education and ask how these two important areas of scholarship can complement this study. Here I include a review of Foucault’s use of disciplinary power, which informs my discussion of “relational regulation.” Third, I review recent educational ethnographies that consider the social construction of identity in school and those that particularly focus upon students’ experience of “connection” and “disconnection.” Last, I consider work that contributes critical psychological analyses of girls’ identities.

Chapter 3 shifts to the qualitative methods I employed in this study. First, I review foundational scholarship on qualitative methods. Second, I describe the social location from which I come to this research, especially as a former principal, through the eyes of my participants. Third, I review the mechanics of the study—including data collection, sorting codes, and classifying themes—and its setting. Participants’ demographics and descriptions come next. Last, I discuss the significance and limitations of the study.

Chapter 4 reviews the practices that participants saw as regulating their

relationships and possibilities in public high school and at CHS. As participants described their experiences at CHS, their experiences in public school surfaced as a comparison. This chapter is dedicated first to those stories of relational regulation, classified into two categories: institutional regulations and informal regulations. Participants' cultural forms of relationship are introduced, but are taken up in greater detail in subsequent chapters. Here participants point out practices of regulation in the management of school space, time, and organization. For example, they note that emotional expression and representation of ascribed circumstances by school personnel and peers are often objects of information regulation. In the last section, participants describe the relational possibilities they experienced at CHS. I take up three categories of their stories to demonstrate how these possibilities point to a different relational regulation and lessons learned at Conservation High: "getting to know you"; "arguments, nit-picking, and being at each other's throats"; and "schooling effects."

I compare two discourses that participants use that describe, in part, their negotiation of "school failure" in Chapter 6. I use a Foucauldian notion of "discourse" in relation to discursive relations of power to consider how participants use the representational discourses of "being fake" and "being real" to inform themselves about the relational terrain of their school environments. The term "being fake" is used to mark what they see as a deceptive representation of self, while "being real" marks what they consider to be an honest or authentic one. Certainly authentic representation includes negotiating one's presentation also. Participants use these discourses in diverse ways, not only in the sense of "dealing with fake people" in public school and being with "real" people at Conservation High. "Being real" includes challenging normative expectations

of privilege versus marginalization in how people present themselves, like being able to get dirty, as they often did in their fieldwork, and presenting an outward affect commensurate with their internal climate. I show how these discourses are employed in ways that also reproduce some of the exclusionary politics they rejected about the public school, the climate in which they were marginalized. At other times, they participate in “fake” representation in ways that highlight the competitive and consumerist climate in which they were negotiating power. Last, I highlight participants’ dropout stories as they negotiate the message that their “real” selves were not welcome in school.

In Chapter 7, the final chapter, I summarize the study and its findings, with particular attention to how participants negotiated the discourse of school failure. I argue that participants, such as those at Conservation High, are the lucky ones because they had opportunities for bonding and thoughtful dialogue about their own participation in social relations and politics. Last, I offer ideas for further inquiry, including investigating how privileged students perceive “real” and “fake” representation and its role in the social order of their schools.

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

In this dissertation I seek to understand how study participants make sense of their experience at public high school and at the alternative school Conservation High, specifically in terms of the relational climate. How did they understand the social environment of these schools? What were the ways they experienced their relationships being regulated? How did they negotiate these experiences and advocate for themselves? This is an interdisciplinary study in that it draws on literature on the subjects of alternative education, small schools, “at-risk” youth, and the intersections of race, class, and gender in high school.

This review of literature has four sections. The first, Small and Alternative Schools and “At-Risk” Youth, briefly reviews the history and purpose of small and alternative schools. Who attends small and alternative schools and what do they offer that is different from the offerings of large high schools? I also summarize scholarship about the contributions of small and alternative schools with a specific focus on youth’s sense of belonging in school and their relationships with teachers and their peers. Last, I review discussions of alternative schools as “dropout prevention programs” and the findings concerning how the development of community within those small and alternative schools retains students.

Second, pertinent to the current study is scholarship that considers social/cultural reproduction and theories of resistance in education. Here I briefly summarize such scholarship within the sociology of education over the last three decades. I consider how theories that focus on cultural and class reproduction through schooling are complemented by resistance theories that more deeply investigate how people negotiate

schooling. I conclude with scholars who analyze student alienation and the “structure-agency dialectic” (Feld & Basso, 1996, p. 124). This literature grounds analysis of participants’ experience of and resistance to relational regulation inside schools.

Third, I review multiple educational ethnographies of young people, emphasizing the ways that girls negotiate constructions of identity—especially as “school failures” and their relationships in alternative and public school settings—in order to situate the current study. This section is divided into four subsections. I begin by summarizing work on student resistance in alternative educational settings. Of particular interest is Loutzenheiser’s (2002) study finding that alternative school students construct “success” and “failure” in relationship to their experience of “disconnection” and “connection.” The next three subsections each foreground a particular construction of identity: gender, race, and class. These studies demonstrate significant variation among diverse girls’ negotiation of identity and experience in alternative and public school climates.

Fourth, I summarize work that describes the influence of the psychological construction of “identity” and “adolescence.” In this section, I review critical psychological analyses in order to provide a foundation for considering how Conservation High participants demonstrate a skilled use of psychological descriptions for themselves as girls, and as adolescents having a “psychology.”

Small and Alternative Schools and “At-Risk” Youth

While CHS is presented as a “school choice,” this section on small and alternative schools reviews educational scholarship on the relationships among school size, structure, and community in relation to students labeled “at-risk” for dropping out of high school. I briefly review the small school movement before discussing alternative schools because,

like alternative schools, small schools vary significantly, yet often focus on developing community within the school.

Small Schools

Small schools are products of a reform movement with a broad sociocultural vision of democratic education, as described by Strike (2010):

The idea that schools should be communities contains a vision of school reform whose core assumptions can be distinguished from the core assumptions of other paradigms of school reform. Effective school reform is not primarily about standards or accountability or performance incentives. It is about belonging and about initiating students into communities that create and sustain excellence in practices. And it is about creating democratic communities that help create good citizens and good neighbors. It is about being more concerned with the kinds of learning that enrich lives and create democratic social relationships than with the development of human capital, although we must be concerned with that as well.

(p. 4)

Strike describes a well-accepted philosophy of education that recognizes that social education is not neutral or inactive in traditionally structured schools, still affected by the inadequate reform efforts of No Child Left Behind. He argues that students gain relational lessons for democratic as well as economic participation when they learn in democratic classroom communities and schools. Students' experience of belonging, he suggests in his introduction, is also a relational form of education, especially when educational researchers find so many students feeling alienated within schools. Small schools, where students and teachers have more opportunities to interact, are better able

to develop community.

Small school environments can encourage social relationships among students and teachers, and thus increased student retention, as Lee and Burkham (2003) found.

They note that

School size, per se, is unlikely to directly influence the probability that students will drop out of high school. Rather, there are likely to be other organizational features that accrue to students and staff in smaller high schools. One of those organizational features is how school members—particularly teachers and students—relate to one another. . . . These findings suggest the importance of school size in relation to dropping out, above and beyond its relationship with the quality of relationships among school members. We also suggest that such findings indicate that there may be other social benefits that accompany smaller size—including organizational trust, members’ commitment to a common purpose, and more frequent contact with people with whom members share their difficulties, uncertainties and ambitions. (p. 385)

For Lee and Burkham, it is not the size but the organization of small schools that makes a difference. The organizational features more common in small schools encourage teachers and students to form relationships. How students and teachers relate to one another—including “more frequent contact with people with whom members share difficulties, uncertainties and ambitions,” keeps some students engaged in school (p. 385). Lee (2004) argues that “research attempting to establish a direct link between school size and student outcomes may be misguided. Rather, school size influences student outcomes only indirectly, through the academic and social organization of

schools. Considerable evidence links these organizational factors to student outcomes (especially learning and its equitable distribution)” (p. 1). Other researchers, including Strike (2010), support this assessment and add that developing community in schools and classrooms is more than organization because it includes the experience of being in active democratic educational environments as a basis for relationships.

Several studies of school size have found that small schools tend to have a positive impact on student achievement, and provide factors that influence overall student (versus “at-risk” youth) achievement (Cotton, 2001; Ready, Lee & Welner, 2004; Lee & Smith, 1995, 1997). Lee and Burkham (2003) used the High School Effectiveness Supplement to the National Educational Longitudinal Study (NELS) in sampling 3,840 students from 190 suburban and urban school districts. They found that students in large (more than 2,500 students) and medium (1,500–2,500 students) middle and high schools were at higher risk of dropping out than students in small (600 or less students) schools. Students were more likely to stay in schools with populations of less than 1,500 students, and even more so in schools of 600 or fewer students. In other words, small schools across the nation retained students longer in comparison to schools with more than 1,500 students. In a review of 57 empirical studies on the effects of school size on multiple organizational and student outcomes in North America, Leithwood and Jantzi (2009) found that “the weight of evidence provided by this research clearly favors smaller schools. Students who traditionally struggle at school and students from disadvantaged social and economic backgrounds are the major benefactors of smaller schools” (p. 464). Clearly, small schools favorably serve youth who seem to fall through the cracks in large schools.

Several researchers found that large schools have particularly negative effects on low-income and racial and ethnic minority students. Small schools seem to better serve students labeled “disadvantaged,” increasing their achievement levels (Bickel, Howley, Williams, & Glascock, 2001; Ravitz, 2010) and reducing achievement gaps between the advantaged and disadvantaged students (McMillen, 2004). In addition, Rumberger and Paladry’s (2005) study may explain how some large high schools benefit from dropout rates. In their study of 14,199 students from 912 high schools, they noticed that students attending large high schools dropped out at a higher rate, which removed the lowering effect of poor achieving students’ scores on a school’s overall achievement averages. They found that dropout rates tended to be lowest in mid-sized schools (600–1,200 students) rather than in very large or small high schools. Fowler and Walberg (1991) and Fowler (1992) conclude that schools with roughly 1,500 students or fewer show superior outputs for minority and poor youth. Similarly, Lee and Smith (1995) suggest that school size matters most to the equal distribution of achievement gains across socioeconomic groups. Findings about the exact school size that encourages the most achievement is still under discussion, possibly because school size alone may not be able to account for school culture, which has been shown to impact dropout rates (Ravitz, 2010, Leithwood & Jantzi, 2009, Loutzenheiser, 2002, Martin & Downson, 2009).

Further, certain aspects of large schools that are seen as preferable, such as the ability to offer an increased variety of classes, or having lower per-pupil costs, may not be as beneficial as they seem. Lee and Smith (1995), using the 1995 NELS data, looked at course-taking patterns and student achievement in small and large schools. They found that within-school course-taking patterns were negatively related to all their measures of

student outcomes. Smaller schools, offering more concentrated academic courses, versus electives, had higher academic standards and achievement for all students. Next, while it seems logical that small schools may cost more per pupil than large schools, Stiefel, Berne, Iatarola, and Fruchter (2000) found that costs of small high schools (fewer than 600 students) are about the same as large high schools when considered on a per-graduate basis. In this way, student retention favors large high schools. Yet, at the elementary school level, Kuziemko (2006) estimates that “a 50 percent decrease in enrollment size leads to a 20 percent increase in per-pupil operating costs” (p. 73). In her analysis she is not able to determine the benefit of retention to overall high school budgeting because she concentrates her economic analysis on elementary schooling.

Probably the most important argument for small schooling is the sense of inclusion and belonging that young people get from relationships developed in school. Clearly, the alienation and marginalization that students experience in school plays a major role in high school dropout rates. Leithwood and Jantzi (2009) write:

The theoretical case for small schools rests on the grounds that it is easier to develop relationships with other students in small schools and that there is a better chance of staff knowing students well. Small schools are thought to encourage teachers to take more responsibility for student learning and offer students a better chance to be known by someone; they increase the connection between student and community. Small schools, it is claimed, engender better teaching strategies and likely also diminish the need for costly monitoring and supervision. (p. 465)

As stated in the above introduction, school size itself is not necessarily the antecedent of developing community in school. Strike (2010) advocates for small schools because the

size “can help create schools that are communities, but good educational communities do not automatically happen when schools have fewer students” (p. 3). Development of classroom and school communities relies on instructional strategies that encourage student dialogue, relationships, and conflict resolution. According to Ravitz (2010), small schools have particularly responded to calls for school “reform that emphasizes how students can benefit when there is a climate of trust and that better relationships support meaningful student learning (e.g., National Association of Secondary School Principals, 2004; National High School Alliance, 2005)” (p. 292). Like “the reform model networks, these new small schools and small learning communities are trying to change not just school structures but school culture and, ultimately, the approach to instruction and student learning outcomes (Ravitz, 2010, p. 292). School culture and a sense of belonging are related to academic achievement. Martin and Downson (2009) provide evidence that suggests that relational processes in the academic context help motivate student to pursue academics. Martin and Downson demonstrate that “the greater the connectedness on personal and emotional levels (also referred to as *relatedness* and *relational processes*) in the academic context, the greater the scope for academic motivation, engagement, and achievement,” (p. 327) particularly among “at-risk” students.

While small schools may be effective at developing a more personal climate for teaching and learning, they may lag behind in reforming instruction (Ravitz, 2010; Quint, 2006; Bomitti & Dugan, 2005; American Institute for Research and SRI International, 2005). Kahne, Sporte, de la Torre, and Easton (2006) found benefits, as seen in measures of school culture, such as “program coherence” and “reflective dialogue,” but few corresponding changes in instruction. It appears that

some “small schools are fostering more personal and supportive contexts for both teachers and students . . . but they do not appear to be spurring increased instructional reform activity. . . . Instructional reform efforts, instructional practice, and academic test scores all appear the same at small schools as at other CPS schools serving comparable students. This represents a sizable shortcoming of the reform effort” (pp. 2–3).

However, this shortcoming may be attributed to academic freedom exercised in small schools; many small school advocates have been reluctant to endorse a particular instructional approach, preferring to give schools and teachers autonomy to make the best decisions for themselves (Feldman, et al., 2005) and to adapt innovations to their local setting or classrooms (Rowan & Miller, 2007; p. 254). It must be noted that some small schools are also alternatives to public school and function as dropout prevention programs.

Alternative Schools and “At-Risk” Youth

In this section, I review recent scholarship concerning nationwide research on alternative schools, the social construction of the “at-risk” students that inhabit those schools, and research on community in alternative school settings. In a national survey, Lehr, Tan, and Ysseldyke (2009) found that 20 state Departments of Education reported that alternative schools in their state serve a smaller number of students with a low teacher-student ratio. Typical enrollment in alternative schools “was between 26 and 75 students (n=30 states reporting)” (p. 23). Clearly, alternative schools tend to be small schools. Alternative school populations are not only increasing (Kleiner et al., 2002; Lehr & Lange, 2003; Lehr, et al., 2009), but they are also part of a more comprehensive small school

movement. While alternative schools are often seen as being for “at-risk” students and small schools for multiple purposes, both tend to include the development of smaller learning communities than is the case in traditional large high schools.

Research on alternative schools tends to be concerned more with the student population served than with size. According to Kim (2006), while formats for alternative schooling differ by state and school district, “one of the commonalities they share is that students who attend an alternative school did not do well in traditional schools” (p. 2). Lehr et al.’s (2009) synthesis of national research confirms that alternative schools tend to serve students who are labeled “at-risk” of school failure within the traditional structure of public school. They note:

Meeting the needs of students disenfranchised from the traditional education system is becoming more and more important as we are faced with a growing population of students for whom status quo education is not successful.

Alternative education is one of the possible solutions that many states and local school districts have embraced to address the issue of students who are not meeting desired educational outcomes and standards in traditional school settings. (p. 19)

Their national survey of school districts found that the number of students enrolled in alternative settings for youth described as “at-risk” of school failure or dropping out has increased significantly in recent years. In addition, “historical accounts and the legislative review corroborate the finding that the number of students attending alternative school is rising and trends suggest the numbers will continue to grow” (p. 23). This growth is legislatively grounded. For example, Katsiyannis and Williams (1998) found that 22

states had alternative schooling legislation by 1998. In 2009, 11 years later, Lehr et al., found that 48 states now “had some type of alternative school legislation,” despite “considerable variability in the type of information delineated in statute, law or policy” (p. 23). This legislative increase is important because the Pacific Northwest states, where the current study was conducted, has a longer history (since the 1970s) of using progressive alternative school legislation.²

Few argue, however, that alternatives are not needed, given the national concern about young people who drop out of high school and the significance of the dropout problem. Swanson (2004), Rumberger (2008), and the Educational Testing Service (2005) estimate that one-third of high school students in the United States fail to receive a regular high school diploma on time. Only slightly more than half of Latino and African-American students graduate from high school on time (Kelly, 2005). Moreover, disparities between high school graduates and dropouts are increasing. Dropping out of high school can have significant personal economic impacts, especially for young women. For example, the National Center for Educational Statistics (2002) reported that for males who dropped out of high school, the median income was \$25,095, versus \$34,303 for male graduates without college; for female dropouts the median income was \$17,919, and \$24,970 for females who graduate. Research on girls who drop out of high school suggests that they face “more serious negative personal consequences . . . as a result of dropping out of high school” (Kaplan, et al., 1996, p. 760). Further, the NCES (2002) reports that adults older than 25 who dropped out are twice as likely to be unemployed as those who completed high school (6.4% versus 3.5%). National economic

² That legislation is not referenced here to maintain the confidentiality of the state in which this research was conducted.

measures have declined in recent decades, but when there has been some economic growth, as Aronowitz (2006) notes, most citizens do not experience that growth (he uses federal spending on the Iraq War as an example). Ream and Rumberger (2008) used data from a national longitudinal database to show that the behavioral and social aspects of schooling are dynamically related to school completion and/or dropout among Mexican-American and non-Latino white adolescents. They found that

accumulated resource disadvantage not only exacerbates low average grade and educational aspirations, but may deter Mexican origin youths from engaging in school-related activities that facilitate access to educationally beneficial forms of social capital and diminish vulnerability to street-oriented friendship networks.” (p. 125)

The complexities of a young person’s choice to drop out of school, as well as the choice to complete school in alternative or GED programs, are not well understood. Entwisle, Alexander, and Olson (2004) distinguish between permanent high school dropouts and those that temporarily leave and return to gain their GED or high school diploma. In their longitudinal study in Baltimore, Maryland, which has more than a 40 percent dropout rate, they found that those Baltimore students who returned to earn their high school diploma or GED resembled their counterparts that finished school in terms of demographics and school performance associated with school engagement. Prior to dropping out, these students also “had more positive motivational qualities and were more often employed than the permanent dropouts” (p. 1181).

The designation of “at-risk” is broadly defined both legislatively and in the alternative school research literature. For example, Lehr, Tan, and Ysseldyke (2009)

found that most states' legislation or policies varied in the way they defined the student populations appropriate for alternative school placement. For example, some included students who had been labeled as behavioral problems but had not necessarily been suspended or expelled. The legislative review found that 50 percent of states saw alternative schools as places for dropout prevention, while most also saw alternative schools as appropriate for youth with behavioral problems or involvement with the juvenile justice system. Skiba and Knesting (2002) found that the number of students who are directed toward alternative schools after having been expelled, suspended, or dropped out has been rising. Not surprisingly, administrators of alternative schools (Becker, 2010) and researchers like Lehr et al. (2009) are concerned about "the extent to which alternative programs are increasingly being used as dumping grounds for youth with behavioral problems" (p. 26). The sweeping categorization of students who have been expelled or suspended, or those students considered disruptive, as "dropouts," suggests an association with behavioral problems when there may in fact be no connection. In addition, students with special needs are also a population that is directed towards alternative education in some states (Gorney & Ysseldyke, 1993).

Further, the designation of "at-risk" has functioned at times as a catchall category of broadly defined "risk-factors," most often related to the risk of dropping out. For example, Fulkerson, Harrison, and Beebe (1997) implemented the Minnesota Study Survey statewide. The results indicate that students enrolled in alternative schools had a higher number of "risk factors" in their lives when compared to a randomly selected sample. These "risk factors" included a higher incidence of suicide attempts, sexual activity, pregnancy, and substance abuse, and they were more likely to have witnessed or

experienced physical or sexual abuse. As Alexander, et al. (2001) note, the “at-risk” designation may bring attention to the idea that dropping out often represents a long-term process of disengagement from school. While such research encourages educators to investigate the conditions of students’ lives, the label of “at-risk” often serves to stigmatize students, rather than helping educators focus on how a school can serve them.

In other research, some students receive the label of “at risk,” and are transferred to alternative educational programs solely on the basis of their involvement with the juvenile justice system. Young women and girls are the fastest growing segment of the juvenile justice system (Chesney-Lind & Jones, 2010; American Bar Association & National Bar Association, 2001). As Hirschfield (2010) shows, girls who get involved with the juvenile justice system increasingly drop out of high school. Hirschfield studied a sample of 4,844 inner-city students in Chicago. His research suggests that contact with the juvenile justice system increased school dropout rates. He notes that “students who were first arrested during the 9th and 10th grade were six to eight times more likely than were non-arrested students ever to drop out of high school and are about 3.5 times more likely to drop out in Grades 9 and 10” (p. 368). As the increase in female juvenile delinquency shows, the challenges facing at-risk young women need to be addressed. Chesney-Lind and Shelden (2004) highlight the lack of appropriate intervention, supervision, and ongoing support for “delinquent” young women. They also note that more research is needed on effects of alternative education for such girls.

Alternative schools in some states are also being targeted as an “appropriate” placement for special education students. Given that students of color (and especially Native American students) are more likely than European-American children to be

identified as learning disabled (Donovan & Cross, 2002), the relationships between race and ethnicity, and special and alternative education deserve more scholarly attention. Wasburn-Moses (2011) notes that “despite the continued growth of inclusive practices, an increasing number of students with disabilities are being served in alternative school settings. However, the number of students served in these settings, and the services they are receiving, remains virtually unexplored” (p. 247). She implemented a (Midwestern) statewide survey in an effort to assess the services that youth with Individualized Educational Plans were receiving. She found that, “despite access to valuable supports and services, some students with disabilities placed in alternative settings may be experiencing significant service gaps” (p. 247), particularly the lack of licensed teachers in special education. Wasburn-Moses is specifically concerned that such placements for special education youth are the same as placements for students who have committed criminal offenses. On a state level, her research confirms a trend. Gorney and Ysseldyke (1993) found special education students attending alternative schools in a much higher proportion than traditional high schools. This is also the case at Conservation High, where at least one-third of students have an active Individualized Education Plan, while their referring school districts describe serving between 11 percent and 22 percent of young people with IEPs. Yet not all states use alternative schools in this way. One of the few national surveys of alternative schools reported that the percentage of special education students did not significantly differ from the overall percentage of students with IEPs in public schools during the 2000–2001 school year (Kleiner, Porch & Farris, 2002, p. 10), the year when this study was conducted. Instead of contradicting Wasburn-Moses (2010) and Gorney and Ysseldyke’s (1993) findings, this finding may suggest that

states and school districts vary in their procedures for channeling special education students to alternative schools—averaging out to little difference nationally. The problematic joining of all of the above broad groups of students seems unaddressed in the legislation that Lehr et al. (2009) reviewed as a whole.

The relationship between the constructions of “dropout” and “at-risk” is also problematic. For example, Kraemer, et al. (1997) state that “terms such as *risk*, *risk factors* and especially the term *cause* are inconsistently and imprecisely used, fostering scientific miscommunication and misleading research policy” (p. 337). On the one hand, numerous factors have been identified as contributors to early school departure, including demographic characteristics (Alexander, et al., 2001), being retained in a grade (Alexander, et al., 1997; Jimerson, et al., 2002), truancy and residential mobility (Ream & Stanton-Salazar, 2007), being identified as a behavior problem (Kim, 2010; Skiba & Knesting, 2002), juvenile delinquency (Chesney-Lind & Shelden, 2004), and school characteristics (Rumberger, 2004). Yet, on the other hand, Bowditch (1993) asks:

But what is proven? Those factors are the very indicators that disciplinarians used to define troublemakers and that led to suspensions, disciplinary transfers, and involuntary drops. . . . Are “risk factors” correlated with “dropping out” because they are used routinely by school workers to expel students? If that is the case, then disciplinarians’ daily activities play an important role in regulating social mobility.” (p. 507)

Bowditch (1993) notices that the definitions of dropping out and risk factors associated therewith have a curious circular quality, and they evade the question of the educators’ roles in the high school dropout rate.

Also problematic is that academic scholarship generally approaches dropout prevention as a monolithic target, without distinctions concerning why students leave school (Aloise-Young & Chavez, 2002). This “confusion,” or catchall approach, may contribute to the stigma of what Becker (2010) calls “the tension between two competing discourses in alternative education programs. One discourse focuses on students *with problems* (e.g., students with learning disabilities) and the other focuses on students who *are problems* (e.g., students considered “behavioral problems”). In her study, she explored “the effects of this tension on schooling processes and on students’ social and educational success.” She found that

in the face of pressure to shed its reputation as a dumping ground for disciplinary cases, administrators and teachers at Cromwell Alternative North (CAN) reframed the school as a place for students with special needs. Despite the change in rhetoric, two competing discourses continued to operate in the daily reality of the school.” (p. 61)

Becker (2010) confirms Fine’s point that (1995) “the cultural construction of a group defined through a discourse of ‘risk’ represents a shaved and quite partial image” (p. 76), and this, in turn, locates students within identities that they and administrators must negotiate in addition to other important priorities in school.

The labeling of large groups of students in these ways homogenizes diverse and complex circumstances, contexts, and needs of students within the groups. It removes the focus from the conditions that these students face and ways to serve their needs.

Loutzenheiser (2002) studies young women labeled “at-risk” in alternative high school settings. She finds that labeling “creates a category that is made to seem unitary. That is,

students labeled at risk are viewed as having a set of personal characteristics (often identity based) that cause school difficulties and similar, if not the same, needs and concerns” (p. 442). She argues that the implications of seeing “at-risk” monolithically is that educators and policymakers are

likely to continue to point blame at families, encouraging a lack of reflection on the role of school in students’ disconnection. This is not to argue that students, schools, and teachers are not in jeopardy of failure. However, the notion of failure is as complicated as success, and no fixed set of factors offers the tools to “fix” the problems. (p. 442)

In essence, Loutzenheiser (2002) argues for intensive research and efforts that take into account the complicated and diverse experiences and conditions in school settings as well as within the lives of youth in school. Clearly, “at-risk” is used in a variety of ways and this variation can impact how an alternative school’s purpose is understood. Researchers have highlighted the social construction of the “at-risk” label (Swadener & Lubeck, 1994). Swadener and Lubeck (1994), in *Families At-Promise*, question this construction, which often translates a youth’s context (e.g., poverty) or labels (e.g., special education student) into an issue of youth identity. The authors offer an alternative positive construction: “at-promise.”

The reason the social construction of the “at-risk” label is relevant to this dissertation is that constructions of “at-risk” or “bad” students (Becker, 2010) are the same labels that were applied to students at Conservation High: “dropout,” “at-risk,” “special education,” “behavioral problems,” “psychologically diagnosed,” “substance abusers,” “disruptive,” and “juvenile delinquents.” These historically and socially

“durable” labels contribute to the social caste system within high schools in the United States (Ortner, 2002). Many CHS participants saw themselves as behavior problems as well. Becker (2010) argues that the majority of students in alternative schools are seen as struggling or potentially struggling with academic, social, legal, economic, and mental health problems, all broad categories of problems that contribute to students being labeled “at-risk.” All of Conservation High’s students were considered “at-risk” by their referring school personnel. Sixty-four percent had dropped out of school without notifying school personnel, and three out of the four students with Individualized Educational Plans were recommended for CHS (i.e., “pushed out” of their previous school) by their school counselor.

The small size of alternative schools seems to offer opportunities for relationships that, if cultivated, may encourage young people to finish high school. Lee, et al. (2000) found that “sociological research on school size suggests that small schools should have at least two advantages over large schools: relationships among school members are more personal and the schools offer a narrow curriculum (typically confined to academic courses). Large schools are said to be impersonal and bureaucratic” (pp. 147–48). Therefore, it is not surprising that Croninger and Lee (2001) found that “socially ‘at-risk’ students specifically benefit from regular communication with their teachers” and they are more likely to stay in school when that occurs.

Finally, some alternative schools have been established as a response to zero-tolerance policies regarding school violence. Burstyn (2001) observes that when taking into account the lack of agreement and shared cultural assumptions about individual, structural, social, or institutional antecedents of school violence, “the nitty-gritty of

school regulations, the day-to-day procedures to prevent fighting and harassment, become more controversial than the initial decision to end violence” (p. 1). Castella (2001)

describes a social context of school life in which school violence is defined to include

jostling in corridors; name-calling that leads to fighting in the playground;

bullying and extorting food or money from the victims; suicide, which may

devastate not only the individual and his or her family but the whole school;

forms of sexual harassment that some teachers and administrators have not

noticed or have accepted as “natural” behavior among children and teens, and the

systemic violence embodied in coercive school policies.” (Burstyn, et al., 2001)

Missing here is the relational aggression not only by boys in high school, but also by girls

(Adamshick, 2010; Simmons, 2002; Pronk & Simmer-Gembeck, 2010; Wiseman, 2002).

Casella (2001) argues that such violence in school has become a natural part of school.

Casella argues that “many students today, unlike students of the recent past, accept

violence and policing as an everyday component of schooling” (p. 42), and he suggests

that the eradication of violence must take many forms, including attention to the

“misunderstandings and prejudices of individuals . . . which fuel most forms of violence”

(p. 43). His work highlights the challenging position of alternative schools, when they are

seen as a catchall for students accused of school violence, given contexts of systemic,

institutional, familial, and individual areas of intervention.

Based on the literature, alternative schools tend to be small schools with the

potential of creating classroom and school communities. Alternative schools are

structured in differing ways and are used to serve a diverse student body unified under

the ambiguous term “at-risk.” The definition of “at-risk” depends upon the state and local

school district.

Theorizing Cultural Reproduction and Resistance in Education

Resistance theorists in educational scholarship attempt to explain student behaviors that are seen as oppositional to the goals, objectives, and expectations of public education.

Over the last several decades, Marxist, neo-Marxist, post-structural, and postmodern theorists have been interested in “why the opposition of some groups against others is politically and morally necessary in social institutions where mainstream ideologies dominate to discipline participants and social norms. Resistance, in these theoretical formations, is differentiated from mere opposition to authority” (Abowitz, 2000, p. 878).

Instead, these theories examine power struggles where a broad range of student behaviors, meaning-making systems, and silences are seen as efforts to subvert, oppose, or reject oppressive structural and relational practices.

Resistance theorists developed a theoretical framework in response to the determinism they saw expressed in social reproduction or correspondence theory. Before reviewing resistance theories, I next briefly summarize social and cultural reproduction theories in education. While social and cultural reproductionist scholarship “differed in regard to theorization, scope of analysis and methodology; each attempted to trace links between economic structures, schooling experience, and modes of consciousness and cultural activity” (Collins, 2009, p. 34). Social and cultural reproduction theories attempt to describe how social inequality is reproduced through, in part, the schooling of successive generations, under the rubric of “meritocracy.”

In education, “correspondence theory explains how schools assimilate students into the capitalist economic order” (Kim, 2010, p. 263). Here schools are seen as an

institutional instrument, functioning in relation to other institutional and structural interests. People who occupy those structures are seen as structurally determined. Bowles and Gintis (1976) in *Schooling in Capitalist America* analyzed how schools reproduce existing class stratification. They provide a theoretical foundation to which other theorists responded. Bowles and Gintis saw education functioning in a direct relationship with the economy to reproduce class structure and class consciousness. They argued that, corresponding to students' class status, students were provided with differential access to daily educational experiences in relation to school authority. For Bowles and Gintis, the organization of schooling maintained class-stratified inequality through a tracked system that in turn supported labor force stratification. How schools structure inequality through tracking continues to be documented (Ansalone, 2010, Oakes, 2005); however, it is not the whole inequality story. Other reproductionist theorists, Bourdieu and Passeron (1977, 1990), posit a theory in *Reproduction in Education, Culture and Society* in which the social reproduction of inequality and privilege goes beyond economics. Bourdieu (1986) describes and distinguishes between three kinds of cultural capital. "Embodied cultural capital" consists of unconscious and conscious properties learned over time. "Objectified cultural capital" consists of owned objects and cultural goods. "Institutionalized cultural capital" consists of institutional recognition and credentials (p. 47). Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) argue that forms of "cultural capital" (e.g., language use, forms of communication, manner of dress, white skin, etc.—primarily embodied cultural capital) are arbitrarily assigned an exchange value or currency by and in the interests of the dominant class. Dominant-class cultural capital has a high assessed value in schools in the United States. Bourdieu and Passeron argue that the cultural capital that

subordinate groups obtain prior to and outside of schooling (whether from family, media, etc.) is disconnected from and undervalued within formal schooling. Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) note:

Insofar as it is a prolonged process of inculcation producing internalization of the principles of a cultural arbitrary in the form of a durable, transposable habitus, capable of generating practices conforming with those principles outside of and beyond any express regulation or any explicit reminding of the rule, pedagogical work enables the group or class which delegates its authority to pedagogical action to produce and reproduce its intellectual and moral integration without resorting to external or, in particular, physical coercion. (p. 36)

Here Bourdieu and Passeron explain an aspect of their theory of symbolic violence whereby cultural capital subtly and even unconsciously ensures the security of the dominant class. The school, a middle-class establishment, rewards those students privileged to possess particular skills and qualities, language, communication styles, social interactions, and knowledge, leaving lower-class students at a disadvantage. In terms of teachers, they argue that the non-European-American middle-class “child’s cultural capital, which has high exchange value at home, since it is a product of primary pedagogical work, has little exchange value in a classroom led by a teacher unfamiliar or unappreciative of the child’s cultural capital” (pp. 418–19). Well-meaning, caring teachers may not recognize their own “habitus,” or cultural capital schemata, without investigation, they theorize. It is taken for granted, since, given teachers’ educational success, their own cultural capital was valued in the educational system (Bourdieu, 2000).

Bourdieu's (1976, 1987, 2010) theory of "cultural capital" continues to have prominence today (Monkman, et al., 2005; Noble & Davies, 2009; Nora, 2004; Sullivan, 2001). For example, Farkas (2003) and Farkas et al. (1990) studied informal academic standards that are covertly or overtly rewarded in schools. Both studies found that teachers' rewarding of seventh and eighth graders' noncognitive abilities (e.g., teachers' evaluation of student appearance, background characteristics, and work habits) affected students' cognitive development. Winkle-Wagner (2010) found that "students' grades were indirectly affected by teachers' implicit judgments of a students' background and ability. Teachers' judgments were not necessarily based on skill or merit but on perceptions of background" (p. 41). Social and cultural reproduction theories attempt to explain such subtle and complex mechanisms that perpetuate social inequality through educational achievement.

Social and cultural reproduction theories in education were critiqued by neo-Marxists and others influenced by the work of Paolo Freire (1973) for not accounting for complex social inequities across social locations, such as race and gender. Further, these theories, especially correspondence theory, were read as overly reductionistic, mechanistic, and deterministic because the role of human agency, in terms of active student and teacher resistance, was ignored. These critiques do not mean that such theories should be rejected outright. Certainly, economic aspects related to school performance appear to have remained relatively consistent since the Coleman Report in 1966 (Coleman, 1966; U.S. Dept. of Education, 2001), and it seems that the value of a high school diploma during the current economic crisis cannot be underestimated (Weis & Fine, 2004). Collins (2009) argues that

the issue of social reproduction in education and society remains highly relevant but that its study requires new conceptual tools as well as a reworking of old findings and insights. The first is that to understand social reproduction we have to consider multiple levels of social and institutional structure as well as microanalytic communicative processes and cultural practices. The second is that social class matters profoundly but that analysts struggle to understand its protean nature, including its intricate interplay with other principles of inequality, such as race and gender. (p. 35)

One way to accommodate an aspect of Collins's recommendations is to study how students experience particular school practices and structures as well as their resistance to those perceived limitations, as this current study does.

Theorists such as Michael Apple (1982) and Lois Weis (1988) object to the structural determinism of human agency in the above reproductionist approaches. They argue that people actively make meaning, resist, and respond to the circumstances of their lives. McLaren (1989) suggests that hegemony and resistance, as constructs, are inseparable; in other words, where there is hegemony, there is resistance. On this basis, poststructuralists focus upon the construction of identity through many means, including knowledge, representation, body politics, and language. Knowledge is reflexively understood because there is no foundational truth, but rather conceptualizations and lived experiences that are in flux and able to be seen from many perspectives. While describing the constitutive character of language, power, and what is considered legitimate knowledge, Davies (2000) notes that "within poststructuralist theory, language is understood as the most powerful constitutive force shaping what we understand as

possible and what we desire within those possibilities” (p. 181). Human action and identification are seen as produced through people’s active interpretation through language. Kim (2010) stated:

The discussion of the concept of resistance or resistance theory is important in that it can serve as a means to address the complexity of the individual’s experience of educational reality and the production of meaning. It can be used to explain the complicated reasons why and how marginalized students and groups in schools are being silenced and invisible within the educational system.” (p. 263)

The centrality of resistance theory does not mean that social and cultural reproduction theories are not useful. Instead, authors like Langout (2010), and Feld and Basso (1996) analyzed the “structure-agency dialectic in settings that have traditionally silenced and disempowered people” (p. 124). Thus, structural analyses are used alongside post-structural and ethnographic accounts. This combined approach produces a more versatile theory that recognizes agency, resistance, and meaning-making systems of those on the margin. In addition, a combined approach can contribute an alternative noncentered perspective in educational settings (Hill-Collins, 2008; Williams, 1991).

A number of descriptive studies about the conditions in schools apply the Marxist concept of “alienation” when taking up resistance. As Smith (1990) writes, “The simplest formulation of alienation posits a relation between the work individuals do and an external order oppressing them in which their work contributes to the strength of the order that oppresses them” (p. 19). Some ethnographic studies confirm Smith’s description of alienation through studying youth resistance. Willis’s (1977) *Learning to*

Labour is an early work that did just that, showing how lower-class “lads” through their resistance to and rejection of the dominant cultural of schooling unwittingly colluded in the reproduction of their class status. McRobbie (1978, 2000) critiqued Willis’s work as lacking an analysis of patriarchy and racism in the lives and perspectives of the lads.

Scholarship that theorized the relative autonomy of lived culture inside and outside of school offered hope of liberation for young people in school, rather than seeing them as culturally, socially, and structurally determined. As Apple (1982) notes:

Rather than being places where culture and ideologies are imposed on students, schools are the *sites* where these things are produced. And like the workplace, they are produced in ways that are filled with contradiction and by a process that is itself based on contestation and struggle. . . . For without getting inside the school, without seeing how and *why* students rejected the overt and hidden curriculum, and without linking this back to non-mechanistic conceptions of reproduction and contradiction, we would be unable to comprehend the complexity of the work that schools perform as sites of ideological production [emphases in original]. (pp. 26–27)

Apple’s goal is to understand the complexity of students’ perspectives of and resistance to ideological and cultural production in school.

Foucault, Disciplinary Power, and Relational Regulation³

My analysis in this dissertation has been significantly influenced by Michel Foucault’s work, especially his theorization of technologies of the self and of discipline. In *Technologies of the Self* (1988b), Foucault describes his career as an attempt to sketch a

³ Thank you, Christy Reynolds and Dr. Sari Biklen, for your dialogue and contributions to this section.

history of how humans “develop knowledge about themselves [through discourses of] economics, biology, psychiatry, medicine, and penology. The main point is not to accept this knowledge at face value but to analyze these so-called sciences as very specific ‘truth games’ related to specific techniques that human beings use to understand themselves” (p. 18). For Foucault, academic disciplines, of which education is one, are produced as legitimate ways for human beings to understand themselves and construct identity. I find this point particularly applicable to youth labeled “at-risk” and how they negotiate its meaning. This is because I see the construction of “at-risk youth” as a regime of truth—a political, economic, and intellectual construct that positions youth. Foucault (1988b) identifies four major types of technologies that are used to organize meaning:

- (a) technologies of production, which permit us to produce, transform, or manipulate things; (b) technologies of sign systems, which permit us to use signs, meanings, symbols, or signification; (c) technologies of power, which determine the conduct of individuals and submit them to certain ends or domination, an objectivizing of the subject; (d) technologies of the self, which permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality. (p. 18)

Here he suggests that these technologies are each associated with particular forms of domination and rarely function separately because they are primarily forms of making meaning of the world. For example, we can say that dominant discourses of race produce a raced subjectivity or way of being. “Raced” identity is well known to function within

relations of power. Foucault (1981) argues that discursive formations are not based on truth-specific claims, like the “truth” of racial identity, but upon meaningful use within discourses that he connects to forms of subjectivity, noting that the idea of discursive practices sets up the “legitimate perspective for the agent of knowledge” (p. 199). The youth interviewed in my study negotiate the discursive formations of their labels: “at-risk,” troubled youth, behaviorally-disordered, school failures, special education students, and high school dropouts. I use Foucault’s work to legitimate the study of their experience of negotiating these discourses in the context of high school and the relationships developed therein. For Foucault, the very structure of the self is a product of this disciplinary power. “Relational regulation,” as I use the term, is embedded within such production of discourses of power and identity, because relationships are a vehicle for discourse to be communicated between people.

Foucault’s (1977) contribution in *Discipline and Punish* lends a particular implication to “relational regulation.” Foucault (1977) traces the Western history of social control through punishment, demonstrating an initial paradigm of punishment as a public spectacle, to today’s paradigm of crime prevention through discipline and regulation. While today’s criminals are no longer drawn and quartered in public (pp. 3–6), and physical torture is condemned as inhumane, Foucault argues that the structures by which social order is maintained today are no less problematic. During the 19th century, the criminal justice system shifted its focus away from punishment of the body proper to *disciplining* the body through regulation of the soul or mind. Knowledge constructed about criminals vilified them as “deviant,” or “abnormal,” and such production was supported from the medical and social sciences whose primary social function was to

define the parameters of “normal,” acceptable human behavior (Foucault, 1988). In this way, he suggests that everyday people “police” themselves in order to avoid punishment or association with punishment. Another disciplinary measure, reinforced by technologies of surveillance, according to Foucault, is exemplified by the “Panopticon,” a model in which prisoners know that they can potentially be watched at all times, so that they internalize the warden’s gaze, which Foucault calls “self-policing.” Such new technologies of discipline create new forms of individuality. In this study, I am interested in the students’ “disciplinary” experiences and their resistance to them.

This kind of disciplinary system is not limited to prisons; Foucault argues that modern society is permeated with these regulatory practices and structures. Although Foucault does not analyze the role of public schooling, he does recognize that the production and dissemination of knowledge leads to the development of persons into classifiable “individuals” who experience themselves as always under surveillance, and are trained to regulate their own behavior so avoid being designated as “abnormal,” “deviant,” or “criminal.” Foucault (1977) concludes *Discipline and Punish* by saying it will “serve as a historical background to various studies of the power of normalization and the formation of knowledge in modern society” (p. 308). His statement is particularly applicable to the labeling of “at-risk” youth and their negotiation of the meanings of that label. In the current study, many youth see themselves as “at-risk,” as youth who have “slipped through the cracks.” At the same time, they resist and negotiate the meanings of “at-risk” and critically analyze the system from which such labeling stems. While not offering a direct opposition to the meaning of “at risk,” students’ efforts to “be real”

undermine the blanket application of “at-risk” constructions by highlighting the variety and complexities of their lives.

As educational theorists have noted, school is a key place in which identification with “normality,” “deviance,” “success,” and “failure” are produced and disseminated (Nygren, 2011; Martin et al., 1988; Peters & Besley, 2007; Wong, 2007). “Schools are institutions that clearly involve such regulation and governance of the experience of their students. In turn, this constitutes the self” (Besley, 2007, p. 56). Self-regulation is reinforced through school curricula, the temporal and spatial organization of the student’s life at school (Nespor, 1997), and through the surveillance and disciplinary measures of teachers and administrators, but also, significantly, through dominant discourses and interpersonal relationships. Foucault suggests that individuals are trained to regulate their own and others’ behaviors by internalizing disciplinary power, and they may also “discipline” others. Discipline “cannot be identified with any one institution or apparatus,” Deleuze (1986) writes, “precisely because it is a type of power, a technology, that traverses every kind of apparatus or institution, linking them, prolonging them, and making them converge and function in a new way” (p. 26). What I mean by “relational regulation” is disciplinary power expressed through interpersonal relationships, whether through organization of bodies, normalization of conduct, constructions of identity, and dominant discourses, or through disciplinary actions on the part of an individual.

Many of the participants in this study say that they struggled in traditional public school in response to the regulatory structures of school that left them in highly impersonal relationships. This dissertation offers insight into how these students and other “at-risk” youth might experience their own marginalization through such

expressions of disciplinary power; and it argues that such marginalization is felt through relational regulations. Ethnographic accounts of students' everyday experience in schools document the lived experience of such marginalization.

Educational Ethnographic Accounts

Here I review educational ethnographies and qualitative projects that focus upon youth's experience in school as they relate to this particular study. Of interest are findings from studies that use class, race, gender, and returning dropouts/"push-outs" (Fine, 1991) in alternative educational schools as the foci of inquiry. However, I also include studies that engage the social constructions of identity and relationships within the public school system, since all but one student in this current study are products of that school system.

While I have categorized the following ethnographic accounts into four sections, there exists considerable overlap. First, I review ethnographic studies that listen to young people's experiences within alternative school settings, particularly those that focus on girls' experience. This is not to exclude the complexities of "male" experience, but instead to provide a foundation of scholarship that studies diverse girls' experience in alternative schooling.

Second, I highlight studies that foreground girls' experience and the construction and negotiation of gender in their high school studies. While gender is foregrounded, other axes of difference, such as race and class, are included. These studies demonstrate significant variation among girls' experience of the climates in public and alternative schools.

The third and fourth sections, which respectively foreground racial/ethnic and classed identity in qualitative educational studies, may also include gender as a category

of analysis.

Alternative School Setting and “Zero-Tolerance” Policies

How do youth experience alternative schooling? What might students returning as “dropouts” say about the differing authority structures of their public and alternative school experience? This question is especially important because of the problems associated with not gaining a high school diploma in the current economic climate (Tyler & Lofstrom, 2009). As March and Gaffney (2010) ask, “What might be the effects of pivotal educational decision-making on the educational trajectories of disadvantaged youth”? In this section, six educational ethnographies are reviewed. Most were selected because of their analyses of student resistance, authority, “zero-tolerance” policies, student alienation, and connection. However, the last study, by Lyons and Drew (2000) concerns an increasingly fearful educational climate for all students under the sweeping “zero-tolerance” policy rubric. Many of these research projects also focus on intersections among constructions of race, class, and gender in middle and high schools; their findings vary in important ways.

In Last Chance High: How Girls and Boys Drop Out of Alternative Schools, Deirdre Kelly (1993) demonstrates how continuation high schools, the most common form of alternative high school, “become as much safety valves for the system as safety nets for the students, and the resulting contradictions and stigma hamper success” (p. xix). Kelly spent a year in two continuation high schools, and she includes a review of the history of alternative schools in the United States. She argues that students pay a high price for the stigma associated with alternative schools. She demonstrates ways the social culture between students perpetuates and condones traditional class and gendered

relations. Given that she found that ethnic relations were encouraged, she focuses upon how girls and boys' circumstances that led to attending the school differed, along with their experience in the school and their form of exit from the school. These experiences varied in gendered ways and had different consequences. For girls, their self-worth continued to be reinforced through their relationships with and dependence on others. Instead of providing a second chance, Kelly shows how these school districts "attempt to mask their own dropout and push-out rates by sending marginalized students to continuation schools" (p. xix).

Kim's recent (2010) study of student resistance in an Arizona alternative high school named "Borderlands" confirms Kelly's work; however, it focuses on the use of authority by teachers, staff, and students. Borderlands serves students expelled from traditional public high schools under "zero tolerance" policies. Here "zero tolerance policies" are "used to require suspension or expulsion only for a specified list of serious offences, but they have been extended to include resistant acts or even minor behavioural issues, implemented as an overarching approach towards discipline" (p. 262). Kim's (2010) study confirms Kelly's (1993) claim that alternative schools provide a "safety valve" for large high schools struggling to serve youth that either drop out or are "pushed out" (p. xix). Kim's study relates to the present one because Kim explores the meaning of student resistance as a form of critical student communication, as a way to "listen to and communicate with resistant students to help them succeed in school" (p. 261). She asks, "What might be possible for the teachers and students to understand conflicts and tensions in order to establish a more meaningful teacher-student relationship?" (p. 262). Here she explores particular contextualized examples of how so-called "resistant"

students empower themselves and seek communication in contexts where teacher authority and school policies ignore students' expressions of reasonable needs. She suggests that labeling a student's actions as "resistant" serves to derail further investigation into the experience of marginalized youth and their particular form of communication. Teachers, in her examples, are seen as punitive and dismissive of student efforts to communicate through "resistance."

Contributing to Kim's (2010) study is Kim's use of Langout's (2005) theorization of the resistance of student of color in Woodson Elementary School. Regina Langout (2005) asks, "Who has the authority to define an act as resistance, and what does it take to listen to those with very little power (i.e., working-class children, both white and of color)?" (p. 126). She claims that "resistance" is often defined by a middle-class understanding. Langout (2005) states

that race, class and gender have come together in particular ways that facilitate children being seen through imposed stereotypes and through a discourse of discipline. Individual children are rendered invisible and can voice this invisibility, as well as an alternative narrative that is based on their experience that stands in direct resistance to the dominant narrative about them. Their resistance discourses occur through redefining, reclaiming, re-imaging and compliance. At times, the resistance perpetuates the dominant structure. In all these cases, children move back and forth in their roles as "power holders" and "power subjects" (Hermans, 2001) as they act both within and against power structures. (pp. 151–52)

Langout (2005) suggests thinking of "resistance as process rather than a fully articulated

and cogent position because intentionality can be “partially articulated, symbolic, or fully articulated and reflective” (p. 126) and, therefore, “the researcher needs to search out less visible forms of resistance by more carefully examining idiosyncrasy, passivity and indifference” (p. 126). Kim uses these points to strengthen her argument, using multiple examples of particular teacher-student conversations where students are labeled “resistant” and silenced and/or punished, rather than engaged. Kim offers insights into where potential exists to deepen student-teacher relationships and, therefore, investigate conflicts.

Becker (2010) takes up the stigma and labeling issues that the above studies identify. Becker’s (2010) study of a Northeastern alternative high school examines the salience of two discourses—one focused on students who *have problems*, the other on students who *are problems*—in the alternative schooling process. At Cromwell Alternative North (CAN), teachers and staff promoted a view of students as youth with “special needs.” In the students’ social world, having “special needs” was not awarded status like being a troublemaker. Students at CAN therefore managed both discourses in their daily interaction with teachers and peers. Some students accepted special needs rhetoric, some rejected it. Most managed it creatively, *being a problem* in the eyes of peers and *having problems* in the eyes of teachers. Code switching between the two discourses, however, was not something all students could do. A handful of students—“shining stars”—managed both “SPED” (slang for special education students) and “bad” discourses to achieve the greatest social and academic successes at CAN (p. 60).

In *Seen and Heard: Listening to Young Women in Alternative School*, Lisa Loutzenheiser (2002), in a similar theoretical move to Kim (2010) and Langout’s (2005)

criticism of how “resistance” is constructed, critiques how the notions of “at-risk” and “success versus failure” reductionistically mystify the complicated lives of young people and ultimately silence their voices. She advocates for listening to the “insights and analyses of marginalized youth who leave large high schools for alternative programs” (p. 441). She uses in-depth interviews with nine young women attending Janus High School, a continuation (alternative) high school in Northern California. This school serves a predominantly white population, with 22 percent Latino and African-American students. Twenty-one percent of students are identified as “special education” students from both urban and suburban areas.

Similar to this current study, Loutzenheiser listened to how her study participants constructed “success” and “failure” in two schools: traditional high school and Janus High School, an alternative school. Loutzenheiser found young women’s perceptions of “success” and “failure” inextricably linked to each other as well as to their experiences of “disconnection” from teachers and high school and their experience of reconnection at Janus. Her participants identified example after example of how teachers at their traditional comprehensive high school did not hear their efforts to get help on issues ranging from academics to traumas in their lives. While her participants tended to not mention gender discrimination, they did mention their awareness of an “ideal girl.” Their “social class, skin color, sexuality and the experiences of their lives pushed them outside this norm and they knew it. In many cases, they did not want it” (p. 452). To many of these students, there was pressure to act and “conform to what a girl was ‘supposed’ to look like” (p. 452). Clearly, many of her participants had given up hope of being treated fairly. As in the current study, Loutzenheiser found young women’s experiences at Janus

to be of connection, community, and relationships that engaged them in school and offered a sense of “family.” For example:

The idea of “family” was not restricted to staff-student relationships. Many of the young women also spoke about students accepting each other. Beenie said this was shocking and, “It was weird that everybody was a family, you know? They would go on walks together. They ate together. The rappers, the hippies, whatever, it doesn’t matter what you are—what you look like, what you dress like, what music you listen to. You just hang out and talk.” This acceptance of difference was essential to the feeling of connection, safety, and caring, especially in light of the rejection many felt at the larger schools. Students at Janus viewed the acceptance of difference as part of what a caring family was or should be. According to the young women, because the school and teachers did not favor or teach to one type of student, difference seemed the norm. (Loutzenheiser, 2002, p. 456)

Loutzenheiser observed that while connection and disconnection from school resulted from complicated sets of circumstances, it seemed that paying closer attention to the complexities of students’ lives was a remedy. Further, students noted that teachers were role models for social acceptance of differences as well as emotions, such as anger, that were not sanctioned in the traditional school environment. Emotions were no longer silenced, and the social environment implicitly and explicitly supported speaking about experiences that they otherwise would not have put into words. In this climate, one student spoke for the first time of incest, and her speaking out eventually resulted in the perpetrator being imprisoned. The teachers at Janus did not ask students to leave aspects

of their lives outside of school.

All of these studies reveal personal experiences of how “students, families and educators live with socially and institutionally imposed identities” (March & Gaffney, 2010, p. 4). March and Gaffney (2010) describe their retrospective study of two high school seniors and the educational pathways they took that landed them in an alternative high school. The researchers looked at the defining events and decisions in the students’ narratives about their relational identities among family and educators. “The interpretive reading of the data revealed the interplay among students’, educators’, and families’ identities and how they sustained, diverted, and redirected the journeys of participating students” (p. 3). One student they followed, Patricia, an African-American young woman, “saw teachers at [her] mainstream school as being impersonal, distant, and disengaged from the students’ personal, social and academic pathways” (p. 11). Yet at her alternative school, she found that teachers demonstrated substantial effort to maintain communication with students and their families. Teachers at the alternative school were students’ “familial circumstances as unalterable and as the defining force of educational pathways” (p. 11). They document how one teacher, Mrs. Jones, challenged aspects of Patricia’s identity to help her negotiate the “multiple identities that she exerted across school, family and social contexts” (p. 11). March and Gaffney (2010) call upon educators to facilitate and encourage students’ belonging and resiliency and thus help students create “lived trajectories that are personally and socially fulfilling” (p. 3).

Youth experiences of regulation are particularly relevant when considering the national wave of zero-tolerance policies and increasingly policed culture in American schools (Black, 2004; Lyons & Drew, 2005; Williams, 2005). *Punishing Schools*, by

Lyons and Drew (2005), describes a school culture of increasing fear and punishment based on constructions of marginalized “others.” Lyons and Drew examined class, race, and geography at two schools in Ohio, analyzing narratives of school violence and their relationship to politics and educational policy to “shed light on a pervasive culture of fear—fear of youth and fear of difference—and its utility for political leaders seeking to divest from any notion of public education as a democratic social good. In their introduction Lyons and Drew note:

This book is about punishing schools—about the ways schools are punished as both focal points of particular, power-poor neighborhoods and, in a more general sense, the ways schools are increasingly being punished regardless of the economic and political power status of their communities by the steady, increasing divestment in public education. Our schools are being victimized, our children’s futures as participants in a democratic society literally *looted* by a political leadership that privileges corporate interests at the expense of neighborhoods, families and children. And schools have become instruments of punishment themselves, as the criminalization of youth and difference, the mass-mediated amplification of some citizen fears and the muting of others, and a zero tolerance approach to difference and conflict increasingly erode the conceptual and material distance between the prison and the school. (p. 4)

Lyons and Drew recognize the regulatory effects of social control specifically through the use of SWAT teams and police in school that contribute to a culture of fear. Such an analysis will be particularly important for this study because, though participants do not talk directly about a “culture of fear” in their public schools, but instead a “culture of

dominance and performance,” they discuss the roles of fear and isolation in their relationships in school.

Foregrounding Scholarship about Girls, Race, and Class

Joan Brumberg (1997) in *Body Projects* shows how the presentation and performance of the young woman’s body has transformed over the last century. In her research she found that Victorian-era Caucasian girls were less engaged in making a “project” of their bodies’ presentation. She historically documents, through diaries written by girls between 1830 and 1990, how it is not an “accident” that the most recent generations of young women consume themselves with the presentation and performance of their bodies through hairstyle, clothing, and makeup, making their bodies a “project.” This is in contrast to the former generations who focused upon their own character, intellect, and caretaking qualities. Brumberg (1997) notes:

The historical evidence I present . . . suggests that although young women today enjoy greater freedom and more options than their counterparts of a century ago, they are also under more pressure, and at greater risk, because of a unique combination of biological and cultural forces that have made the adolescent female body into a template for much of the social change of the twentieth century. (p. xxv)

While she does not acknowledge how the “project” differs according to class and race—because she primarily, but not only, focuses on privileged Caucasian girls—she recognizes an important cultural shift in the dominant culture in which girls live. She describes techniques of this culture shift such as self-regulation, identification, and constructions of agency that support women’s bodies being made into projects. Lesko

(1988) discovered that in her qualitative study of adolescent girls, the total experience of school became a curriculum of the body in the sense that (unintended) messages about the ways girls should act and look were invariably communicated and negotiated. These studies show how the feminine body and psyche is being targeted and has responded to dominant cultural prescriptions for females. Schools are sites that enable the development of student identities and help produce a particular student body (or bodies). Through everyday practices, gendered, raced, and classed student bodies learn lessons which are often more powerful than the lessons that they learn with their minds (Bordo, 1989, 1993).

Lutrell (2000) looked at the construction of identity in school. In this case, Lutrell (2000) investigated youth's experiences of "becoming someone" with Caucasian and African-American women in two high school completion programs in the Northeast and Southeast, respectively—a population related to the one studied in this dissertation. Lutrell (2000) found that becoming somebody through school concerns being recognized and understood by others as well as gaining knowledge, however contested that knowledge may be. She describes how life circumstances and race function complexly in terms of power, learning, and literacy, and observed that working-class and poverty-level African-American and Caucasian women frame their school experience of symbolic violence differently. Lutrell found that both racial groups tend to take up different forms of resistance to the classism and racism they experience and witness. Further, they also take up self-critical educational discourse, such as being a "slow learner" and blaming themselves. They blame themselves instead of locating their underpreparedness within the educational system that was not able to accommodate irregular school attendance,

which she theorizes was interrupted as a result of the experience of poverty.

Hopeful Girls, Troubled Boys: Race and Gender Disparity in Urban Education by Nancy Lopez (2003) contributes thorough explanations about the gendered and racialized academic achievement gap. She discusses the experiences of second-generation Dominican, West Indian, and Haitian young men and women of color who are products of the New York City public school system. Lopez presents a narrative showing how race, gender, and class sort differential access to educational opportunities. Here males describe being constructed as “thugs,” while females are sexualized. The young men receive a form of racism that constructs them as violent, which impacts their school engagement and how they see schooling. “Unlike men, who were generally hard-pressed to describe positive relationships with teachers, women spoke of having a good rapport with their teachers” (p. 54), often describing how polite and silent they were as students. Yet, even when young women acted out, they were perceived as less threatening than young men who acted out. Lopez also demonstrates differential treatment of girls and boys, both in school and at home. For example, girls are expected to spend time learning to prepare and coordinate family meals, while boys spend time recreating, and mostly playing basketball. Lopez argues that these differential conditions play out with young women valuing school and its impact on their future in ways that the young men do not.

Sarroub’s (2005) *All American Yemeni Girls* illuminates the experiences of six Yemeni-American high school girls and how they navigate among their religious, home, and school lives in Dearborn, Michigan. About half of the student population in the school district they attend is Arabic speaking and 15 percent is of Yemeni origin. Sarroub describes how the girls were “rarely allowed to distance themselves from the home or be

seen in public working in what were considered to be male domains” (p. 25) so as to not damage their reputation within the Yemeni community in the Southend and in their home villages in Yemen. The Yemeni boys were known to report back to the community what was considered to be bad behavior for a Yemeni girl. Although most of the teachers were non-Arab and did not support an “increased emphasis on Arab and Islamic cultures as part of the curriculum” (p. 104), Sarroub points out that the classroom is where the girls were able to interact socially with the boys without fear of gossip, whereas “the hallway and cafeteria were places where behavior was sanctioned by cultural and religious practices” (p. 47). A case in point is when Saba receives a compliment in the hallway from a non-Arab boy who then tries to put his arm around her, while a Yemeni boy looks on. Although she turns away from the boy, she fears that the Yemeni boy will spread gossip about her within the community. She decides to change her dress for two months because “for these students, social success in school (behaving and communicating appropriately according to cultural and religious traditions) was as important as academic achievement because the enactment of appropriate social mores in and out of school determined status as well as degrees of shame and honor” (p. 61). This book provides valuable insight into the world of Yemeni American high school girls and how they negotiate among their home, school, and religious spaces. Sarroub’s (2005) *All American Yemeni Girls* challenges Bourdieu and Passerson’s (1976/1990) assumptions of society-wide cultural reproduction through schooling (Collins, 2009), because she shows how school is a haven from the cultural reproduction within their home and community lives.

Foregrounding Scholarship about Race, Class, and Gender

There have been many efforts to study how race and racism, in the context of other

institutionalized constructions of difference, such as gender, class, “disability,” sexuality, etc., play out in the everyday lives of students in schools within the United States. Next, I briefly review research findings concerning ethnic identity, perceived racism, and academic achievement. Afterwards, I describe ethnographic accounts of diverse youth’s school experiences.

How ones’ race, ethnicity, and culture are perceived in an educational setting has a profound impact on school experience. Matute-Bianchi (1986) studied successful and unsuccessful Mexican and Japanese American students, finding that minority status or objective material conditions do not account for school success or failure; instead success is dependent upon students’ perceptions of themselves and their perceived role in the future. She finds that students use their Mexican-American identity as a “response to their subordinate status in the school” (p. 253). Their identification with an ethnic identity as socially disadvantaged due to historical and structural forces of exclusion played an important part in the Mexican-American students’ school failure, while there were no Japanese students who failed. Matute-Bianchi concluded that ethnic identification led each group to have a different investment in education and, therefore, different results. This finding has been challenged by further research. Somewhat similarly, Fuligni, Witkow, and Garcia (2005) found that the strength of 589 ninth-grade students’ ethnic identifications as either Mexican or Chinese provided extra motivation for academic success, while Zarate, Bhimji, and Reese (2005) found in open-ended interviews with Latino/a adolescents that dynamic descriptions “employing instead language that indexed their fluid, border identities” (p. 95) were significant predictors of their academic performance. Schwartz, et al. (2007) found that Hispanic adolescents who were well

acculturated to the United States tended to demonstrate academic achievement and “prosocial” behavior. The researchers suggest that “connection to a cultural community—the receiving context, the family and other heritage-culture institutions, or both—is associated with positive behavior” (p. 370). The centrality of community is also supported in Perreira et al.’s (2010) work, which shows that in recent immigrants a stronger Latino identification and a stronger sense of family obligation were both linked to a positive view of school environments and academic motivation.

The relationship between perceived racial discrimination, academic achievement, and racial identity was studied by Oseela et al. (2007). In a nationally representative sample of African American and Caribbean Black adolescents, they found that high racial identification of both African-Americans and Caribbean Black youth did not buffer the “deleterious effects of teacher discrimination on Black youth’s academic achievement” (p. 426–27). Powers (2006) surveyed 240 urban American Indian students regarding how students with strong cultural identification received a greater positive effect from American Indian cultural programs in school. The positive effect of the cultural programs contributed in an indirect way to positive “students’ educational outcomes via universal constructs, such as a safe and positive school climate, parental involvement in school, and instructional quality” (p. 20). This research is important, especially given that some youth in the current study clearly perceive racial bias and discrimination on the part of teachers and peers. Cultural-focused programs particularly serve youth with strong ethnic and/or racial identification. Powers’s (2006) data were inconclusive regarding moderate racial identification. This is also an important finding, which suggests a need for further

research into programs that serve youth who identify differently than “strong cultural” constructions.

How do intersections of identity impact young people in high school?

Ethnographic researchers approach this topic from many angles. Deutsch and Theodorou’s (2010) study of diverse urban youth found that “the act of consuming for the adolescents in this study is an integral part of their identity performance across the intersectionality of their experiences of gender, race, and class. For girls, consumption is linked to specific gender performances based on the maintenance of an attractive appearance as dictated by social perceptions of femininity” (p. 229). Deutsch and Theodorou name these consumerist representations as “omnipresent.” They confirm that the omnipresent physical displays of identity through clothing, hairstyles, and accessories are assurances of recognition of not only one’s individual identity but also of one’s place in the larger peer group. Preppy, Goth, or Geek, each group is marked by specific consumer choices that identify their members not only as individuals but also as members of these social networks. This dual exercise, of individuation of self and connection to a social group, results in a relationship with material culture wherein consumption is used to both mark and mask difference. (p. 231)

They find that those youth with limited financial power face a choice to remain “identityless (or unable to display your place in the social order)” (p. 251), leaving many students on the margins of their social environment.

Pollack (2008) studied “mixed” or “bi” and “multi” racial and ethnic identities of youth at Columbus High School in California. She reports that the official school-

sanctioned rubric, found in the school's curriculum, played a role in simplifying racial and ethnic categories. She states that

in my own classroom curriculum simple lines delineating people into the school's small handful of "race" persisted to the end of the school year, despite my intermittent attempts to have discussions challenging the very concept of racial classification. In response to the year's last assignment, in which I asked students to bring in music that they felt "represented themselves" or had something to say about "ethnicity" students squashed the complexity of their everyday media usage into neat racialized categories. (pp. 42–43)

While students would describe the nuances of their own "mixture," "analyses of social and curricular resource distribution had them comparing (and slotting themselves into) a short list of simple race groups," like when advocating for more "Latino" representation in the curriculum (p. 44). Importantly, students use the racial/ethnic taxonomy of the school's official curriculum to advocate for their simplified "group," to discuss and act upon issues. In other words, they talk about building group allegiances with broad groupings that do not actually represent the ways they think about themselves in a more intimate setting. Pollack's work may demonstrate political group simplification (e.g., Latino versus Nicaraguan) because the students embrace these groups as the primary or only way to respond to the school system. Also, Pollack's concern is that youth may be using these broad groupings in ways that may produce confusion, given their diverse membership and ways of meaning making. Her finding is important to the current study because it documents group affiliations that individual students negotiate and experience much more complexly. This awareness differs from the seeming simplicity that Deyhle

(1995) describes with Navajo (Dine) youth in schools they see as white-centered. Deyhle suggests that the Navajo youth he studied opposed white-centered authority and reinforced Navajo cultural authority and integrity. “Navajo youth who resist school are in fact resisting the district’s educational goal of taking the ‘Navajoness’ out of their Navajo students” (p. 892).

Angelina Castagno (2008) examined how silences around discussions of race contribute to the maintenance and legitimization of Whiteness. She draws upon ethnographic data from two demographically different schools, in order to highlight patterns of “racially coded language, teacher silence, silencing students’ race talk, and the conflating of culture with race, equality with equity, and difference with deficit” (p. 314). She finds that “an examination of my data illuminates that most white educators are reluctant to name things that are perceived as uncomfortable or threatening to the established social order. In other words, they possess a strong desire for comfort and ideological safety within their classrooms and the school walls” (p. 315). Castagno demonstrates how these silences and acts of silencing contribute to an educational culture in which inequities are dismissed yet legitimated, which results in the protection and entrenchment of Whiteness as a dominant category of privilege.

Race is central to discussions of normativity, access, and power. In other words, although race is present, it is often silenced, muted, and ignored within schools (Boler, 2004; Pollock, 2004; Johnson-Bailey, 1999; Thompson, 2005). Although many educators insist on ignoring race, they are engulfed in a system in which race structures both how schooling operates, and the subsequent outcomes of schooling, like the achievement gap (Ladson-Billings, 2006).

Foregrounding Scholarship about Class, Gender, and Race

Lois Weis's (2004) *Class Reunion* is a follow-up study of many of the youth she interviewed at Freeway High in *Working Class Without Work* (1990). In the former study, she interviewed 40 white working-class male and female high school juniors about their school experience, future plans, and how they construct identity. She also observed how they acted in class and related to one another in the context of a significantly deindustrializing economy in Buffalo, New York. She found that education was primarily seen as a means to an end (diploma, certificate) versus for its intrinsic value. The young men in her study, in general, had "traditional" views about gender roles, expecting to fulfill their father's roles as economic providers with women at home. Many males, she found, resisted school authority as an aspect of their construction of masculinity. In contrast, female students saw education as a possibility for a more positive future. Like many parents that Weis interviewed, female students focused on careers with or without a vision for marriage afterwards and considered moving from Freeway given the economic climate. Many young women expected to prepare themselves to be economically independent from men. Weis found that the young women planned for further education in recognition of the possibility of being single mothers. Weis also considered how white working-class identity is constructed in opposition to racial "others." In *Class Reunion* Weis interviewed many of her former informants. She found that half of her female informants had gone on to gain a college education and were now employed in white-collar jobs; whereas few of the men had gained higher education and mostly worked in low-wage service positions. Weis's findings challenge reproductionist views in which family demographics influence educational attainment. Weis reports that many men had

given up their former expectations of patriarchal family arrangements and were identified with a masculinity within marriage that includes shared domestic work and parenting. Yet Weis again found that that white working-class identity continues to be constructed in relief against racialized “others,” particularly African-Americans and Yemeni-Americans. She documented how identity construction has changed in response to an economically and socially changing society.

While my current study primarily focuses upon working-class youth and those that live in poverty, Brantlinger’s *Dividing Classes* (2003) also contributed to this dissertation. This is because Brantlinger (2003) found what many participants herein suspect, but only have circumstantial evidence for: that middle-class members with authority to make decisions in schools did so for their children’s benefit, leaving students such as those attending Conservation High at a disadvantage. In *Dividing Classes*, Brantlinger (2003) conducted in-depth interviews with middle-class teachers, parents, and school administrators in Hillside, Indiana. She reviewed how professional class members, situating herself responsibly in that class, “use [our] agency in crafty ways to secure the best of what schools have to offer for our own children.” Brantlinger (2003) designed her study to understand

whether the proponents of stratified structures were aware of the detrimental impact that unequal school conditions have on children of other classes. As I detail how the educated middle-class negotiates school advantage and rationalizes their actions, it is important to note that these same individuals are esteemed as the most intelligent, liberal, and well-meaning people in the society. My aim was not to portray particular individuals or a whole class as evil but rather to show

how certain flawed moralities and self-centered acts sway society away from an ethics of reciprocity and the best expressions of democratic community life. (p. xi)

She demonstrates how these particular people worked together to jointly determine the educational policies that cemented an educational advantage for their own children. As Adair (2003) notes, they “perpetuate and naturalize their own privilege and authority and maintain educational disadvantage for Others” (p. 604) while showing the steps that create and set up class and racial stratification “that consciously deny disadvantaged students’ educational access” (p. 604). In order to publicly argue such points, they engaged in what Brantlinger (2003) calls “deficit” discourse that consciously focused the problem on the “losers” and used merit “ideologies [to] mystify class relations” (Brantlinger, 2003, p. 7). I have reviewed this study because participants herein suspect that many of their own teachers consciously dismissed them, knowing about the consequences students would face.

Critical Psychology and the Social Construction of “Adolescence”

Participants in this study enter into the discourse of psychology as they speak about their experience within schools. They are well versed in the language of their own development, self-esteem, learning disabilities, and relationships. Further, they also must negotiate the meaning they and others attach to “adolescence.” Teachers rely on developmental, cognitive, and educational psychology to assist them with their teaching of young people. Teachers look for “developmental delays,” signs of “depression,” learning styles and disabilities, emotional disturbance and literacy, social skills and self-concepts. It is important that such discourse be critically taken up. Developmental

psychology grounds many dominant theories of education, learning, and classroom management. This includes social, moral, personality, cognitive, and developmental theory with particular emphasis on childhood and adolescence. As a discourse, psychology is part of everyone's life (Burman, 1994). It enters into the personal experience of day-to-day living through popular culture and media, like the messages about how to have better self-esteem, relationships, and mental health on popular television programs like Oprah (Harris & Watson, 2007), in teen magazines (Currie, 1999), and around the dinner table (Fine & Macpherson, 1995). Further, corporate marketing targets teenagers with consumer interests relating to their so-called psychological needs (Giroux, 2000, 2003, 2009). While Giroux criticizes the corporations' intentions, he acknowledges the socially constructed nature of psychological needs.

In this section I briefly review scholarship in critical psychology leading to a deconstruction of development, and "adolescence." I write this review in order to acknowledge the psychological context in which youth construct their identity.

An early work in critical poststructuralist psychology is Henriques et al.'s (1984) text *Changing the Subject*. The authors reflected on the failure of systems theory and social context theory to adequately critique the manufacturing of "normalization" inherent in psychological theory and research. Even though these theories were intended to compensate for social structure, they lacked an ability to be self-reflexive and critical and to account for power. Broughton (1987) describes the critique of the current canon of developmental psychology:

Developmental psychology is not just a scientific discipline combining theory with practice and research. It is also wholly a part of society, a social institution with a professional structure and a public presence. . . . It not only reflects ongoing social activities but joins concertedly in their formation, regulation, and reformation. Developmental psychology segments, classifies, orders, and coordinates the phases of our growth and even defines what is and is not to be taken as growth. . . . [It] sets goals and formulates ideals for human development and provides the means of realizing them. . . . There is considerable consensus among developmental psychologists that their field is an academic sub-discipline contained within the behavioral sciences, one that objectively observes age-related changes exhibited by human individuals, more or less independent of concrete context or history. . . . As a science, it can serve no particular political purpose but rather possesses a privileged immunity from the machinations to which societal institutions are subject. [It] plays no role in the formation of the development it studies. (pp. 1–2)

Critical psychology acknowledges such a role by using post-structuralism to unveil the dynamics of self-interest, to put the spotlight on what is constructed as a product of developmental theorizing as well as who benefits from such a perspective. Critical psychology looks at what is produced by the notion of deviancy—such as high school dropouts, juvenile delinquents, and at-risk youth—what is considered normal and unexamined, and what is the process by which knowledge is constructed about “deviants” (Henriques, et al., 1998; Lesko, 1996). This perspective is of particular interest in this study as it too generates knowledge of CHS participants. For example, according to the

Federal Workforce Investment Act from which CHS received funding in 1998–2000—the time-period that the participants attended CHS—once a young person was labeled a “dropout,” they were always considered one whether or not they graduated with a high school diploma from CHS. They are federally designated as “high school dropouts” so that graduation does not change the label. Identities and experience are produced and maintained through social discourse (Foucault, 1979, 1997) and are then interpreted by young people. Taylor (1994) describes how the construction of “development” can be used to blame the victim and support hegemonic ideologies:

Lack of success as defined and measured by standards of the dominant Euro-American culture can be explained by a failure to develop. Variations in developmental experience have led to many adolescents being labeled “deviant” and “deficient,” and the responsibility for this failure placed squarely on the individual. In this way the effects of racism, sexism, and classism on equal access to education, employment, housing, and health care, for example, can be ignored or denied. (Taylor, 1994, p. 29)

Subjectivity, and changes in subjectivity associated with age and development, must be seen as constructed by social practices that position the object of its “gaze” (Morss, 1996). The notion of “adolescence” participates in constructing the “adolescent identity crisis” that has become so institutionalized. Adolescents are thus marked as people biologically or developmentally determined in an “identity crisis” and, as such, cannot be trusted because they do not know themselves. Further, youth resistance, seen in such a light, may be more easily ignored. The role of emotions in school is a critical issue to marginalized students (Williams, 2005). Adolescence is assumed to be successfully

mastered when adolescence is completed (Lesko, 2001). Thus, young people can be seen as caught in time—caught in a decade-long treadmill of an untrustable identity—regulated until adulthood. Lesko (2001) calls this an effect of “panoptical time.”

Cultural constructions of adolescence seem to determine the adolescent as “hormonally driven, peer oriented, and identity seeking” (Lesko, 1996, p. 140), without a critical examination of the context—which Lesko (2000) characterizes as long-term age segregation through compulsory education. Rather, literature in adolescent psychology (Gemilli, 1996; Shantz & Hartup, 1992) marginalizes adolescents as being preoccupied with peer group and resistance, an apparent effect of identity crisis, and effectively as “just how they are.” It is not surprising that so much advertising targeted to youth uses both the subculture and the need to have identity, hopefully gaining their financial allegiance (Giroux, 2000). “Adolescence can be seen as the *effects* of certain sets of social practices across numerous domains of contemporary legal, educational, family, and medical domains” (Walkerdine, 1990). As Gale and Densmore (2000) note:

Invoking discourses that “blame the victim,” this self-esteem rationale suggests that the problem is best located within girls themselves. Rather than analyzing which precise factors in our educational and occupational systems militate against the development and maintenance of positive identities for girls and instead of devising strategies for social change, educators who are informed by this discourse tend to see their role as helping girls fit into these systems. That is, the problem is viewed as an individual’s maladjustment rather than caused by flawed social systems or institutions. (2000, p. 131)

It is from this skeptical position that the construction of “adolescence” is critiqued in

Re/Constructing “the Adolescent,” by Jennifer Vadeboncoeur and Lisa Patel Stevens (2005). Regarding the question, “What do you want to be when you grow up?” they note:

[The question] simultaneously implies that who the young person is, at this moment, is not as important as the adult he or she will become. It exemplifies just one of the hegemonic ways that young people are defined and essentialized in western industrial societies today: the “adolescent” as an unfinished product, as undeveloped, as a being whose existence is characterized by exclusion from the dominant child/adult binary. “Adolescence” is often perceived as a wasteland, bordered by “too old for father’s lap,” and “too young to vote.” It is the landscape between the poles of childhood and adulthood, and as such, “adolescents” are frequently marked and categorized as the “ones who don’t belong.” For the last century, the social construction of adolescence as a temporary “stage” has been described and constructed through a theory that emphasizes developmental achievements over the course of sequential and cumulative stages. This theory, largely credited to G. Stanley Hall (1904)—the “father of adolescence”—is so deeply embedded in social discourses about young people that it is taken to be fact. (pp. 1–2)

The construction “underdeveloped” leaves young people—people seen as “incomplete,” “emotional,” and “irrational”—to be untrustworthy. Youth who participated in this study have been labeled in multiple ways. Such preconceptions mystify youth’s experience. The current study is an attempt to provide youth’s perceptions about their experience in public and alternative settings that reach beyond these labels and preconceptions.

Summary

Alternative or comprehensive schools have been largely constructed as a catchall for students who disengage from school and leave, in addition to students whom the school system has labeled as troublemakers or as having special needs. Not surprisingly, students labeled “at-risk” populate alternative schools in gendered, classed, and racial forms. Yet, alternative schools are disparate, having no particular uniformity.

Importantly, many small and alternative schools focus on smaller structural and curricular organization that engenders belonging and relationships within their buildings. Probably the most important argument for small schooling is the sense of inclusion and belonging, which translates to school commitment. Clearly, the marginalization that students experience in school plays a major role in high school dropout rates.

The literature reviewed above is of particular importance when considering the school resistance and ethnographic literature concerning how marginalized students are alienated within their schools. Sociologists of education have theorized how schools function in a socially reproductive manner. This literature has been complemented by post-structuralist and cultural studies and by resistance theories that look at the agency that students and teachers express in their everyday interactions in school. Such theories consider hidden curricula that sort students, while others consider the differing value of students’ diverse cultural capital. Some of these theorists consider how young people might observe and resist structural forces in their everyday interactions. These theories are used by ethnographic scholars who gather evidence by observing the lives of students in schools.

School ethnographies most similar to the current study involve diverse girls in alternative school settings. Of particular interest is Loutzenheiser’s (2002) study because

she finds that young women's perceptions of school "success" and "failure" were tied to their experience of "connection" and "disconnection" in school. Many other studies were reviewed because they are also relevant to how students construct identity in schools, especially alternative ones. How students negotiate their construction as "resistant" is also informative. Kim (2010) and others researched how marginalized youth stand up for themselves and their identities. All of the studies reviewed note personal experiences of how students and others interpret and negotiate socially- and institutionally-imposed identities. Last, in a brief review of critical psychology, terms such as "self-esteem" and "special education" and the construction of "adolescent" are taken up for their pervasive use in the media and in schooling. Constructions of youth as being in an "identity crisis" can reduce the value placed on youth's voices. This dissertation listens to the voices of youth having multiple labels. My interest in this dissertation is to look beyond these labels to what these youth have to say for themselves.

This dissertation seeks to investigate how young people in an alternative conservation-focused high school made sense out of their success in school through the relationships that they engaged in there. I am interested in what forms of relational regulations they identify in their former experience in public school and how they participate in complicated discourses in order to negotiate their relational place in both school environments. How do they resist the discourse of school failure and negotiate potential conflict with competing discourses?

Chapter 3: Methods and Procedures

In this section, I begin by reviewing the qualitative methodological theory I used to frame how I asked my research question and conducted the project. Then I describe how this project came about, including the shifts I had to make as a principal to pursue this research, as well as how I settled on a research question and initiated the study. Because this shift was intertwined with my position as a principal, I include the bearing of that social location as a principal on the initial project. Next, I discuss the bearing of additional social locations on the project. Last, I review the procedures I followed to collect and analyze data, and finally, I introduce the informants and discuss the significance and limitations of the study.

Qualitative Research in Education

Bogdan and Biklen (2003, 1992) state that qualitative research includes a variety of research methods, which work with and produce descriptive data. Qualitative researchers use such methods as participant observation, in-depth interviews, historical accounts, and case studies to understand how informants construct meaning from their perspective.

Bogdan and Biklen (2003/1992) describe the naturalistic style as one where research is conducted with informants in “their territory—in their schools, their playgrounds, their hangouts, and their homes. These are the places where subjects do what they normally do, and it is these natural settings that the researcher wants to study” (p. 199). Good qualitative data derived from a naturalistic setting is

rich in description of people, places, and conversations, and not easily handled by statistical procedures. Research questions are not framed by operationalizing variables; rather, they are formulated to investigate them in all their complexity,

in context. While people conducting qualitative research may develop a focus as they collect data, they do not approach the research with specific questions to answer or hypotheses to test. They are concerned as well with understanding behavior from the subject's own frame of reference. (1992, p. 2)

Such research asks about complex and contextual meaning from people's perspectives. Qualitative researchers stress "the negotiated, emergent, situational quality of human society as a product of human freedom" (Collins, 1988, p. 233) and seek to move beyond particular meanings to identify general patterns in social life (Stake, 2010), while maintaining theories close to the distinctive meaning of actual social life (Emerson 1983). Qualitative research genres, although not a unitary whole, acknowledge that meaning is constructed, negotiated, and interpreted and that meaning is put to experience; qualitative research does not assume that there exists a discoverable, essential Truth. The world is seen as socially constructed. Social constructivists "emphasize intersubjective understanding. They focus upon the specific and examine the multiple meanings of everyday life constructed by people within the context of their particular language and culture" (Sears, 1992). From this stance, multiple epistemological positions about culture, language, and power can be described.

The researcher's task is to discover (or uncover) the ways in which the world is interpreted from the perspectives of those people who are at the center of what the researcher is studying. An inductive approach produces generalizations by analyzing a series of cases (Dey, 2004, p. 90). Themes are abstractions derived from the characteristics of everyday experience that have been grouped together. These characteristics are denoted by specific categories, named "codes." Themes are used to

produce theory about how one's informants perceive their lives, and themes may become the object of interpretation of the effects of discourse (i.e. Britzman, 1992; Pillow, 2000). Theory emerges from making connections within one's data—from the picture that emerges as researchers interpret the data they have collected and examined (Blumer, 1969; Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Denzin, 2010). Theorizing depends on concepts derived from the data rather than on deductions from received theory (Emerson, 1983). This does not mean that researchers in fact see the whole picture that their participants describe (Britzman, 2000). Rather, participants' perspectives are interpreted through the researcher's gaze and experience.

Inductive analysis is the process whereby themes or abstractions from coding the data develop (Dey, 2004). Tesch (1990) suggests that "coding" is usefully considered a recontextualization of data by the researcher. However, an inductive orientation does not occur from a neutral standpoint (Biklen, 2004; Stake, 2010). While researchers seek to faithfully represent the perspectives of their informants by reading and re-reading, categorizing, comparing, and contextualizing data, researchers' perspectives are situated by their own social locations. As Denzin (2010) points out:

For the post-pragmatist grounded theorist there is no neutral standpoint, no objective God's eye view of the world. The meaning of a concept, or line of action, or a representation, lies in the practical, political, moral, and social consequences it produces for an actor or collectivity. The meanings of these consequences are not objectively given. They are established through social interaction and the politics of representation. All representations are historically situated, shaped by the intersecting contingencies of power. (p. 302)

Thus, as qualitative researchers develop themes, they must also reflexively describe the bearing of their social location, including their situated context for question generation, interviewing, coding the data, and developing themes and the theory derived therefrom. This context is the topic of the next section.

Initiating Research as a Principal

My sense is that the most salient social location I occupied in relation to my participants was as their former principal. It was also a central social location for how I saw them as “students.” Therefore, I center this identity to describe how I transitioned from a principal to a researcher, while describing how this project came about. First, I briefly note my social, cultural, physical, and economic social positions because they frame my worldview and experience as well. These identities and social locations are not separate from one another. It is from this frame of reference that I come to this research. These basic parameters have organized the perspective from which I see the world and my place in it.

As mentioned above, I began interviewing graduates while still the principal of Conservation High School, and I completed the interviews after I had resigned my position. At that time, I had earned a bachelor’s degree in mathematics, psychology, and secondary education. I had also earned a master’s degree in Cultural Foundations of Education, and another in Counseling Psychology, both focusing upon cultural and feminist studies in each respective field. I had authored articles and made presentations on multicultural education, counseling, and lesbian identity at national conferences. I am a lesbian and have taught diversity and lesbian, gay, and bisexual courses in education and counseling on the undergraduate and graduate levels. I am an advocate for lesbian,

bisexual, gay, and transgendered rights as well. In short, I see myself as a scholar and a human rights activist doing my best to leave the world better than I found it.

I am a biracial light-skinned woman. My mother is second-generation Italian and my biological father is Cherokee and third-generation Swedish. I grew up with visitations from my biological father until I was seven years of age and after I was 17. Until I was eight years old I lived with my Irish/"Pennsylvania Dutch" step-father. His family was more influential in my life than my mother's family. While I often get asked about my ethnicity and/or race, I consider myself Italian, Cherokee, and Swedish with significant Irish influence. While I have chosen not to pursue becoming a citizen of the Cherokee Nation, I have been blessed with many amazing Indian people in my life, including Cherokee, Ojibwe, Sioux, Grand Ronde, Siletz, and Chomash. I have learned from Indian elders in my community not to downplay any of my ancestry. I am a member of the Native American Church and the Willamette Tsalagi Community, the author of the National Congress of American Indians' Resolution 09-076, and an advocate for Indian youth and youth of color in the educational and juvenile justice systems as a founding member of the Lane County United Coalition of Color.

I now live a middle-class existence, although I grew up in poverty, receiving free lunches while enrolled in public school. I am mostly able-bodied while having sustained a spinal nerve injury from back surgery in 2000. The resulting pain has significantly impacted every aspect of my life. Thankfully, I am able to exercise, which helps me manage the pain from this injury. English is my first language. Even though Italian was spoken in my maternal grandparents' household, I was restricted from learning it. As a witness to significant violence as a child, I am an advocate for safety, especially for

young people. I consider myself progressive or mostly “left” when it comes to social issues and politics. I grew up in the northeastern United States and I now live in the Pacific Northwest.

Initiating the Project

I began participant observation for this project in December of 1999 while I was the principal of Conservation High, a small, alternative high school in the Pacific Northwest that served youth who had had difficult experiences in public high school. There were a number of topics I wanted to write about. I wanted to write about the (over)stimulation I thought my students experienced in the name of learning. I wanted to write about how these youth that were constructed as “at-risk,” “losers,” or “scary,” were in fact not. I wanted to write about the meaningful lessons my staff experienced with the students, such as those we talked about during our faculty meetings and in impromptu moments when teachers and Americorps volunteers hurried to me to say things like, “Michelle, I have to tell you what happened to Trey today!” In addition, I wanted to write about the youth’s relationships to the outdoors as a phenomenon worth in-depth study, because I felt the standard sterile atmosphere of classrooms in public schools rarely did enough to address the environment that supports the very conditions of our life. I thought that the outdoors had a powerful affect on students’ worldviews. These are some of the beliefs and assumptions I held when I began this study. Not surprisingly, they are not what participants found to be most salient in their conversations with me.

This project allowed me to talk personally with students about their Conservation High experience when they were finished and when I no longer was in a formal position of power over them. As a principal I did not have as much contact time with students as

the teachers did. Prior to this project, I generally spent one or two days a semester with students in the field, where we had more opportunity to talk. The rest of my time was in the school building. Students often sought me out because I, or they, had an agenda—to solve a problem, to call home, or to obtain permission for something they wanted to do. I often sought them out because of their needs or about a particular event. However, I was interested in having time with them when I did not have to make a decision about formal school policies, which was often my role as principal. This project offered that opportunity. I ultimately resigned my position as principal in order to complete this project. I had to choose between continuing to serve as their principal and moving on to being an advocate for youth like them in higher education and elsewhere. I struggled with that choice. I hoped this project would be a gift to them.

Multiple Places in the Research: Social Locations

I chose a qualitative methodology in order to describe ways participants saw their lives in school. This approach, like all others, is incomplete. It loses something in the narration, conceptualization, and translation. It can never communicate the real thing; its strength is using informants' words and frames of reference about their own lives. Central to descriptive research, however, is the researcher's commitment, purpose, training, social position, relationships, and worldview. I do not try to practice what Michelle Fine (1992) calls "ventriloquy," and Donna Haraway (1988) describes as "the God trick," where the author's political location and interests are hidden under the unquestioned mask of authority and "objectivity." Denzin and Lincoln (2005) suggest that many scholars "judge the days of value-free inquiry based on a God's-eye view of reality to be over" (p. x). Instead, I describe multiple subject locations to both expose and to clarify for the reader

the perspective from which I conduct, analyze, and present data. TuSmith and Reddy (2002) discuss the need to reveal one's perspective in educational settings, rather than reproduce patriarchal relations by feigning its absence and invisibility. As a "social scientist," I acknowledge my conscious choices and control of this research project. Acknowledgment is not enough, however. Next, I describe how I reflected upon the impact of my many social locations on various aspects of the progress of the study.

Resigning as principal, I shifted my attention to conducting a formal research project. I especially enjoyed when participants talked about how CHS's structure, staff, or students made a difference in their lives. This dissertation has many examples of such statements. At times, I found their sentiments and my own critiques of traditional high school structure to be in alignment. Being a principal meant not only that I had authority at CHS, but also that I had an investment in our efforts to serve students in the best ways we could. I wanted to believe that our work was worthwhile and had a positive impact on the youth with whom we worked. I wish to avoid communicating that Conservation High is the "right"⁴ alternative to public school. Clearly, for some participants in this study, CHS was a positive place. Yet, this dissertation is not a comparative study. It is not an argument about what kind of structure is best, but rather a legitimization of these youth's voices about the need for an educational structure that highly values interpersonal relationships.

As their former principal who listened to their stories, I occupied an insider position in hearing about their school experiences. My position as these students' former principal and someone who had supported them would impact the data I received from them, such that I could elicit more information from them than an unknown outsider

⁴ Thank you, Dr. Sari Biklen, for your contributions to this section.

could have. Our familiarity enabled us to laugh about aspects of the program that an outsider would not have understood. Thus, a tacit agreement on the culture of CHS became apparent in interviews. Because I was a former authority figure, participants may have withheld some of their experience. While a few participants wanted me to know what they had “gotten away with” in school, knowing there were no longer any consequences, such talk did not occur in some interviews. The partiality of their interviews with me is acknowledged.

Interviews were built upon our shared history and memories. This history would always be the context of how our relationship began. Biklen (2004) suggests an exploration of the complications memory contributes to adults’ ethnographic scholarship on youth, emphasizing how memories, when unselfconsciously employed, increase the authority of the adult researcher over the adolescent informants, with sometimes negative effects. These effects include, particularly, an overemphasis on defining the perspectives of our informants in relation to an adult sense of “what is happening” with inadequate attention to the informants’ legitimacy and authority as interpreters of their experiences. (p. 718)

Biklen warns of the use of our memories of being young adults when engaging with young adults. As principal, I was often called upon to make decisions based upon my assessments of the needs of our students. Such memories can unnecessarily complicate or contribute to observations in the data. When I was principal I needed to make and use generalizations about what I thought my students’ lives were like. In Biklen’s (2004) terms, the fact that I was principal, and therefore required to be at least administratively on top of “what is happening,” is an indication or warning that more reflection is

required. Further, my generalizations and assessments, while based on my teaching experience, professional training, and formalities of the job, are also based upon my own memory of being a young person in public high school. While these experiences allowed me to occupy an insider position, they also are a reason to be cautious.

Biklen's (2004) points caused me to reflect upon at least three areas: First, the transition from the role of principal to the role of researcher; second, my assumptions about the place of "real relationships" in the academy; and, third, the way in which I draw on my memories of being a young adult.

Qualitative research is not to be driven by the researcher's generalizations about participants' lives, but rather by the researcher's perspectives on those lives. Each participant has a complex lived story. Further, their perspectives, negotiations, strength, agency, and resistance deserve to be foregrounded. This project is about them. Denzin and Lincoln (2010) describe a shift in the larger methodological community that is relevant here. They identify "this shift—which attempts to reposition the discourses of communities and cultures to a position of authority equal to that of academic research—invites us to interact with communities as sources of strength rather than as groups of victims that need help" (Tucker, 2009, quoted in Denzin & Lincoln, 2010). As a principal I believed my students were sources of strength to themselves and to each other. My own sense of responsibility and/or obligation to them changed as I became a researcher. The students' graduation from CHS helped to ease my transition from principal to researcher.

As a principal I supported and joined my staff in taking time away from formal curricular responsibilities to use "teachable moments" in class. By "teachable moments" I mean topics of significant personal, school community, and social relevance that surface

in the moment and are not planned. When issues of community and school climate naturally arose in class or in the field, we briefly moved the formal curriculum aside. For example, when bus tokens were stolen from my desk, I asked students to talk about if they had ever been stolen from and how we may treat each other when we fear being stolen from, why they think it happens, and what we can do about it when someone we care about steals. The former principal used a similar process when a swastika was found in the boys' bathroom. Though I made a formal priority of such dialogue, I never thought of it as a potential research topic.

At CHS I received feedback from students (and faculty) about the importance of dialogue. In contrast, in my own memory of high school there was little interest in the fact of or quality of the relationships through which schooling happens. Similarly, my own teacher training placed no emphasis on "building classroom communities," although graduate schools of education are increasingly making community building a priority. As a student writing a dissertation, rather than as an established scholar, I feared that my dissertation topic might be accorded the secondary status of the study of emotions in education, as described by Boler (2000). Nevertheless, the sheer pervasiveness of the themes of relationships made me determined to press on.

Biklen (2004) also notes "the danger for narrators who construct their memories as links between their adolescent informants and the adult researcher who, as a former youth, rides on the implicit suggestion that the researcher can too easily access youth's perspectives" (p. 716). Certainly, dynamics between researcher and informants are affected by the historical knowledge and former experiences they draw upon. What did I draw upon?

First, I perceived that my informants had both similar and different experiences from those I had as a young person. Regarding my personal experience and context in high school, I was a high achieving student who was homeless her junior and senior years of high school. Unlike my informants, I had both the motivation and status of a moderately high-achieving student. My own experience in public school produced some oversights on my part. For example, in Chapter 4 many participants complain about the large-school environment. As a new interviewer, I agreed with them that schools are “too big” for some students, and at times I overlooked the need for further investigation into the matter. Probably the most important question I could have asked more frequently was, “What contributed to your losing interest in school?” I notice now that I had the opportunity to be curious about students’ decision-making processes.

I include this reflection because how I see the world, especially as someone who benefited from public schooling, played an important part in my research. I thought of many of my students as young people who got into trouble, both as victims and because of their own failings. For example, Amelia willingly partied instead of going to school. I noted “general” differences between us. I was not a victim of the educational system, nor was I responsible for rejecting what it had to offer. The only time I got into trouble in high school was when I was reading an Agatha Christie novel after I finished my work in algebra. Further, I did not attend an alternative high school, nor was I in a position to be referred to one when I was in high school. I noticed that I needed to keep in mind the significant generational and historical differences between us, from the daily conditions of our lives, to the “advances” in technology, changes in popular culture, and even the position of the United States in a global economy. At times, I attempted to compare our

experiences. I felt that I could relate to their perceptions of the arbitrariness of adult power and their vulnerability. I learned that I had to use these experiences of mine to ask questions, rather than to anticipate the answers. I wanted to know how *they* handled it. As a principal of these young people, I also learned so much about their lives and how they saw the world that such labels as “victims” and “troublemakers” diminished in relevance because they did not explain enough about the complexity that I found in my relationships with the youth.

One area I did relate to was a different kind of “trouble” that many youth found themselves in. I recognized what I called “dangerous circumstances” outside of the school building, such as homelessness, domestic violence, frequent moving, substance abuse, substance-abusing or incarcerated parents, and couch-surfing. These circumstances did not determine their experience. As a former homeless youth myself, I saw young people in such circumstances as vulnerable and sought to find stability or help for them.

When interviewing young people, I was curious about their histories (e.g., Where did you first experience that?), experiences (e.g., What was that like for you?), and analyses (e.g., When you think of those instances together, how do you make sense of it?). I intended to demonstrate that I was not another adult who believed they were incomplete, inadequate, or immature (Lesko, 2001), as constructions of adolescents might dictate. I was encouraged by the social justice education I received at Syracuse University, which centered reflection upon what people have to say about their lives and also deconstructed representations of them. I learned to be cautious about imposing my own experience as a teenager by exhibiting a “been there” attitude. Especially during

interviews, data organization, and analysis, I was careful to resist superimposing my understanding and evaluation of youth and youth culture in Conservation High, both from my vantage point as former principal and as a former youth who had had her own high school experience.

The rest of this chapter describes how my investigation of the high school experiences of female Conservation High graduates was designed and conducted. No discussion of their perspectives can be complete without a description of the qualitative methodology that framed the procedures I followed to gain access, engage in participant observation, conduct interviews, and organize and interpret data. Those are the topics of the next two sections. Then I consider other social locations because my own frames of reference, such as race, class, gender, and sexuality, are inherent in every aspect of the project. As Luttrell (2000) notes, as ethnographic researchers we must

recognize that our role in shaping the ethnographic encounter is huge; consciously or not, we listen and make sense of what we hear according to particular theoretical, ontological, personal and cultural frameworks and in the context of unequal power relations. The worry always exists that the voices and perspectives of those we study will be lost or subsumed to our own views and interests. (p. 499)

Next I give an example of talking about sharing the experience of waking up in a tent with Helen, albeit from different social positions. My goal is to curtail what Smith describes as

the practices of thinking and writing that . . . convert what people experience directly in their everyday/every-night world into forms of knowledge in which

people as subjects disappear and in which their perspectives on their own experience are transposed and subdued by the magisterial forms of objectifying discourse. (1999, p. 4)

The translation of experience into words can easily turn people's lived experience into an object, rather than communicate the life within the story. I recognize that the reality of my students' lives described within this dissertation will lose something in translation, which effect I hope to mitigate by taking into account the distortions that could be introduced by my own investment in the process.

Qualitative researchers have highlighted the "inevitable relational dimension of meaning and the ways in which social acts construct shared understanding of 'what is going on'" (Condor, 2006, p. 6). Below I give an example of the relationally embedded nature of interviewing participants. For example, in the following interview with Helen we are laughing about her disclosure about sneaking into the boys' tent at night.

Helen: I ended up sneaking into their tents because the girls were just pissing me off. It was just that I wanted to be around the guys. It wasn't that I was going to go and screw around with somebody. But I can't get in trouble for that anymore.
Ha ha!

Michelle: No you can't. [I am laughing.] You're lucky [jokingly], just kidding.

Helen [still laughing]: I have been saying that my favorite times at CHS are waking up first thing in the morning on Spike and going into the warm kitchen tent for breakfast.

Michelle: Yeah, me too!

Helen: That was the best.

Michelle: I love that everyone is together [in the morning].

Helen: Yeah. I don't know. . . . I know I changed a lot. I know I am a tougher person, like emotionally and physically.

Michelle: What day-to-day stuff made a difference? I mean it wasn't a "poof" all at once.

Helen: The group effort. We had to like be a part of a group and not an individual anymore.

What is evident in this passage is our shared experience of waking up and going into the warm kitchen tent out in the woods on a chilly morning. Functioning in the group included sharing responsibilities, such as preparing meals and cleaning up from breakfast. Everyone had a responsibility, whether making breakfast, washing dishes, or putting up or taking down the tents. Our shared understanding of our former relationship is framed by differing positions of power. For example, Helen's reference that she "can't get in trouble for that anymore" and her immediate defensiveness that "sneaking into the boys' tent" was not a sexual encounter demonstrate the gendered and sexualized interpretations she made of what I might be thinking as an authority figure. Further, Helen may have said something different had I been a man. At this point in our relationship I am unsure if she knew that I was a lesbian, so I don't know what bearing our difference in sexual orientation had.

Next, I agree with her "me too!" and "I love that everyone is together [in the morning]," which demonstrate our shared experience. Helen suggests that becoming an "emotionally and physically" "tougher person" was a product of learning to "be a part of a group and not an individual anymore." I suspect that her perspective as a Tlingit woman

is woven into the experience of being part of a group—I use my basic knowledge of her tribal identity to interpret her words. In addition, she is aware that I am a Cherokee woman who is bicultural and somewhat active in organizations that serve people of color and Native Americans in particular. Our local coordinator of the Indian Education Program frequently presented at CHS. These examples show *how* sharing the meaning Helen has made of events like “going into the warm kitchen tent,” learning to function as a group, and “sneaking into the boys’ tent” can be seen as negotiated during the interview.

The dialogue above with Helen can be seen as a “negotiated conversational accomplishment” (Fontana & Frey, 2000), wherein both interviewer and interviewee actively participate in the live co-construction of the interviewee’s stories and subjectivity (Gubrium & Holstein, 2003). Being aware of the impact of my social location and how I see the world has everything to do with “speed bumps” (Weis & Fine, 2000). Hill (2006) describes such bumps as “moments in the research where I was forced to pause and reflect on the methodological and ethical concerns that informed the development of my work” (p. 927). The relational context of learning can be negotiated as a hidden curriculum, depending upon one’s perspective of one’s social locations. Our similar stance on the priority of relationships and a commitment to negotiate relationships together encouraged trust and willingness to share in our interviews. In this way, our former relationship was a strength when it came to data collection. Like Hill (2006), I wanted to “presume that I held the unique and privileged position of being a legitimate insider” (p. 927). Interviewing someone with whom one has a prior relationship is more complicated, however, because acknowledging one’s social location is different than

reflecting upon its impact.

I occupied multiple roles that sometimes came into conflict. In the examples below my multiple roles collide. For example:

Michelle: What is your race?

Amelia: I am just white trash. A little bit of everything.

Michelle: Why do you say that? [Observer Comment: I ask this communicating my concern.]

Amelia: Because I am.

Michelle: What is your ethnicity?

Amelia: You mean my nationality?

Michelle: Sure.

Amelia: Okay. Cherokee and Blackfoot, Irish, Jewish, Gypsy.

Michelle: What does that mean to you?

Amelia: I am just white trash.

Michelle: But what does that mean to *you*?

Amelia: I live in a trailer park.

In this instance, my role as a researcher and an advocate conflicted. As a researcher, I was interested in how Amelia made sense of being “white trash” in school. My agenda surfaced when I wanted Amelia to see the label of “white trash” as one that is put upon people who live in trailer parks. I hoped she would have a positive self-concept and a historical and cultural understanding of what it meant to be Cherokee, Blackfoot, Irish, Jewish, and Gypsy. I hoped for her to reject the “garbage” implications associated with “trash” as well as how “*white* trash” seemed to negate her biracial and religious ancestry

(Cherokee, Blackfoot, Jewish). In the interview I felt responsibility to challenge this label. Therefore, I struggled as a researcher to be receptive to *her* story. I had positioned myself as Amelia's advocate and as an adult who cared about her. I withdrew and did not ask any other questions about it. Here an ethical issue arose concerning my mixed roles. I had numerous options. I could overlook her self-labeling, address my concern more overtly, or ask what she thinks about people's opinions about that label. I knew Amelia would interpret my interaction with her. Should I overlook the ethical risk of the youth participant leaving the interview with the idea that "Michelle supports labeling myself as 'white trash'," a concern that had more to do with my position as an advocate than as a researcher? Yet, ethics are a researcher's concern also. This particular circumstance highlights how former relationships may provide access to information not available to "outsiders," bring up ethical issues, and complexly inform our data.

For me, being aware of racial politics was a strength and a struggle during interviews that again highlighted these mixed roles.

Michelle: Okay, what is your race?

Marissa: I am white.

Michelle: And what . . .

Marissa: And I have a little Native American and I have a lot of Irish and a little bit of Norwegian and that is only my Dad's side. I am mostly Irish and Norwegian; that is what I like to think.

Michelle: What is your Mom?

Marissa: I have no idea (angrily).

Michelle: Okay, so help me understand some things about when race [came up] at [CHS] . . .

Marissa: With race? You know how you will pass out all those papers and they ask your race? I don't [fill them out]. Absolutely never. Why? Because it doesn't matter. It just doesn't matter. I don't see it as mattering whether I am white or I am Black, or Hispanic.

Michelle: What if you were in a group that is really discriminated against?

Marissa: It matters to those who see it that way. Those who see me as not being okay. It matters to them.

It was difficult for me to hear Marissa describe that race “doesn't matter.” To me, her “color-blind” words erase culture, history, racism, and her own ancestry (Deloria, 1994). She does not mention her own Native American ancestry in her statement, “I don't see it as mattering whether I am white or I am Black or Hispanic.” I am sensitive to any race or culture of ancestry being seen as irrelevant, in part due to my own personal experiences. My question, “What if you were in a group that is really discriminated against?” was a challenge to her point of view. Her underlying message is that race only matters to those who make her race an issue. I became a teacher in the interview by asking her to put herself in someone else's shoes. Her explanation further clarifies how she negotiates racial and ethnic differences. I was embarrassed for myself that my own student would hold such a position. On some level, I felt responsible for the lessons learned or not learned at Conservation High. This kind of exchange between Marissa and me is characteristic of the relationship we had within Conservation High. It is indicative of an ability to disagree; when I challenge Marissa, she speaks her mind. I am thankful to see

that in these pages. But she does not question me. I hold more socially sanctioned authority to question Marissa.

My biracial status had a different impact with participants who acknowledged (versus denied) their ethnic identity. For example, I doubt my conversation with “Helen” could have happened if she thought I had no sense of the functioning of white privilege:

Helen: I become [every students’] stereotype for every other Native girl because I am the first Native they ever met!

Helen: Fieldbird Elementary School was really hard because I was the only colored girl. The teachers really didn’t have any multicultural training. They literally taught us that Columbus discovered America. And with kids in Indian headdresses. It was like . . . I didn’t fit in with the white kids at all especially with the middle-class white kids.

Michelle: How did you handle that?

Helen: Well there was nothing that I could do. I had other problems at home you know. Half that time we didn’t know if we were going to get fed. I was raising my brother and sisters. And school was my haven. I am really glad that I didn’t fit in in middle school, and with the white girls and their need for lipgloss. And their need for all of the possessions and not being able to learn things for themselves. Not being able to question what they are learning.

Michelle: That is a real mark of Whiteness, huh?

Helen: Yeah, that is white privilege because they don’t have to think about those things or question things.

Michelle: But it keeps them stupid.

Helen: Yeah it does. I had powerful women examples that showed me that I could question and they were Native women.

I found that my interviewing with Helen was informed by an awareness of the functioning of white privilege and our familiarity. Otherwise, I would not have been able to reflect her sentiments or highlight the costs of white privilege. I do suspect that such reflection/mutual understandings helped her be more comfortable in sharing her point of view.

Data Collection

Entry into the field. While I began participant observations in January of 1999, I was a new principal who had begun three months before on the first day of school in September of 1998. I was thrown in and overwhelmed for most of the year. However, I always made the time to interview students interested in attending Conservation High. I spent at least one and a half to two hours with each student, once or twice. I wanted time in the beginning to get to know them. I was struck by many of their stories of former school experiences. Most of these youth were far from the stereotypes I had about high school dropouts, juvenile delinquents (for those that had a juvenile record), and the emotionally and behaviorally disordered (for those again that came with that designation). I was saddened that these young people seemed to have been underserved on many levels. Yet I also was inspired by what they valued, laughed about, and wanted in their lives.

During that time I became a “practicing observer” of my own work as an alternative high school principal. I began to listen differently as my students talked about

their experiences at Conservation High and at their former schools. Their discussing of their experience was not out of the ordinary for me. I frequently talked with students about their experiences in Conservation High. I wanted to be kept up to date with current students whenever possible. This seemed possible in a school with 44 students. As I started to think about my experiences as a participant observer, I took the following field notes as if I were introducing Conservation High School to someone new:

OC: I remembered what it was like for me the first time I walked through it. Conservation High was housed in a wing of a 1950s traditional concrete-block school building, organized in an “L” like most buildings of its era, whereas the other wing was occupied by the youth corps’ organization of which CHS was one “program.” I remembered my disappointment in the architecture because it so easily isolated students and teachers, often from each other. The first classroom on the right of the CHS wing which opens through two double-fire doors was set up like many other classrooms in the United States: cream painted concrete walls, the far wall having waist to ceiling windows. Eight tables were organized in a half-circle facing the blackboard and each other. A teacher’s desk was in the corner next to the blackboard in front, and cubbies and a closet were in the rear of the room. But the first time I looked in the gear room during my interview changed how I thought about the building. The gear room, next door, had the same concrete and glass physical structure, but was a maze of organized conservation gear. To an outdoors woman like myself, this was a room of gear that could make almost any backcountry backpacking trip a reality. Tarps, small tents, kitchen tents, Dutch ovens, propane, and yellow tops (5 gallon water

containers) were organized in their assigned areas. The next room was the tool room, a carpentry workshop to repair the conservation tools stored in it. Tools included rakes, hog hoes, pulaskis, axes, McClouds and hoedads. These tools and gear made field-based conservation education possible. These tools and gear were to become a part of my everyday CHS language and experience over the next two years.

During the late winter of 1998 and spring of 1999, I noticed the ways that CHS-cultured language connoted very specific meanings as well as regionally (Pacific Northwest) contingent meanings. For example,

At CHS, we called five-gallon water coolers that were brought out into the field everyday a “yellow top.” This is not because they currently have yellow tops, but because they used to when the school and its larger organization was formed. Thus, the nickname continued when the replacement coolers changed colors. A hoedad is an especially long (18") hoe with ridged edges and a rounded U-shaped blade. Local history has it that the “Hoedads,” a group of male and female forest work cooperatives in the 1970s, created this tool especially for planting trees in Pacific-Northwest soil. The tool came to be named after them (Hartzell, 1987). Hoedad has little meaning outside of our geography. The implications of “hoedad” are historic, political and corporate (with connections to the logging industry and the responding environmental activism to preserve old growth trees by the Hoedads and inhibit clear cutting practices).

Sometimes I felt like I was writing a brochure and other times a diary. More and more I noticed the special ways we talked that I had taken for granted. But I also knew that CHS

culture did not end with our “conservation talk,” or with yellow tops and hoedads. I wondered how we *were* different through our experience there. How did my students and I think and feel about ourselves in such historically and experientially contingent ways—CHS ways, and Pacific Northwest ways? Could I follow the trail students’ stories marked?

I wrote field notes—observations of what I witnessed in my office, hallways, and with students in the field. However, I was only in the field one or two days a semester. At first, I struggled about what to write down since I had not settled on a research question, just a context. My initial participant observations were sparse and dry, containing descriptions of events, almost like a weekly log of my activities. After some time, I shifted my attention to observing students and my interactions with them. I noticed that this shift in my attention was significant. Over the six months, between January and June, I confined my observations as a principal to those interactions that seemed beyond the typical day-to-day events, especially those with students. With this, I believe the notes and data began to gain richness. I concluded participant observation when I decided to interview female graduates about their experience of school success in June 1999.

As a principal I acted to serve youth so they could do well in the program and to ensure that the facility functioned well. As a researcher I sat down and wrote about what I had observed. I attempted to drop my tendency to “evaluate” situations, and simply report what I witnessed. This process of writing and reviewing mostly interactions between students and me helped me look more closely at my own work. Taking time for review was helpful in how I thought about particular students and their motivations. Because of this experience, I called for a time during faculty meetings for discussing our perspectives

on particular students and what we thought they needed from us. This practice resulted in a lot of conversation because students acted differently in different contexts. Classroom teachers did not see students' interactions in the field; however, crew leaders did. By sharing their observations, crew leaders and teachers strengthened their relationships and helped them find better ways to work with youth. Once I settled on a research question, I scheduled interviews with graduates and transcribed them within a month of each interview.

Interviews with participants. Qualitative data is commonly developed through unstructured and semi-structured interviews (Potter & Hepburn, 2005, p. 283). Brown and Durrheim (2009) note that “inside and outside the academy, the practice of interviewing has become so culturally omnipresent that Silverman and Atkinson were prompted to suggest that we live in an “interview society” in which interviews are central to making sense of lived experience. Clearly, interviewing happens not only within a relationship, but within a larger context of “interviewing.” Interviews are more complexly understood as “negotiated conversational accomplishments” (Fontana & Frey, 2000). When I interviewed my former students, I found that our prior relationship gave me the insight to ask questions I would not have asked of a stranger. The context of the interview, our prior relationship, the altering of our prior principal (authority figure)-student relationship, all had a complex bearing on the interviews. I proceeded with taped semi-structured interviews that followed a list of Guide Questions approved by the Institutional Review Board for Human Subjects of Syracuse University.

Before gaining Institutional Review Board Approval on October 4, 2000, I began a pilot study with written approval granted by the executive director of the not-for-profit

organization that housed Conservation High School during January of 1999. He too was interested in hearing what young people had to say about their educational experience at Conservation High. I am grateful for his support and the insight that had led him to begin Conservation High just three years before.

Pilot interview and research participants were recruited through requests for participation sent to all 14 female students upon their graduation between June of 1999 and the January 2001 at Conservation High School. I followed up the in-person requests with phone calls. I did not describe the study to participants prior to graduation unless they approached me about it. The request form included a description of the study and permission forms for participants and parents when participants were under 18. Permission forms included a description of the format and potential risks of the interview, that interviews and focus groups would be audiotaped, the limits of confidentiality, and an agreement to submit the final product to Conservation High School, to Syracuse University, and for publication. Prior to every initial interview, I again reviewed the purpose and scope of the study, the informed consent, and the potential risks to participants. This discussion included the voluntary nature of participation and a review of the permission form. I described to participants that I would be transcribing the interviews, reading them, selecting themes among everything everyone said, and writing about what they had to say. I wanted them to know that I was going to organize their ideas and add my own analysis as well.

I conducted one to four interviews with 12 of the 14 female students who graduated from Conservation High between June 1999 and January 2001. This time span included four graduating “classes” because CHS held graduation in January and June

every year. The first set of interviews was with the female members of the class of June 1999. Out of eight total graduates, all four female graduates agreed to be interviewed. These included Dierdre, Marissa Nha, Linda, and Autumn Moon. Out of the 10 graduates for January 2000, all four female graduates agreed to be interviewed. These were Amelia, Becka, Helen, and May. The three female members of the six-person class of June 2000, which consisted of six young people, agreed to be interviewed. These included China, Crystal, and Lily. Lastly, Carmen, Fern, and Anáwaké were the three female graduates of the class of January 2001. Each interview ranged from one and a half to five hours. Our “marathon” interviews often included meals I either made or bought, and the interview occurred at school or at one of our homes, whichever the participant wanted. I interviewed participants within a few months of their graduation date, most within two months. Participants ranged in age from 16 to 19 years old at the time of their first interview.

The first set of pilot interviews were with Dierdre, Marissa Nah, and Autumn Moon—June 1999 graduates. Dierdre’s was the very first interview I conducted and it was the only interview I conducted with her. I remember telling her before the interview that she was the very first student and I was learning how to conduct such a project. Even though I had planned to do follow-up interviews with each participant after my proposal was approved, when I completed transcribing the interview and called Dierdre, I found that she had moved soon after graduation without leaving a forwarding phone number or address. I also met shortly after their graduation with Autumn Moon and Marrisona Nha, both electing to do the interview at the school. Since there were six months between graduations I had ample time to go over interviews. All interviewed participants agreed to

follow-up interviews, but some were difficult to track down. For example, Amelia and her boyfriend moved with no forwarding address or number so I could not contact her for a third interview.

However, some participants did not move around frequently and stayed in touch with me, including Autumn Moon, Lily, Carmen, Fern, Helen, and Anáwaké. Therefore, these interviews are the most developed. During the two years of data collection, coding and sorting, some participants called just to find out how I was doing, to socialize, and to see if I had any other questions for them. Autumn Moon, Helen, Lily, Crystal, Fern, Carmen, Marissa Nha, Amelia, Becka, and Anáwaké each participated in two to four interviews. I planned one focus group for four participants, but only Fern and Anáwaké attended. Two others called with reasons why they could not be present. At this point, I felt they were tired of interviews. The focus group was a wonderful experience and certainly more lively and frank. Final interviews and the focus group offered confirming evidence that I had reached a saturation point in data collection, hearing the same main themes repeat themselves.

My experience tracking down participants for follow-up interviews was at times a struggle. For some, it included finding them through a number of referrals. This experience became more commonplace. “May” and “Linda” were the two female graduates between June 1999 and January 2000 who did not participate in this study even though they both initially agreed to participate. I talked to Linda about the study before she graduated, asking her if she would be interested in participating once she graduated. She said she was very interested and that being at CHS had changed her life. She said she thought CHS was a great school, people were respectful and cool, and she talked about

never getting in fights there, whereas she had gotten into them “all the time” at “Millville High.” When I called Linda, an 18-year-old half-Mexican, half-Klamath Indian, I left a message. Her mother returned my phone call. She respectfully told me that she would not allow Linda to do the interview because she did not trust researchers. She apologized to me and thanked me for all I had done for Linda, who had a very positive experience at CHS. Research on Native Americans was often used against Indians, she said, even if the researcher had good intentions. She assured me that she knew I had no intention of using it this way; however she did not want Linda to participate. I was disappointed because I enjoyed listening and talking with Linda and looked forward to the content of her interview. Linda became a living legend at CHS. During our interviews, many participants praised Linda for being a loyal friend, a dedicated student, and a hard worker in the field. Linda was known as being *the* young woman whom no young man could beat in the field. When participants and teachers referenced the ability of young women to physically match or outperform young men in the field, I frequently heard supportive comments about women with Linda’s name attached: “Well, look at Linda. She rocks in the field! No one can keep up with her! She is an inspiration.”

May, a Caucasian 16-year-old at the time, did agree to meet with me twice after her graduation. She did not show up either time. When I called her, she said that she had been busy, and we rescheduled and she no-showed again. I decided the interview was not important to May. May seemed interested at first but I did not hear from her. My relationship with May was sometimes a challenging one because of a conversation I once had with her about her clothing. Without going into identifying details, I will disclose that May had a way of challenging and using representations of women that I worried may

work against her. While her contribution, specifically about that, would have been an asset to this research, I also respect her (passive) choice not to participate.

During the initial pilot interviews, I was especially sensitive to how my questions were being interpreted; some of my questions seemed off base because they did not speak to participants' experiences. I frequently checked with them to make sure I understood what they were saying. I told them that I needed them to explain their assumptions very clearly, and I would ask them a lot about things they probably think I know. MARRISA, Autumn Moon, and Dierdre were very helpful this way. My questions began with, "How were you successful at CHS?" This question did not result in the detail I expected. I expected a "process" response, such as the sequence of events that led to their success at CHS. This question did open up important areas for participants to talk about, especially their experience in relationships. I think this primacy of relationships is part of the reason that my first interview, with Dierdre, did not result in the kind of specifics that the following interviews included. Clearly, participants' success was interpreted primarily through the relationships they had forged and the community they had developed. Therefore, my research altered course from a focus on success toward a focus on identity and relationships. In general, informants were good to me, in that I suspect that even when my questions were not constructed in ways that spoke to their experience, they did not let that get in the way of what they thought I was asking. I am thankful for their kindness in this regard.

Holstein and Gubrium (2003) describe the interviewer's role as often to "incite respondents' answers, virtually activating narrative production" (p. 75). This description fits the interviews documented herein, more than the notion of the interviewer's role as

balanced co-creator of the interviewee's stories. Brown and Durrheim suggest that this imbalanced interviewing deserves acknowledgement (Brown & Durrheim, 2009). In initial interviews, I asked more open-ended questions, while later I was more willing to challenge participants with information that I already knew about them and our school. For example, when participants constructed their time at CHS as "everyone got along," I would ask, "But what about all the arguments and teasing?" I found that such challenges produced richer data that often described a strong commitment to relationships with their peers, accepting the whole person.

Later in the interview process I began to ask somewhat different questions to clarify points about which I had already gathered a substantial amount of data. For example, I asked, "Some participants have talked about CHS as a family. What do you think about that? How did that happen?" These questions received responses with examples. I summarized what a participant said and asked them if I got it right. And participants almost always had more to say, whether or not I got it right. I appreciated the feedback I received from participants because a "well, you almost got it" led to more description. This was good news because a critical appraisal by participants demonstrated, first, that our relationship was one where they could disagree and, second, that they were invested in our relationship and the accuracy of their perspective enough to clarify what I was (mis)understanding. I believe I conveyed my dedication to "getting it right," to representing their stories from their points of view as accurately as possible. Although I was concerned that they may just agree with me because of my former authoritative position as their principal, I was consistently relieved by evidence that countered that concern.

Interview data including one focus group totals 570 pages, with 104 separate codes. I chose not to code my participant observations because the interview data were so full of description and ideas. My choice to not code my participant observations also had to do with the fact that I had concluded those participant observations before I had determined a research question. However, I did re-read participant observations notes to find my accounts of specific events that participants described in their interviews. However, these instances were few. I found I was more interested in relying on how participants saw their school experience than on my own observations.

Data coding and analysis. I transcribed each participant's interview within one month of the date it occurred. After reading and re-reading the first three interviews, I began to sketch out coding categories. However, it was not until the next three interviews were transcribed and reviewed that I began to construct a coding sheet using the program FileMaker Pro 5. This coding sheet contained a check-off list of 104 codes and a place for each narrated quote that corresponded to selected codes. I generated codes out of these first six interviews. The decision process about what to code was clearly a product of participants' points of view combined with my training and worldview. For example, as a feminist researcher interested in critical race studies of education, I was interested in the raced, gendered, and classed experiences of participants. I not only asked about these experiences, but I also recognized that the social constructs of race, class, and gender, to name a few, were always functioning, even if the overt interactions were only symbolically or representationally about such content. Therefore, I created a code for "race" as well as one for "raced interaction." "Interaction" identifies discussed dynamics that highlight race as part of the overt interaction; or else I read "race" as functioning in

the dynamics. The “raced interaction” code included examples of racism. For example, when Marissa said,

You know how you will pass out all those papers and they ask your race? I don’t [fill them out]. Absolutely never. Why? Because it doesn’t matter. It just doesn’t matter. I don’t see it as mattering whether I am white or I am Black, or Hispanic.

I coded this narrative as “raced interaction.” While her question, “My race?” as well as her point that race “does not matter” (i.e., I see her as using a color-blind perspective that seems to dilute racial salience) may seem at first glance to negate the “raced interaction” code, she engages the social politics of why or why not race matters and her own interaction with ethnic and racial demographic forms. All talk about racism, for example, was coded as “raced interaction.” Whereas the “race” code was a catchall code for any other kind of condition in which race was mentioned, like a simple naming of race. I created the catchall “race” code, so that I could leaf through it in case there were themes I missed outside of “raced interaction.” While I perceive race as functioning at all times (lives are lived within raced constructions), “raced interaction” refers to the salience of raced interaction or racism represented in the data clip. This code included my observations, of which participants may have been at times unaware.

I created coding categories to identify particular aspects of informants’ experiences. Further, my interest in post-structural theorizing and social structure had taught me to look at social constructions of identity and how resistance and agency may be expressed. I knew that students and teachers negotiated rules and regulations. I also was sure to name these codes.

As I created codes, I also created categories for them, but these categories often complexly related to other categories. The categories helped me locate a code within the code list of 104 codes. The categories were relevant to coding itself. These categories included each school, “identity,” “the body,” “relationships,” and “sociological analysis codes.” These latter codes refer to sociological ways of looking at what was occurring in the data, rather than the topic of the data itself. These codes included “individualism,” “power relations,” “cultural capital,” “agency,” “resistance,” “social construction,” “hidden curriculum,” “school ideology,” “knowledge and power,” and “identity representation.” In the above example, Marissa’s refusal to fill out demographic forms can be considered recognition of the social construction of “race,” an act of “resistance,” and her negotiation of “identity representation.” This narrative clip was not coded “student voice” (below) because it did not directly concern her identity as a “student” voicing concerns about “students.” In other words, it was not specific enough to a student identity. These demographic forms that she talks about are, however, school forms, so this was a challenging decision.

The two “school categories”—“Conservation High” and “traditional school”—included codes that highlighted the data clip’s character. Most of these categories are commonsensical. Here are a few examples: “when I got there,” “small groups,” “too large” (classrooms or schools), “other’s expectations,” “impersonal experiences,” “role of choice,” “competition,” “what I learned,” “being who you are/real.” Let me give an example of how I applied some of these codes. My first code, “when I got there,” highlights aspects of every participant’s description of their introductory experiences at Conservation High and public high school, if they chose to share that. The codes in

quotation marks demonstrate how I coded the following circumstance: an initial school experience that was “impersonal,” in a “too large” school, where they describe how they “dropped out” of “traditional school” because of “raced” and “gendered interactions” that included being labeled as someone “at-risk” as a marker of identity.

I constructed multiple themes from these data. The most salient were narrowed down and became selected for each chapter. I learned that codes that were not used very often should be reconsidered for their relevance. The theme for Chapter 4 reflects how students negotiated and compared their differing school experiences interacting with school rules, school and classroom size, and inclusive/exclusive educational environments. “School comparison” includes every instance of a participant describing their experience at Conservation High in relationship to any other school experience they had. This code was especially useful because such codes as “personal problems,” “getting to know others,” “emotions,” “what I learned,” or “acting out” could be selected with “school comparison” for the comparative qualities.

As I read this data, I saw that my participants used a relational lens to negotiate their place in their school community, and they evaluated school rules and structures based upon that frame of reference. The “getting muddy” code was particularly useful. It was here that I began to see how the girls negotiated relationships under the regulative impetus of constructions of femininity in a dirty, seemingly anti-feminine context. Thus, differing forms and negotiations of relational regulation became the theme of Chapter 4. As a point of interest, at no time did I have a “relational regulation,” the topic of Chapter 4, as a “sociological analysis code.” The idea that participants’ saw that their relationships were regulated in multiple ways was a primary theme within “school

comparison,” which often included data bits also coded “personal problems,” “too large” population, “fitting in,” “dropping in,” and “emotions.” Students negotiated their school life through a relational lens. These multiple codes had a relational flavor. There were relational codes that had to do with teachers, for example: “teachers and exclusion/inclusion,” “teachers and attention,” “teachers and bonding,” and “teachers and curriculum.” Codes for peers included “friendship,” “testing each other (hazing),” “struggle/conflicts,” “respect,” “acceptance,” “like family,” “inclusion,” “exclusion,” “discrimination,” “relational examples” (rather than abstracts statements), and “emotions,” such as anger, caring, love, trust, and empathy. I incorporated sociological coding categories. These included “social construction,” “contradictions,” “power relations,” “performance,” “individualism,” “culture,” “making community,” “identity representation,” “conservationism,” “knowledge,” “power,” “regulating youth,” “school ideology,” “hidden curriculum,” “discipline,” and “popular culture.”

“Being real,” a form of cultural capital at Conservation High, was constructed as the opposite of “being a poser.” This was a central topic when students compared their public school and CHS experiences, and it is integral to each data chapter. However, such talk also tended to refer also to negotiating identity (e.g., “being real”) and relationships within different school structures. Almost all codes were related to “being real.”

I began to notice descriptions of “lessons learned” in each school context, public and alternative. The “being real” narratives tended to have multiple complex codes that, when I looked at them from a perspective of learning, I noticed themes that brought many of those codes together. Many codes pointed to a theme of negotiating relational regulations that became Chapter 4. I had codes that highlighted aspects of this category of

analysis, such as “too many people” (school or classroom environment was too large),” “being fake,” “being real,” “femininity,” “being muddy,” and “school comparison.” When taken together, these codes pointed to experiences of how relationships and identity were regulated. A prevalent theme was the content and form of their school transition: their experience being a new student at Conservation High, “getting to know others” at CHS, and becoming a “family.” The themes that emerged when sorting through these two codes became the focus of Chapter 5. I originally wrote the chapter on “being real” and “being who you are,” but then realized that there needed to be a description of what “family” meant to participants first. This became Chapter 5, whereas the identity codes and school comparison ultimately became the themes of Chapter 6.

Participants’ Demographics

Here I describe demographic characteristics of Conservation High School and the two cities from which most CHS students came. Then I describe key characteristics of Conservation High’s student body and offer biographic sketches of each informant. I include information that I did not request but which was volunteered. This is important because participants made meaning of their social locations. Other people in their lives, such as friends, parents, and teachers, also made meaning of participants’ social locations.

Table 1

“Two Cities” Demographics

Two Cities Demographics	Population (rounded to nearest percent)
Two Cities (combined)	200,000
Caucasian	88%

African-American	1%
Latino/Hispanic	5–7%
Asian	4%
American Indian	1%
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	0.3%
Persons reporting 2 or more races	3%
Persons living below poverty line	18%

Note: U.S. Census Bureau data, 2000.

“Two Cities” includes two medium-size cities. One, the third largest city in the state, is primarily a “university town.” The other, “Mill Town,” formerly the home of multiple wood-pulp mills and now housing just a couple, is one-third the size of “university town.” Both cities are pervasively Caucasian, with 12 percent reporting non-white race.

The following demographics are from the 1998–2000 school years and describe the demographics that students reported in their interviews. I used self-identification, like the U.S. Census Bureau’s reporting above. Biracial students are reported under both of their racial origins. Participants self-reported their racial and ethnic heritage. The labels *white* and *Caucasian* are used interchangeably; Caucasian and Native American are used when participants did not describe their European ethnicity or tribal affiliation.

Table 2

Demographics of Participants’ Racial/Ethnic Identification

Identified as white only	42%	5	Amelia, Marissa, Deirdre, Crystal, Fern
African-American	0%	0	
Latino/Mexican/Spanish	25%	3	Becka, Carmen, Crystal
Asian-American	0%	0	
American Indian/Native-American	25%	3	Anáwaké, Lily, Helen
Pacific Islander (Guamanian)	8%	1	Autumn Moon
Non-white, 2nd-Generation Russian	8%	1	China
Identifies as biracial or a person of color	50%	6	Anáwaké, Helen, Carmen, Becka, Lily, Autumn Moon
Identifies as a person of color	33%	4	Carmen, Becka, Helen, Autumn Moon
Identifies as biracial person	42%	5	Anáwaké, Carmen, Becka, Lily, Autumn

Jewish ancestry	16%	2	Moon
Participant lived with a parent or grandparent of color	16%	2	Amelia, Crystal
Identifies as a person of color/ biracial and lives with white parent or others	33%	4	Anáwaké, Helen Autumn Moon, Becka, Carmen, Lily

Participant pseudonym	Racial/ethnic description and how they identify
Amelia	Cherokee, Blackfoot, Gypsy, Irish-American, Jewish. Identifies as “white trash.”
Anáwaké	Cherokee, Chickasaw, Irish-American. Identifies as biracial.
Autumn Moon	Guamanian, Irish-American. Identifies as biracial and person of color.
Becka	Mexican, Caucasian. Identifies as biracial and person of color.
Carmen	Mexican, Caucasian. Identifies as biracial and person of color.
China	First-generation Russian. Identifies as Russian (non-white).
Crystal	Adoptive parents: Spanish, Italian, Jewish. Identifies as white, Jewish, and Spanish.
Deirdre	Irish-American. Identifies as white.
Fern	Italian-American. Identifies as white.
Helen	Tlingit, Irish-American. Identifies as “Indian.”
Lily	Irish, Choctaw. Identifies as biracial.
Marissa	Irish, Norwegian, Native American; mother’s ethnicity unknown. Identifies as white.

In general, these demographics are consistent with those of students school-wide. There seems to be a significant difference between the two cities’ census data, which reports 88 percent Caucasian, and participants’ self-identification as 42 percent white and 50 percent biracial/people of color. This may reflect national trends in which young people of color are disproportionately channeled into alternative schools (Rogers, 2003). Two African-American male students (5 percent) attended Conservation High during the 1999–2000 school year, similar to the percentage of African-Americans within the two cities. Two students with Native American ancestry identified themselves as white (Amelia and Marissa). All biracial students considered themselves part white, making the graph above somewhat easier to read. Lily and Anáwaké identified as biracial and, as light-shinned

women, did not identify as people of color.

Many biracial students had tenuous relationships with their communities of color. Only Anáwaké and Lily lived with their parent of color, both living with their Native American and Caucasian-American mothers. In this respect, Helen stands out, in that she highly identified as Tlingit Indian only, while her father is Caucasian. She lived with her mother as a child and her maternal grandmother during her time at CHS. All other biracial participants grew up in primarily Caucasian households. This information is likely to impact themes about the complicated nature of family and community, of which race and ethnicity are a part. Two participants (Amelia and Marissa) identified as white, while also having Native American ancestry.

While it may be argued that “race” is socially constructed, having no objective meaning (Winant, 2004; Obach, 1999), it is nonetheless lived as real, with material consequences (Fine, et al., 2004b). With regard to how race, class, and gender are negotiated by participants, many other studies reflect on the interaction between particular groups of young people with varying degrees of segregation (see, for example, Perry, 2002; Lutrell, 2000; Weiler, 2000; Weis, 2004). Particular or exclusive racial, ethnic, classed, and gendered groupings are not as evident in small classrooms with regular interaction between all students, making such comparison a challenge. First and quite importantly, Conservation High had only 44 students, and 11 students in each, somewhat gender-balanced, class, called a “crew.” While, for example, Amelia discussed how a group of Mexican-American girls always walked down the halls arm-in-arm, wore purple, and called themselves “The Bitches,” at Flats High, she reports that CHS did not have cliques because of its size.

Classes/crews at Conservation High were not large enough to provide data on racial and ethnic-related social groupings. However, that does not mean racial or cultural difference was absent, despite the fact that a majority of students passed as being or seeming Caucasian. Less than half of each crew was Latino or Hispanic in origin. Each crew varied in composition; while there may have been four Latino students in one crew, the average was two or three students in each crew. There were one or two African-American students in the school (proportionate to African-Americans in this community). This composition is significantly more “of color” than the composition of the two-cities area, according to the U.S. Census Bureau data for 2000. The U.S. Census Bureau’s website (<http://www.census.gov>) shows that there was very little change in racial and ethnic composition of the two cities between 1990 and 2000.

Other Participants’ Demographics

The following information was shared as a part of the interview process, or I learned it as an administrator based on individual conversations. I did not specifically survey for this data; therefore, it should be evaluated as a minimum rather than an accurate description of all participants.

Table 3

Other Participants’ Demographics

Participants qualified for fee/reduced lunch program	84%
CHS: Percent of students who qualified for free/reduced lunch program	83%
Labeled “special education”	33%
Labeled “learning disabled” by school psychologist	25%
Labeled “emotionally disturbed” by school psychologist	16%
Juvenile “crime” record	50%
Parent who has been addicted to alcohol or illegal drugs	42%

Parent who has been incarcerated on illegal drug charges	16%
Parent who has been homeless	16%
Parent who committed suicide	8%
Spent significant time during childhood raising siblings	25%
Lived away from one or both parents during CHS attendance	58%

This group of students seemed to be highly mobile, which may be an aspect of their class status. However, it may also be that young people whose families move residences frequently are more likely to end up in alternative schools. Either way, seven out of 12 participants lived away from one or both parents during their attendance at Conservation High. I write about these circumstances because I am concerned about the students' need for community and believe that many would benefit from less frequent moving, more stability, and even a fictive community or "kinship" (Fordham, 1996, p. 32). Further, these experiences have a bearing on how participants see their experience in school.

A high percentage of students and participants lived below the federal poverty line and qualified for free or reduced-cost lunch. Poverty is considered by psychologists to often increase stress in people's everyday lives (Brown, 2008). Further, participants' access to particular opportunities, like medical and psychological services, transportation, and extracurricular activities, was limited. Thirty-three percent of participants, similar to that of Conservation High students as a whole, were identified as special education students, having an active Individualized Education Plan. This is about double the average (14 percent) for the public school districts from which CHS drew. Half, according to participants, had a juvenile crime record. Most of these offenses were nonviolent crimes such as Criminal Trespassing, Minor in Possession, or Curfew Violation.

I thought about how participants' lives contained a high proportion of difficult

experiences compared to those who stayed in school. For example, once, when doing an exercise in class, I asked students to stand up (if they felt comfortable) if they had witnessed or experienced physical or sexual abuse. Almost every student among 22 stood. Then we discussed what this might mean to them and about the environment in which they live. This made an impression on me. In the above list, participants had parents who had been homeless, incarcerated, addicted to drugs, or committed suicide. When researchers label such experiences “risk factors,” many find higher rates among students in alternative schools (Lehr et al., 2009). Alternative schools are often seen as schools for students with academic, social, legal, economic, or mental health problems (Becker, 2010).

Chapter 4: School Relationships and Regulation

“In regular high school, nobody knows your name.”

— Marissa

I knew things about [my peers at Conservation High School] that I didn't want to know.

— Helen

What is it like to go to a high school where nobody (or almost nobody) knows your name? And then to go to an alternative school and be with your classmates at all times, so much so, you know “things” about your peers you “didn't want to know”? This chapter discusses how participants made sense of their experiences at public high school and at Conservation High in terms of the social, and interpersonal, and professional relationships they had at each site. It is *their* “relational” reading of my questions about school success and failure that demonstrates the priority they placed on viewing their worlds relationally and the poignant challenges that that worldview entails. I noticed that when participants reflected upon their experiences in public school and at Conservation High, they described different ways in which their interpersonal relationships were regulated, i.e., managed, inhibited, encouraged, or abandoned. I use the term “relational” to summarize the interpersonal contact, be it informal or professional, between peers and teachers. This can include engaging in a conversation, arguing, sharing information, communicating empathy, sharing a joke, or performing a task to help someone else. A collective assumption of the phrase “knowing each other” is that each person in the relationship has a sense that the other person's worldview and behavior are predictable.

In analyzing participants' talk, I seek to understand how some of the informants in this study negotiated what they saw as school-based management of themselves, their

identity, and their means of forming relationships, for example, their communication with each other as a basis for developing a relationship. What kind of relationships do students develop when placed in a school setting that actively encourages the development of interpersonal relationships? Participants talked about how their relationships were regulated in public school differently than at CHS. In the following pages I first review how participants identify the forms the forms of relational regulation that students “complain” about because it limited their relationships at public school. I have categorized these forms, which exist at both schools, into “institutionalized” and “informal” structures. I wondered, *How aware are informants of institutionalized regulations and informal regulations as organizers of their relationships in school?*

“Institutionalized regulations” are the physical and organizational arrangements that structure the public education setting, such as school size, schedules, subject-driven classes, and policies, that are often taken for granted. Many participants say that the organization of the daily schedule in public school, with limited time for hall passing, shifting class composition, and official rules about being quiet, created the conditions where they could not get to know their peers and teachers. Relationship. These are the kind of conditions that I will be exploring in this chapter.

Next, I explore “informal regulations,” or ways participants say they and the very conditions of their relationships were managed. “Informal regulation” refers to the second kind of relational structure I review, which includes behavioral, emotional, expressive, circumstantial, and representational (e.g. femininity) prescriptions that impacted participants’ intrapersonal (self) and interpersonal (others) relationships. Participants explained that they endured negative consequences for not fulfilling particular

expectations that are not a part of official school policy or rules. Many participants say that they were pushed to portray an inaccurate image of themselves to simplify the social organization or for others' consumption. For example, one participant says that the social organization of the school and school policies catered to students who lived with their custodial parents. From her perspective, the school-home dichotomy falsely categorized her life. Such informal structures are the kind of relational regulation that I explore in the second section.

At CHS, participants had few complaints about the relational structure itself. To locate their awareness of CHS's relational structure, the last section highlights their stories about the quality of relationships they had there and identifies relational structures within their assumptions. I discuss themes of "getting to know you," "arguing and nit-picking," "schooling," and "racism" to demonstrate what was made out of that relational structure. To summarize, in this chapter I examine how informants talk about interpersonal relationships as central to their experience and identity in school, and ultimately, to their school completion.

The three sections of this chapter address how the girls express awareness of:

1. School Structures and Relationships: the institutionalized management of public school space, organization, noise, and time, often as compared with CHS's structure;
2. "My Life at School": the regulation of expression, representation, and evaluation, and informal structures and practices that manage behavior, emotions, and representation;

3. Making an “Us” at CHS: Family, Tension and Difference: the relational regulations at CHS and how participants negotiated them.

School Structures and Relationships

In this section, I focus on youth’s awareness of institutionalized regulators of school-based interpersonal relationships, such as school size, timing, school space, noise levels, emotions, organization, and the lack of space for other needs that are mentioned in the text. The structures include school size, school/classroom organization, and the regulation of (quiet) individual work, as well as time and relationship development. These commonly used structures are often seen as legitimate regulators of young people’s movements. I put these well-established school structures at the center of my inquiry to highlight participants’ resistance to the structures and complexity of public schooling. I am interested in how young people talk about the effects of these school structures in view of their widespread institutionalization.

When informants answered that question in terms of how life circumstances or perceived school needs did not suit school procedures, they often demonstrated that they were “hungry for an ‘us,’” as Fine and Macpherson (1992) write. They were eager to participate in and co-construct a more personal relational culture. In order to describe that feeling, they shared experiences that restricted them from developing an “us,” as well as experiences of being regulated, marginalized, and limited. That contrast became the foundation of this chapter.

When asked about what worked and what did not work for participants in both of their school experiences, participants most frequently acknowledged the relationships they were (and were not) able to make in both schools. They described limitations to

relational opportunities as primary, rather than, say, relations across particular barriers such as race, class, or gender.

School size. Prior to enrollment at CHS, participants attended six primarily Caucasian public high schools with enrollments averaging approximately 3,000 students each. How did participants see their interpersonal relational possibilities in relation to school size? Large school size was a common topic that came out of my questions about differences between their experiences in public high school and those in CHS.

As noted in the epigraph that begins this chapter, Marissa says that in high school “nobody knows your name.” The meaning she made of that revealed what kind of interpersonal relationships she saw as (im)possible in particular school environments. Possibly her inference is reflected in Levine’s (2008) article titled, “A Classroom Community: Where Everybody Knows Your Name.” Levine advocates for concrete ways to promote a sense of community, inclusion, and belonging into school classrooms. A school where “nobody knows your name” is not a construction that educational researchers support. Marissa’s experience highlights the needs of some young people to engage in facilitated exercises that assist youth to get to know each other within the classroom.

Most participants compared the different school sizes, without any specific prompting about size from my questions. School size was clearly on the forefront of their minds.

Amelia: Flats High was too big. It is *huge!* . . . That is the main reason I didn’t like it. It is just huge. And the class sizes were too big.

Students who felt like Amelia may feel they are being “processed” because of the sheer

number of other students. Also common were accounts of how difficult it was for many to get to know others or even just a few students in a large school environment. Almost every participant said that their public high school was too large for them. Due to large class sizes, their questions often went unanswered, and other students were distracting for them and their teachers. Class size made a big difference for Fern:

Fern: You don't learn nearly as much when there is, like, 50 kids in the classroom instead of like ten, which means way less one-on-one [attention]. Like, opinions don't get expressed. I don't know. It is really hard.

Michelle: What is really hard?

Fern: It is just, like, it is really, really hard to be heard when there is so many people. It seems like they don't listen and they don't care. I am sure that that is not true of the whole but . . . it feels like that.

Not being "listened to" is a relative of not being cared for. Most of the young women at CHS either passively became invisible by dropping out or sleeping during classes at their former schools, or became very visible, like Fern, who argued with teachers.

Deirdre looks at friendships as inversely related to school size.

Deirdre: I have more friends [at CHS] than I did at my other schools. I was at North for over a year. There is like a thousand kids there! I know more [people at CHS]. They're more judging at River High School.

Deirdre points out a relational irony of the large/small high school dichotomy. She had more friends in a 44-student school than in the 3,000-student [correction] school she had attended. She also constructs another dichotomy: that public school culture was

more “judging” than the culture at CHS, a topic other participants thought was related to the large number of students too.

All participants but Helen says that not being able to get to know others in their public high schools made their experience there difficult and alienating. Despite the struggle, many still had friends or acquaintances. Helen, a Tlingit Indian, did not expect to fit in. She found friends in both environments. Lily’s story demonstrates how large school size compounded her struggle as a shy impoverished biracial student at predominantly white upper- and middle-class Hills High who needed facilitated opportunities to develop social skills:

Lily: I think that the most important part about CHS is the small groups it gives people. I mean, when I went to Hills there was *so* many people and *so* large classes that it didn’t really give me any social time. [At Hills] I was *really* focused on my studies and I really didn’t socialize at all. I didn’t have any friends. I really didn’t hang out with anybody. When I came here, I still had that “stay in the book, don’t talk to anybody” kind of like really quiet, really timid. It forced me to come out of the shell and just kind of like, there was one student, [Marissa], who was really, really persistent that taught me. She really likes to talk and be friends with everyone.

Lily used her small school experience at CHS to make sense of her discomfort in public high school. For her, the small groups and another persistent student, Marissa, offered her those opportunities. At first glance it seems Lily was talking about social opportunities that were smooth. While small school size was promoted by all students as a significant step, CHS was not socially “easy,” nor was it necessarily a nonalienating

experience for Lily:

Michelle: Why do you think you were so focused on being by yourself [at CHS]?

Where did that come from?

Lily: I don't think it was that I was focused on being by myself. It was just that I didn't have the skills to socialize, so that I became that. I was still in that shell. I was still, I think I kind of felt that I wasn't in that [CHS] circle yet. Like people thought I was just a goody-goody and didn't want to hang out with me.

Lily thought about other CHS students:

Lily: They just figured, you know, you can't be any fun to hang out with. So but it was also like, being alone there was also like my mental space. You know it was a shock going from nothing to 24/7 [of being around my crew for five weeks straight].

At first she feared engaging with other students whom she witnessed arguing. She reflects:

Lily: I learned that it doesn't really matter. You don't have to get involved. If two of your best friends are fighting with each other, you can just step back and be friends with both of them and not be in the conflict. Um. You can just brush stuff off. Even if you get into a fight with somebody you can just brush it off. That is really the biggest thing that I learned. No matter what happens you can just go "oh well. It is going to happen so you might as well accept it." I learned to open up more and talk about who I was and I don't have to have barriers and make up fake images of myself. I don't have to . . . I can just be myself. I don't have to hide it

and wonder what other people think of me. I can just be myself and, if they don't like who I am, that is not my fault.

For Lily, the large school environment meant barely talking to anyone. Yet the small school size presented a significant challenge: developing the skills to socialize with others, ones that wanted to get to know her. In the small group environment, she stated that she developed skills that helped her learn how to be with 10 other classmates. In that situation she negotiated being dismissed by some as a “goody-goody,” being concerned about what others thought of her, and witnessing her friends have disagreements. To put the seeming contradiction together, the gift of CHS was the small groups where she experienced a difficult learning process. The small school size in itself did not bring Lily these lessons. She had to learn them herself. Learning the lessons of taking “mental space” and “brushing it off” did not happen in the large school environment. Her description also highlights her view of CHS culture, that to gain acceptance she *had* to express her “rebel” self. I believe that some students saw Lily as an impostor, as an academically successful student. They probably did not have the frame of reference to interpret Lily's experience until they got to know her.

The impersonal climate or lack of relationships that Amelia, Lily, and Deirdre perceived in public school contrasts with the social and psychological constructions of adolescents as being intensely social (Lesko, 2000). In fact, these participants seem to have had few relationships in public school that they found meaningful, and they became aware of potential institutional limitations.

School size is not just a hot topic for participants, but also among school administrators and educational researchers. According to Lee, et al. (2000) high school

size

is currently the subject of intense discussion with a larger reform agenda. Most of these discussions advocate making high schools smaller than they are. However, there is little research grounding the debate about the ideal size of a high school. Neither is there much agreement about the outcomes of which the effects of size should be measured nor about the mechanisms through which size might translate into effects on students and teachers. . . . Sociological research on school size suggests that small schools should have at least two advantages over large schools: relationships among school members are more personal and the schools offer a narrow curriculum (typically confined to academic courses). Large schools are said to be impersonal and bureaucratic. (pp. 147–48)

School size was a significant factor in participants' awareness concerning the choices and circumstances that resulted in their transition to Conservation High. Participants generally confirmed the difference between the impersonal climate of their large school and the personal climate of their small school. Rumberger and Thomas (2000) studied the relationship between the number of high school students that drop out of high school and demographic features, including school size. In their study, they found that dropout rates were higher in large schools, urban schools, and public schools, when school demographic composition, resources, attendance, and student measures for academic and social risk were accounted for. Rumberger (1995) found that students who went to large middle schools were more likely to drop out of high school during their first two years. Researchers were aware of the relationship of school size to leaving high school without a diploma when these particular students attended high school. These

students may have struggled because they required further “skills” to negotiate the cultural and structural organization. Importantly, it is clarified here that they were also aware of the relationship between dropping out and large school size.⁵ This section has offered examples of informants’ awareness of relationally regulative practices associated with school size as a structural feature of their schools. Such an awareness can contribute to the identification of students who are unhappy with the organization of school space and may need assistance either in negotiating that space or transferring to a smaller school.

Classroom organization and the regulation of quiet individual work. How aware were participants of the impact of the organization of class composition (shifting or consistent) and relational regulations designed to bring about “quiet, on-task behavior”?

Carmen answered a question here that I did not ask.

Michelle: Please talk about what it was like being on your crews.

Carmen: Just because we were so connected. Like when we were in kindergarten, they had good ideas. [Teachers] were like, “These are the people you are going to stay with all the time. Get to know them and mingle with them,” and, “I am your teacher and this is your homeroom, and we’re going to do these things and these people will always be there.” They had a good idea then. And then all of a sudden you get older. It is like, “No, you have to be alone, like be with yourself. Oh, here is your schedule, and it is different from all your friends. You won’t know anyone

⁵ As a side note, I question the legitimacy of the skills needed to negotiate such a large social organization—they are not the same skills needed to negotiate organizations and society. What might the majority of the population have to learn as a product of large schools that the minority of the population in small schools may contribute to the social-cultural relationships we see in society? Small schools have the *potential* of offering the skills needs to negotiate more personal organizational relationships.

when you get there and be by yourself and do your own work.” It is totally not connected. But when you are in a crew [at CHS], it is like the same as when you were in kindergarten. Like these are the people you are going to be with, and these people are going to look after you and you will look after them, and like it gives you a sense of security and that someone’s really paying attention. It is way different. Like you can’t. . . . *There is nothing in regular school to compare it to, to being on a crew in our school. It is so much different.*

Note that Carmen heard my question, as if I had asked, “How might the organization of schooling isolate or connect students?” The hidden curriculum of classroom composition and connection taught Carmen that she had to learn to “be alone.” She describes how kindergarten and Conservation High keep students connected. In contrast, public school organization disconnects students through a changing cohort of classmates, schedules, independent work, and no one looking after them, which, she implies, also made her feel unsafe. For Carmen, the impetus for school organization should be about relational accountability and safety. China agrees about the relationally restrictive quality of shifting class composition:

China: When you are at [traditional] high school, you have classes with all different people. Then the teachers are so busy, work, work, work. You never get the chance to socialize with the people in your class at that time. So, you can [say], “There goes that person [in my class],” but you don’t know what they like. You don’t know them. At CHS you are with them all the time and you can talk, like when you are finished with your [academic] work. In the field, you can work

and talk. You get to, like, socialize while you are working and in the van ride there.

China adds to the relationship-limiting equation a description of overt aspects of classroom structure: the rigid organization of time, the prohibition against talking, and a perpetual requirement for on-task behavior. It's not on-task behavior that is the problem, but the isolation it creates on a regular basis in the absence of relational pedagogies. China contrasts the ways in which student talk was managed in the two different school settings. On the one hand, the composition of students in each class changed; teachers were busy and so were the students. This organization meant that China "didn't know them." On the other hand, China knew her peers at CHS because "you are with them all the time and you can talk" when you work in the field and in class.

Becka expresses a similar idea by contrasting the teacher as "being about work" to "talking to teachers and getting to know them."

Becka: When you were working at [CHS], you still could talk. When you were out in the field, you could talk and look and get to know each other while you are working. It is like a one-on-one with teachers too. You get to know them too as their selves too, not as a teacher, but as a friend. And at regular schools you can't just talk to the teachers, you know? Because they are all about work. At [CHS] teachers are really cool. They would talk to you about stuff. If you had a problem at home, you could talk to them about it. They would be there to listen to you. But like at my other school, I don't think you can do that. The teachers at [CHS] they care, they are there for you. They are there one-on-one and that is what I like about the teachers there. At regular high schools they were never there for me.

That is what I really loved about teachers at [CHS] because they were always there for you whenever you needed them.

Becka decided that the teachers who talk and listen are the ones who care. Becka did not interpret teachers' efforts at teaching her as care, due to a classroom context that siphoned off opportunities to communicate about each others' lives. Croninger and Lee (2001) studied the association between forms of social capital in the relationships between teachers and students and the likelihood of dropping out of high school. They state that "for socially (vs. academically) at-risk students, benefits are almost exclusively linked to a single form of social capital—*student-teacher talks*—whereas students from socially advantaged backgrounds benefit most from student-teacher relations" (pp. 565). They found that the "students with low social capital have a higher probability of dropping out than students with high social capital, regardless of their risk status . . . the greater students' access to teacher-based social capital, the greater the probability that they will complete high school" (p. 568). The fact of student-teacher communication, independent of what the communication is *about*, is crucial to retaining students.

In Croninger and Lee's (2001) terms, teachers in Becka and China's experience scored low on "student-teacher talks" criteria. Trying to understand the lack of relationships with traditional high school teachers, Becka and China blame teachers' enforcement of rules of "work" and silence, and a failure to share who they are. Those rules may contrast with Latina cultural expectations of relational reciprocity. These students made sense of shifting class composition, regulations about talking, and the impact of less teacher attention in large classes. Participants learned to compare what they value about relationship opportunities.

Regulating time. While researchers suggest that infrastructural elements such as time organization are an “invisible part of the background of other kinds of work” (Nespor, Hicks, & Hall, 2008; Star, 1999), participants were clearly aware of it as an organizing principle of school relations.

Helen: Like, I met my best friends there [at CHS], people you can always trust. You can't find that in regular school because you don't really have the time to get that intimate.

Helen believed that she could not find best friends in a traditional school setting because students did not receive the time with each other to build friendships that have trust.

Becka: At [public] schools, you don't have the time to get to know one another because you are always racing to other classes. You are always on the go. You can't talk unless you are on your break. When I went to a bigger school I only talked to two or three people. You don't get to have a family connection with your friends at school [like at CHS].

Becka highlights the bodily regulation. For her, the time and talk management of public school limited the opportunities to develop a “family connection” with peers at public school. While both school days begin and end at the same time, Becka had time in a small school to know people. In light of Lee and Burkam's study of 3,840 students at 190 schools where they found that “students stay in school when social relationships with their teachers are positive” (p. 386), it is paramount that there be time and opportunities to *have* that positive relationship. Nespor, Hicks, and Hall (2008) describe

what makes such time-based distinctions particularly effective is that . . .

reckoning systems and time categories are congealed in material environments and artifacts and woven integrally into key organizational processes. They are, in short, “infrastructural” elements of practice—“invisible, part of the background of other kinds of work” (Star, 1999, p. 380)—including constitutive activities such as communication with parents and other school personnel, coordination of curriculum across classrooms and schools and the monitoring and control of pupils. (p. 375)

For Helen and Becka, there was not enough time. The structure of, as Becka put it, “always being on the go” left her and Helen unable to focus on the present. Chodron (2005) noticed that “as long as you are oriented to the future, you can never just relax into what you already have and already are.” I suspect that this is what Becka implies by “always on the go.” Underlying the girls’ discourse are sophisticated concepts like attachment and intimacy that presuppose a kind or depth of relationship that hinges on time and opportunity for communication.

In the next example, Lily’s analysis contrasts the rigid compartmentalization of the traditional school schedule with the relationally-inclusive content approach at CHS:

Lily: [Public school] is always taught in blocks of time. It is like now it is time for math and now it is time for English. It is like when you are on that subject, you are on that subject. [CHS] combined the whole aspect of how you could use math and science and English in math and it kind of combined it all. And if you weren’t done with a subject you wanted to incorporate in the subject that was next, that was fine. It wasn’t like, “Oh, we can’t talk about that now.” Like about emotions. They [teachers at CHS] had it mixed in like with math and English. . . . It would

just become a roundabout of your education. It would just be included in it. It wouldn't be this separate entity that existed. It would just be included in your everyday life.

Here Lily opens the discussion of how personal experiences, like emotions, were separated out of her overall public school experience—the topic of the next section. At CHS, subject matter borders included the relationships between academic subjects and “emotions.” At her previous high school, the structuring of time and subject matter and the teachers’ insistence on conforming to that structure, seemed to drain the material of relevance to her everyday life—especially something as personal as emotions. The contrasting experience of CHS’s regulation of time is important here because the time-framed format within the boundaries of the school building were very similar to the amount of time spent in subject-driven classrooms in public high schools. Just as in traditional high school, CHS students crossed from one classroom into the hallway and into another classroom for their state-required “seat-hours” in subject-driven classes.

This next set of participants’ narratives highlights their experience of a similar time format in CHS’s classrooms and fieldwork. I begin with participants’ awareness of how the structure of CHS encourages—possibly forces—opportunities to learn to “deal with each other” and, out of those semistructured opportunities, develop relationships.

Lily: At [Conservation High], you *dealt* with your peers!

Helen: At [Conservation High], you are with them [your classmates] 24/7. You are up each others’ asses.

The context for the above statement from Lily includes her efforts to get some

space to herself during Spike. There she spent time by herself in the van. Lily felt put in the position to deal continually with her peers. This transition was both difficult and beneficial for her. Time-related isolation is not exclusively a teacher-directed phenomenon. Fern acknowledged that some students in public high school actively participate in their own protected isolation, an option not available at CHS, even for Lily.

Fern: You are constantly with these people [at CHS] and you really get to know them. Like you are with them for pretty much the whole entire day, eight hours. You will be going on camping trips and stuff, which completely gives you time to get to know your peers. And then I think relationships grow from there and then you all kind of just click. I think it is really cool because you can go there and feel like completely comfortable with anything. If you need someone to like cry on their shoulder, someone is going to be there.

Michelle: How is that different from traditional school?

Fern: Definitely the people factor. [In public school] you don't get to know everyone. You are never going to know everyone. You don't want to know everyone. A lot of people solo themselves out to not get to know anyone. It is different. . . . You just have more of an opportunity to be with each other [at CHS].

For Fern it isn't about segregation per se; it is about opportunities that are organized by time and the form of interdependence that tasks generate. Fern shows how opportunities are used in that she has time in school *together*. Sapon-Shevin (2008) focuses upon the commitment of schools to build community, teach positive social skills, and maintain a dialogue about inclusive social justice. Certainly, cooperative and

collaborative teaching strategies are foundational for building classroom community.

Sapon-Shevin (1994) asks us to consider: “How do we make sure that all students within cooperative learning groups experience this inclusion and acceptance?” (p. 190). In light of the Columbine shooting, scholars like Sexton-Radek (2005) take seriously evaluating the hostile social environments in schools and the expressions and consequences of it, while Aronson (2000) investigates teaching compassion there.

The cooperative paradigm encouraged Lily, as a student who “soloed herself out,” to learn “not [to] hide anymore” and deal with people, as uncomfortable as that was for her. Swenson and Strough’s (2008) findings are interesting here. They found that when high school students are paired for collaborative work, the only factor that predicted poor academic performance was the presence of conflict during group work. Factors such as gender, or whether or not the group members were friends, did not have as noticeable an effect on performance as did in-group conflict. However, this study was conducted in a climate where conflict resolution was *not* a typical aspect of group work. Zhang (1994) writes that a “collaborative learning approach to conflict resolution increased social support and decreased victimization for high school students. These changes in a student’s interpersonal relationships led to high self-esteem, more positive attitudes toward life, less depression and anxiety, and enhanced internal locus of control, which in turn contributed to greater academic achievement” (p. 99). Beyond the school’s efforts to offer collaborative opportunities, Fern highlights that students chose to use their time developing relationships. Informants needed institutional structures in which to develop relationships and community where they could develop relationships and attachments, resolve conflicts when they arose, and feel safe to be themselves.

Summary. My informants believed that school structures that organized their movements in the name of education challenged their ability to navigate large school environments. This was especially true for students with weaker social skills who were put at a disadvantage in the large school environment. Institutionalized structures functioned differently and complexly for individual participants; that is, not every informant brought up the same structures. Participants named institutionalized structures such as school size, the organization of the classroom, and its content and timing. They consistently described ways such institutionalized structures regulated the opportunities they had to get to know one another and their teachers, and they revealed their awareness of the *context* in which that *could* or did happen at Conservation High. Conservation High's structure offered students with weaker social skills, like Lily, opportunities to learn them. A few participants also looked at how their own behavior changed from school to school; they were less likely to talk or listen and were "more judging" of others in the large school environment. They noted challenges in getting teachers' attention in large schools with large classrooms; they felt isolated, judged, and confused about how to find a social place for themselves in such a large population. They experienced timed-independent learning strategies and "on-task" behavioral expectations that constrained their ability to get to know others.

One aspect of their experience that I am interested in is how their words demonstrate their resistance, especially to the seemingly "determined" quality of such structures as school size or schedule. Such resistance might be seen in the following examples:

- Lily did not talk to others at her public high school. She self-imposed her own isolation at Conservation High out of a belief that she needed to hide. With encouragement to “come out of her shell,” she states that she had to learn how to deal with others in both school environments.
- Carmen did not feel a “sense of security” and “safety” in public school because when she needed teachers to listen to her distress, they marginalized her experience to the bathroom and nurse’s office. Carmen *feels* the “power,” in Megan Boler’s (1999) terms, of her own interest to feel “safe” and “secure.”
- Some youth dropped out to avert large school size and graduate from a small alternative high school.

Pace and Hemmings (2007) found that certain “strategies” are used as a resource for social control:

Strategies are often used to strengthen or substitute for authority. One of them is the *arrangement of the classroom situation*. Teachers have the prerogative to decide the content and structure of their classes, the physical setup, and the rules and routines (p. 8).

School size, classroom organization, and time regulations are aspects of the structure of schooling, which can also function as a resource for social control that seems so “inevitable” that some students (with or without the skills to negotiate it) may choose to leave school entirely. In addition, Metz (1978) notes that “routines confidently established, take on an air of inevitability [as] students come to see them as an inherent part of school” (p. 98). In practice, participants recognized the authoritative “air of inevitability” of institutionalized structures and classroom and curricular organization. Nespor, Hicks, and Hall (2008) describe how

temporal “reference points” are not isolated events but instead locations on continua. . . . Whatever the continua, when the “events to be located” are critical accomplishments or transitions in children’s lives such systems become powerful constraints on the definition of abilities and potential, and constitutive of the children’s social identities within and beyond the school. Something as basic as the beginning and ending times of the “school day,” for example, produce boundaries which segregate performances inside the time frame from performances outside it.” (p. 374) [See also Gandara, 2000.]

When it came to school size and timing, for example, few participants challenged the school structures—they seemed unchangeable. But this does not mean that they were not aware of them. In fact, *they* complained about these topics. Participants construct identity in relationships as well as against markers of “lack of relationships.”

The structures of school size, timing, and talking are seen as important relational regulators of social networks at school. The participants resisted, at least verbally, the ways these institutionalized structures impacted the social organization of their public school experience. The small school environment made it easier for them to negotiate such forms of social management. Lee and Burkam (2003) describe the concept of “social capital” and its role in school success. They note that

From the perspective of social capital, differences in the probability of dropping out can be explained by differences in the quality of the social networks that comprise a student’s interactions with teachers. . . . Peers may also provide valuable forms of assistance and serve as confidants and mentors to students. Nonetheless, we contend that, among adults that students interact with at school,

students' relationships with their teachers are the most important. (p. 554)

They found that the quality of social capital increases the likelihood that students will graduate from high school. This theme can be seen as young people seeking what they need in order to graduate.

“My Life at School”: Informal Normative Regulations

This section considers “how aware participants were of the informal regulation of their relational lives in school.” By informal, I mean outside of official school policy or the formal organization of schooling. Here I classify multiple examples of how participants felt that unspoken yet normative rules were applied to them.

There are four sections. “A Place for My Life” addresses how school structures or practices, outside of official school rules, interfaced with varying circumstances of students. The “Normative Representation and Emotional Expression” section describes participants' experiences of the pressure to maintain particular representations (like a fashion “look”) and emotional congruence within the school building that were inconsistent with what they were experiencing. The third section, “Normative Evaluation,” highlights the effects on the youth of being evaluated by both peers and teachers on a regular basis. The last section, “Interpretations of Care: Results of Impersonal Relational Regulation,” reports what participants had to say about being cared for by teachers and peers in public school. These examples highlight how school structures interface with students' lives and what conclusions students drew from the experience.

A place for my life. There are times when the CHS school organization interfaced with participants' life circumstances in ways that they had to negotiate. Helen

describes the routine and stability of school life:

Helen: Pat [CHS science teacher] made so much difference [when I was sleeping on friends' couches]. I continued to go to school, because it was part of my routine. Being the oldest girl in an alcoholic family, I relied on routine and stability whether I was able to really function in that environment or not. My grandfather had a standoff with the police one night, and shot at the police. For an hour, I thought he was dead. I still went to school the next morning. I had two hours of sleep. My mom wasn't home, she was taking care of my grandma and I was taking care of my brothers and sisters.

Michelle: Did you tell anyone at school?

Helen: Oh noooooooooo.

Helen's presence in school the morning after the shooting was different than the presence of a student who went to bed with a story and a night-light, who had breakfast made for them, and whose parents checked their homework. Helen poignantly says, "I continued to go to school because it was part of my routine," and then, later, "I relied on routine and stability." She indicated an awareness of her dependency on public school structure—and on CHS in her reference to relying on Pat, the science teacher, when she was couch-surfing—during difficult times. While she relied on the school structures for routine and stability, that reliance was not necessarily one she felt able to talk to school staff about. According to Croninger and Lee (2001), "Young people who face economic and social hardships at home are especially dependent on schools for support and guidance if they cannot find these forms of social capital elsewhere in their lives" (p. 549). (See also Stanton-Salazar, 1997.)

Helen leaned on the school's institutionalized routines and conditions (and possibly constructions) whether she "was able to really function in that environment or not." As a person who was admittedly traumatized as a child, Helen constructed this "routine" as a haven. Yet, Helen later in the interview states that "school was the safest place I had," while she, like most other students at CHS, tended to describe public school as generally impersonal. What must it have been like to live with this contradiction and return to school after life-threatening events and not have that noticed by school staff? To have school be the safest place, but not a place to talk about it? This is an aspect of what Croninger and Lee (2001) are discussing, when school structures are unable to provide sufficient conditions, like a place for emotional support and safety. School structure, routine, and timing may serve young people in stressful circumstances.

Deyhle (2007) notes that Native American students and families are more likely than their white counterparts to distrust school staff until relationships are built. A structure that puts the burden of "telling" on the student, of asking for help from people who do not understand the context of her life or the historical context of Native Americans is culturally inappropriate and a lot to expect from a young person.

Some students herein say that school had no place for personal crises in their "everyday" lives. Informants explained how "home life" entered the school building in the form of tears and needing to stand up in class (Carmen), sleeping at one's desk (Becka), being present physically in school but not mentally (Fern), functioning or not (Helen), and needing "my own mental space" (Lily). Carmen describes how, while in school, she experienced the stress of raising her younger brother and sister, while her mother was depressed and using drugs:

Carmen: Like when I was having a hard time living with my Mom [when she was abusing drugs] and trying to deal with raising my sister and brother all the time. I would come to [public] school and be totally stressed out. And maybe I come to school and need to stand up to pay attention or cry for an hour before I even think about doing anything. But in regular school, that is not okay. That is distracting. People aren't going to pay attention if you are crying or whatever. It is not like anyone is going to take you aside and say like, "Oh, you are upset. Let's talk about it." At regular school, they are like, "Oh, why don't you go to the bathroom." "Oh, we will just ignore you. Why don't you sit in the back of the classroom by yourself and everyone [else] just keeps learning." [Quote continued in next section.]

Carmen sought emotional support. To Carmen, it seemed that no one wanted to talk to her about her life problems in public school. The places for crying were in the "nurse's office," "bathroom," and "back of the classroom." These places may be seen as exclusionary and possibly a punishment when no one asks why. There is extensive research about how not believing trauma survivors can be retraumatizing (Brown, 2008). Carmen discusses conditions where she was not even asked about it. Carmen received the message that her pain belonged in the bathroom or in the nurse's office—that it had no legitimate "place" in the school building.

Official and informal school structures may not make a place for young people to sit together in class. Carmen received the message that there existed an artificial separation between "home life" and "school life." Lily also offered an example of how she experienced school policies as maintaining a vision of "good family life" that simply

did not fit her life. She describes how school policies do not accommodate living situations where custodial parents live apart from their children:

Lily: A lot of times the teachers didn't understand. For a while I didn't live with my Mom. So I would try to explain [it to my teachers]. They would be like, "I need to talk to your Mom and I need to have this signed." And I would tell them I don't really live with her. And they'd be like, "What are you, emancipated?" And I'd be like "No, I just don't live with her." And they would be like . . . "uh." And I would ask if I could get a note from my sister who I live with. Can I get a note from them saying this is the reason I am late or something?" And they'd just be like, "Um, I don't know." And so I didn't have a car or anything. So to take three hours out of my day to go over to my mother's house to get a piece of paper signed that says I can go on a field trip the very next day was really difficult. There were a lot of times when they didn't understand how difficult it would be for me to do some stuff.

Lily suggests that teachers, even when she described her circumstances, did not understand. I suspect Lily implies much more in her statement than that her teachers did not have the capacity to comprehend the problem. It seems teachers made no accommodations to equal the playing field for students with circumstances outside of the normative construction of youth and family, in this case about custodial parent's housing arrangements with their children. Lily saw the lack of planning and the lack of ability to use alternative means (such as the U.S. Postal Service for permission slips), as school personnel's willingness to serve constructions of the middle-class nuclear family household. I think she protects teachers here instead of naming them as accountable for

biased treatment of configurations other than the normative “family.”

Helen, Carmen, and Lily’s examples illustrate diverse, complex ways of experiencing school structures and policy. Participants also differed in *how* they expected school structure, policy, or procedures to recognize their circumstances. For example, Helen did not tell school personnel about the shooting. She instead relied on the routine “whether or not [she] could really function.” While I argue that schools abandon their roles as caretakers of young people when stories such as Helen’s happen, Helen was thankful that school was the safest place she had. Carmen had higher expectations. Lily accepts that her very reasonable circumstances could not be accommodated by school policy. As I look over these differences, I wonder what Helen, Carmen, and Lily learned from the interfacing of their “home” lives with teachers, educational structures, and policy. I ask this because pivotal “readings” of life circumstances can have long-lasting effects. For example, what if Carmen took from this experience that she expected too much from teachers? She may come to believe that there is something wrong with her and her suffering, that maybe she is not worthy of being cared for, and that she is “weak” and “needy.” She may learn not to expect people in predominantly white institutions to care.

Normative representation and emotional expression. Participants also identified ways in which teachers and students alike seemed to expect them to conform to particular ways of representing themselves in school outside of official school policy. They identified ways they thought they were supposed to “dress up” their bodies and their emotions to be seen as acceptable in school spaces. How did participants recognize normative expectations about how they were to represent their bodies and their emotions

within the relational environment in school? Again, these examples come from participants' stories about how the schools differed. In only one interview (Fern's) did I ask about how emotions were dealt with at both schools.

Participants had a keen sense of the socially- and culturally-sanctioned prescriptions for "fitting in"—expectations promulgated by school personnel, peers, and corporate culture (Giroux, 2003). Participants responded to normative expectations of "fitting in," often under the threat of marginalization and gendered aggression (Simmons, 2002). Participants' awareness of such "fitting in" prescriptions came up in every interview. Fern gives some reasons why consumerist representations matter in school:

Fern: In public school, people have to dress a certain way to fit into a group. Like, there is no opportunity to get to know one another, so you have to have some way of doing it because there are just so many people there.

Fern demonstrates that she is not only aware of the pervasive social order of representation via "dress," but also of how this social order is a product of the institutional relationship limitations where "there is no way to get to know one another." Fern is not alone in her criticism of this setup and its connection to consumerism. As Giroux (2009) notes:

The threat of social exclusion is the method of choice for mobilizing fear in potential youthful consumers. Marketing concepts such as "cool" operate off the assumption that social relations work primarily as a site of intense competition, pitting youngsters who are trendy against those who cannot keep up within an ever-changing economy of objects and fashions. (p. 54)

Psychologists such as Kanner (2006) and Zoll (2000) have publicly challenged

the ethics of marketing to children. Such consumerist pressure is not only focused upon social group membership but also, for girls, their sexuality.⁶ As Fern notes in the above section, working together afforded the experience to know and respect one another, thus subverting “fitting in” as a structural form of limiting relationships.

Autumn Moon expresses similar thoughts:

Autumn Moon: You have to have a certain look to be anything and it is this whole fashion Ahhhhh! [This] social fakeness. It has nothing to do with who you are or what you have to give to this world. And so I never went. So that was it for me.

Michelle: You just stopped going?

Autumn Moon: Yeah, I just stopped going. It wasn't working and there was no encouragement. There is absolutely no encouragement to go. So I just felt like there was no reason.

Autumn Moon describes how the (consumerist) “look” she was supposed to have in public school had nothing to do with what she had to offer her school community. She suggests she would have stayed in school if she received the message that “who she was” and “what she had to give to this world” were valued by teachers or in the school culture. “Social fakeness” came up for Carmen, in expectations to “dress up” her feelings as well as her body.

Carmen: In public school, you have to be like this little image of the school outfit, [similar to] what they make you wear in schools where you have to dress in the same clothes. And you have to like [she laughs] cross your legs and fold your hands and sit there and stare attentively. That is just the way you have to do

⁶ Sharon Mazzarella (2008), for example, studies the commodification of young women's puberty through the marketing and sales of Proctor & Gamble's Beimgirl.com.

things. You have to be quiet and desensitized. You can't have any emotion during class because that would just mess up your education. You know? If you are sad that day it is like, "too bad for you, shut up, and pay attention to me" [the teacher].

For Carmen, dressing for school was about dressing up with clothing, posture, and pretense. Being in school was about disguising yourself as the "little image of the school outfit" and desensitizing your emotions. Phelan, Davidson, and Cao (1991) recognize that "students' competence in moving between settings has tremendous implications for the quality of their lives and their chances of using the educational system as a stepping stone to further education, productive work experiences, and a meaningful adult life" (p. 224). Carmen seems to fall into their category of a student whose experience becomes divided between home and school. Crossing such borders was stressful as she attempted to embrace different performances (becoming "desensitized"). "These students orient toward situations where support is found and away from circumstances that exacerbate their discomfort" (p. 246). In Carmen's situation, such an orientation fails to recognize some students' inability to transition to bodily and emotional expectations. Therefore, Carmen questioned social prescriptions organizing bodily and emotional management at schools as primary areas where young people construct their identity and social reality. She believed that teachers saw emotions as opposed to sanctioned learning, the old binary of "emotion/thought" (Boler, 1997, 1999; Walkerdine, 1990).

Next, Fern discusses how emotions are policed by peers, who laugh or tease other students, especially males, for showing particular emotions:

Michelle: Well, then how are emotions dealt with at both [schools]?

Fern: I think if you were a guy you probably would get laughed at or teased or whatever at public school. At [CHS], it [a young man having feelings] has happened before. Everyone is just there for you. If you need to talk, it is cool. If you want to be left alone, people respect that and leave you alone. If you need someone to talk to, there is always someone there. And if you need help, there is always someone there to help you with whatever it is. It is a really good thing.

Fern saw emotional expression, especially for young men, as a target for teasing, though there is time and space made for someone to “be there for you” at Conservation High. Lily discusses the messages she received about what information and emotions are allowed. Her public school is about hiding and creating the appearance of being normal.

Lily: I think there was this trust between all people at CHS. . . . In public school there is a way you are supposed to be, the traditional life you are supposed to live, and if you are poor, you are not supposed to talk about being poor, and if there is some quirky thing about your family, like if your mom is a lesbian or your dad left when you were two, you are not supposed to . . . you are supposed to give the appearance that you are normal.

Michelle: How does that work at CHS?

Lily: At CHS, we knew everybody isn't normal. When you entered there you were like, “Yep, I get free lunches. . . .” It wasn't like this abnormal thing. *You didn't have to hide anymore.* When you break down those barriers, it leaves you open to talking about other things about your life. When you start bringing those barriers down, you become more open and free. You have free thought and free emotion. You don't have to have this mask on all the time. I think that is what I

got out of CHS, that I could take that mask off and be myself and feel the way I felt . . . there wasn't any shame in emotions.

Lily begins by exposing her lack of school-sanctioned cultural capital, describing the ways that she did not fit into the traditional school culture's definition of "normal," including her status as poor and the child of a lesbian mother—characteristics that did not "pay off" as accepted differences within school. For Lily, public school culture supported "masking" herself. At CHS, she found her circumstances and emotional expression more accepted.

These examples highlight ongoing pressure experienced by students to disguise their emotional and material circumstances in public school, which led to their assessing the school environment as unsafe and hostile. This dismissive aggression and ignoring of the daily pain some youth carry with them at school on a daily basis is what Edd and Watkinson (2002) call "symbolic violence." "Symbolic violence" refers to institutional practices that psychologically burden students. Boler (2000) suggests this is "feeling *power*." She notes that

the determination of the normalcy and deviance of emotions can be generalized to some extent according to social class, gender, race, and culture, but are also highly determined by particular social contexts and power dynamics between given subjects in a situation" (p. 2). "Feeling *power*" refers to the ways in which our emotions, which reflect our complex identities situated within social hierarchies, "embody" and "act out" relations of power. . . . Feeling *power* suggests an approach to the question of social control. Behavioral and expressive conduct is developed according to socially enforced rules of power. (pp. 3–4)

Participants describe an awareness of “acting” out relations of power with regard to emotional regulations in public school. Participants are aware that emotional controls are contested areas of authority between students and teachers. CHS’s structure in this regard altered *how* relations of power were negotiated, rather than *if*. Participants question the legitimacy of the authority that relegates particular emotions to physical or symbolic “bathrooms.” As Pace and Hemmings (2007) suggest, “Authority is a social relationship in which some people are granted the legitimacy to lead and others agree to follow” (p. 6). Participants like Fern, Lily, and Carmen argue for the right of emotional expression to be a part of school “life.”

Normative emotional expression does not occur in isolation but is a part of other behavioral and representational capital. The next set of informants’ voices demonstrates their awareness of other forms of embodied “dressing up” for school. Carmen highlights a required posture:

Carmen: If I say to Mark (CHS teacher), “You know, I am so uncomfortable in this chair. I can’t pay attention to anything you are saying right now because all I want to do is stand up.” He’ll be like, “Then stand up.” And I will stand up for class for an hour and it is okay. And it is okay to say I need to stand up to pay attention right now. But in regular school it is like, “Sit down.” It’s like, “Well I am not going to learn anything if I sit down,” and they are like, “Well, go to the principal’s office.”

Carmen got the message that a docile posture was required in her classroom. Her own discomfort that was distracting her from focusing on the lesson seemed irrelevant in public school. Nespor’s (1997) study of fifth graders describes how teachers imposed

bodily management requirements upon students. Nespor examined the disciplinary practices that kids' bodies endured in the name of learning to read. Carmen found that similar bodily management requirements could be a barrier.

Not surprisingly, participants found that representations of class through consumerism were not available to them. Many of the participants' families were struggling financially, and the participants acknowledged the punishment they received based upon how their "looks" were judged:

Fern: I think possibly the difference between [CHS] and traditional school would be . . . People are like singled out there.

Michelle: What do you mean they are singled out?

Fern: Like they are judged more because you don't get to know the people there. There is so many of them.

Michelle: On what?

Fern: Your looks. Anything. Mostly looks. Not so much attitude, because you don't have the opportunity to get to talk to them. But at [CHS] it is like smaller, and you know, maybe that kid in the corner looks like a complete dork, but you know one day or another you are going to get to work with them and be in class with them, and you are going to get to talk to them and see what they are all about. You have more of a chance to actually see the person for who they really are besides on the outside.

Being singled out is a form of social control. For Fern, judgment based on how one looks is one of the few social assessment tools available for teenagers who have little opportunity to relate to each other inside or outside of school. She did not have to rely

primarily on these tools in a setting where interaction is central to the instructional process. How one looks has been acknowledged as a central feature in the social order of public schools, and it is used to differentiate the well off from the impoverished students (Best, 2000; Weiler, 2000; Seller and Weis, 1997; Weis and Fine, 2000).

China believes rich youth use class privilege to distance themselves from poor youth:

China: If there were a lot of rich kids at [CHS], I don't think it would be as tight a community.

Michelle: Why?

China: I feel the rich people wouldn't care. They would be afraid to get dirty.

They wouldn't be as tight because they would be competing against each other about who has more money. They wouldn't be socializing because rich people would be so stuck up. There are some rich people that are nice but there are jerks too.

For China, working-class students are more interested in relationships than in supporting a climate of competition through the use of consumerism. China notices complicated relational terrain in schools when there are "some rich people that are nice." China acknowledges the dissonance between her cultural capital, which values relationships, and her construction of middle- and upper-class cultures' capital, which values consumerism. Of course this was not the only exchange system going on, but it was a dominant one that participants saw.

Becka acknowledges that judging others on looks is challenging to resist. Becka exposes her own involvement and talks about what she has learned:

Becka: I used to like judge people, you know [at traditional high school], but now I don't. I want to get to know them. I don't judge people by the way they look, you know, and act sometimes.

Above, Becka reviews her own participation in the competitive “fitting in” culture of her public school, and takes responsibility for her actions. She marks a shift in her own perspective, behavior, and interest in taking the time to “get to know them.” Becka opposes “judging” to “getting to know.” I suspect that Becka is suggesting that when you know someone, you understand their context, so there is less judgment. Becka and others do not see this as simply a matter of (cross-cultural) communication. They see this relational regulation as a hegemonic “glass ceiling” limiting their experience of the social context of school.

Regulative evaluation. Foucault (1979) suggests that the experience of constant surveillance is internalized as a kind of self-evaluating, regulating force of identity. In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault describes a prison's architecture, calling it a “panopticon,” where inmates can see that they may be constantly observed, but the inmate cannot see who may be watching them. Such a structure, Foucault argues, sets up the potential of imagining oneself to be always under the gaze of the warden, with or without the warden's presence. Many theorists have applied Foucault's thoughts to structures of public schooling (Ball, 1990; Jardine, 2006; Llamas, 2006; Peim, 2009; Piro, 2008). How did participants “read” their experiences of evaluation in terms of relationship possibilities? How did they demonstrate a self-policing or a resistance to it?

Amelia: If you went to a traditional school you would have to impress everybody to be able to fit in. Right? If you want to be in the popular crowd. You have to

find some way to impress them. At [CHS], you don't have to impress them.

Michelle: What do you have to do to be popular [at CHS]?

Amelia: Just talk to them. There was no popular thing really. Everyone just knew everybody. It was so small, there was no popular crowd. You could be very well known but . . . I was well known because I was loud (laughs).

“Popularity” and “impressing” to Amelia is opposed to “knowing everybody.”

Her resistance to the requirement to “impress” suggests a rejection of a self-policed effort to determine what will impress others. Amelia suggests that if one is already known, there is no need to “impress.” She rejects this particular form of self-policing by invoking a social system legitimated on “knowing” someone. There is a dichotomy between policing of “popularity” on the one hand and, on the other, the possibly of policing “knowing” each other. According to Amelia, the relational context of CHS somewhat discouraged class- and other-based competition. A public school, if one does not have the means to “impress,” as Amelia puts it, one is excluded on the basis of:

- Class

Amelia: If you were like poor, people [at CHS] would actually try to help you out and find a place to live, but that really didn't have much effect on [your relationships with] people there. I mean about [social] class. . . . You didn't have to have money to impress anybody. You didn't have to. There are a lot of stuck up people that go to traditional schools. “I've got money. I've got a fast car. Look at me.” People at [CHS] aren't like that.

- Race

Helen: We were in an upper-middle-class, white-crust neighborhood so we weren't. . . . [In school] we were like all labeled [with a sigh of doom] "the Roseheart kids." We lived in apartments and didn't have much money at all. I never had the clothes . . . or had the time or the space to do all the projects [they could]. You know? I was different from all of them. I was brown. They were white and rich.

- Age and appearance

Fern: Well, I think it is wrong. You know, you will just be walking down the street and people will be like, "Oh, these kids these days, they are just a whole bunch of scandalous punks." Punks is another one [label for adolescents]. Like, "Yeah, you are just a punk kid. Blah, blah, blah. Punk kids, they steal and lie and da, da, da." I think it is mostly about appearance. If you are all, like, pimped out in [displaying] your Nike gear and stuff, compared to like having on a grungy pair of Carharts [work jeans] or something, there is going to be different reactions from people. And they are going to treat you differently.

- Gender and sexuality

Helen: I love being able to be my own person. Everyone was like fascinated with the things I was doing. Like when I had the Mohawk guy, the suit guy, and the football guy all in one month, and I found out there were rumors about me that I was a slut! [That] I was a mother, and I was pregnant again! Those were the rumors, even though I was a virgin. I knew I had made it because people were gossiping about me, people I had never even met and all they could do was sit around and talk about me. I was enjoying myself. It was a compliment. There

were times that I knew that I had straight fucked up and made amends. But that is different than this. But when people were calling me a slut and a bitch. They didn't know who I was because I was enjoying myself. I was cooler than they were because they couldn't make their own waves. They couldn't be who they wanted to be.

The informants describe prescriptions they had to negotiate in school and out in their community. The judgments to which they were subjected indicate the privileging of particular identities and life circumstances, including middle-class, white, adult-oriented, sexually conservative representations. Participants acknowledge their diminished position in the dominant culture of their public school. Yet each makes sense of that position differently.

Helen finds that her freedom to enjoy herself translated through race and class differences. She interprets the rumors as being about the rumor makers who lived under the thumb of social prescriptions that she chose to break. When Fern describes being labeled a “scandalous punk” for dressing in work clothes, she connects the prevalence of ageist middle-class values in school to larger societal norms. As the participants made sense of the class, gendered, and racial characteristics that differentiated them at times uncomfortably from their traditional high-school peers, they constructed identities in response to the evaluations that the others made.

China directly questions the institutionalized climate of evaluation. The following is a conversation I had with China as I walked out of my office into the CHS hallway. China, standing right in front of me, had just cursed a classmate who was walking away from her:

Michelle: “Hey, China, what’s going on?” (China defends herself, tells me the “she said, I said” kind of story. In the process she also discloses ways that she has fueled the argument. I reflect this to her. She looks at me frustrated.)

China: Michelle, can’t I ever just get a break from always being evaluated by everyone, just make some mistakes without there always being a big deal made of it? Like we are so obsessed with having to deal with that all the time.

China recognized the academically and behaviorally-oriented evaluative context of school. It is unclear if she was shirking responsibility or speaking to the impact of that context. Either way, she recognized the pervasiveness and normative regulatory-surveillance culture of schools, which inducts young people into the myth of meritocracy (Souto-Otero, 2010).

Fern also critiques normative evaluation by giving three examples of students being disciplined. In each, she says that school authorities made no effort to discover what precipitated “inappropriate” behavior or to resolve the problem that fueled the student’s “misbehavior.”

Fern: Maybe the teachers should try to put themselves in our positions and try to figure out what we are going through. Kicking us out of school [for having too many absences] is not necessarily going to help a person. Just like schools are supposed to be there to help us learn, and it really doesn’t help when we get booted out. It could be ruining our life of education. It discourages us and makes us want to go. Before you get kicked out, they should try to actually get down to the real problem and try to help you. Like Debbie throws a chair at the door and gets like two hours [detention] [at CHS] without them finding out what was

upsetting her. Like my teacher [in public school] grabbed our arms hard. He shouldn't be like, "No, don't do that." And he took my perfume, and wouldn't give it back. So I punched him, and then they wouldn't listen to my story. When I told them he would always be grabbing us, they didn't believe me.

Fern questions the willingness of teachers and administrators to hear about what is actually happening in school. Her first example concerned her getting suspended for being absent from public school. The second example concerns her friend Debbie who threw a chair at a CHS teacher and was disciplined with two hours of school/community work. The third concerns a teacher from public school who grabbed Fern's arm and took her perfume. She retaliated by punching him and was expelled. In all three examples, including at CHS, no school authority attempted to figure out what it was that inspired the transgression against school rules. She experienced school authorities as uninterested in the personal experiences that precipitated the incidents—just the result. By suggesting that school personnel should think more deeply about the effects of suspension, she shows a commitment to her education that she perceived to be greater than that of public school personnel. Fern's school commitment dwindled as a result of the message that her story did not matter. Attention-getting students—sometimes called troublemakers, at-risk, or needy—may be communicating their personal needs to school personnel (Kim, 2011) in an impersonal system. The trouble some students "make" is a result of structural violence rather than a problem of personal neediness. Participants read such incidents as symptoms of their status as relatively disposable (Fine, 2004).

Interpretations of care: Conditions of impersonal relational regulation. In this section, I ask: "How did school structure, personnel, and the behavior of other

students impact participants' sense of being cared for?" "How did 'care' function as a regulator of their relationships with peers and teachers?" While participants felt more welcomed at Conservation High, it was also far from perfect. In this section, participants describe the conclusions they came to regarding feeling "cared for" and the meaning they attach to its presence or absence.

Helen: You didn't *have* to go [to public school]. In other schools, the teachers aren't connected to the students, nor to each other. There, you didn't want them to be [connected] anyway because who wants to say that. You weren't able to have much of a relationship. They didn't care anyway. Those [teachers] that cared really did make a difference. They didn't really give a shit about me. I went to Hills High School for only six months.

Helen outlines an impersonal context of "caring." Probably most important is that Helen acknowledges the power of teachers who care, where "those [teachers] that cared really did make a difference." Her statement about teachers who "didn't really give a shit about me" is followed by a statement about leaving school. Demonstration of care on the part of school personnel can lead to a student's attachment to that school, which was of primary concern for Becca:

Becca: Like in PE [at traditional high school], I will never forget this. We were running around the track. We had to run around like 15 times, and I had to stop and get my inhaler. And the teacher wouldn't let me. And I couldn't breathe. So I just didn't do PE anymore. I just sat on the wall every day because he would just not let me take my inhaler. That is just how I saw all the teachers. They just didn't care, so I gave up on things they wanted me to do. They didn't care, so why

should I care you know? They are not going to be there to help me, by myself. I don't like to talk in front of classes. They never wanted to help me by myself, so forget it. I am not going to do it. I don't like how teachers . . . how high schools are run. I don't like how people think they are better than everybody. You can't get help when you need help. It bothers me. If I ever had a kid I would not put my kid in a regular high school, I would put my kid in a CHS school. Something that they can feel comfortable and not like where you don't feel safe, when they need help they can get help.

Becka's standoff over her health with the PE teacher may have been generalized to how she thought about all teachers. For her, cultural "care" capital takes the form of reciprocity: if she sees that teachers care, she will do what they want her to do. The fulfillment of a care opportunity is a reason to stay in school. Care and safety seem to go hand in hand. Becka did not feel safe in a school where she was not cared about. School safety and violence prevention is a current focus of extensive dialogue in the field of education (Williams, 2005; Sprague et al., 2007). The irony is that Becka is a "casualty of zero tolerance policy" (Black, 2004).

Marissa, by contrast, focuses on care in her relationships with her peers.

Michelle: You were out there in the field doing stuff that wasn't fun but you stayed in CHS anyway. Why?

Marissa: But I had the team's support. Like, I had a lot of people supporting me. It was not always fun, but I was, like, "I really need to be here, and I really need to do it." When I was feeling bad about something, the crew leaders would talk to me. They would be like, "This is what you are working for, do you really want to

give up now? Because look at what you have done. . . . Look at all these things you have accomplished this whole time.” You know? And then you have your friends who are like, “Oh, no you can’t leave. We want you here. Like, gee, you are going to get kicked out if you do this. Don’t do that!” A lot more care and support than you get at normal high schools. Because it is like who really cares if you are one of, say, 500 students to drop out of your freshman class? No one, really. Like, unless you get to be good friends with a teacher but even then they have 200 kids of their own.

Marissa, like many others, shows here how feeling cared for was important in her decisions to either leave or stay in school. Feeling cared for was a form of cultural capital. First, Marissa gave an example of expressing “feeling like quitting school” to her instructors and peers who, in turn, supported her continued success at CHS. They showed her they cared. Her instructors supported her by recognizing her contributions and that she was wanted there. Next, she notes how no one at public school cares if you leave, like she did in her freshman year. For Marissa, care kept her in school when it was not fun. Marissa does not sound like an apathetic dropout here because she created opportunities to discuss her thoughts about leaving school with her teachers and peers.

China: At regular high school, you can try to talk to the teachers, but you don’t get a good vibe like at CHS. At CHS, it is like talking to some adult you would talk to outside of school. At high school you can’t talk to them. They don’t care about what you have to say. They don’t care about what happens to you in your life. They are like “I am busy right now.”

China, like others, disengaged from teachers who she believed did not care about

her. This lack of caring was exhibited by teachers not listening, expecting little, and not being interested in what was happening in China's life.

Next, Carmen describes how caring is time sensitive:

Carmen: At CHS, if I come in and I am stressed out trying to raise my brother and sister and having a hard time with it, they listen to you. They care. They have time to care. It is not, I guess, in public schools, regular schools, it is not okay to be real. You have to be what they want you to be which is quiet and polite and whatever else. You know?

Carmen confirms Orenstein's (1994) words: "The lessons of the hidden curriculum teach girls to value silence and compliance, to view those qualities as a virtue" (p. 35). Orenstein also notes that

students tend to believe that, although [teachers] pay more attention to boys, teachers actually like girls better: as one Weston [High School] girl once told me, ticking the list off on her fingers, 'teachers like us because we're nicer, quieter, and better behaved'. (p. 35)

Carmen broke these unspoken rules of "good-girl" behavior in public school by talking about "being stressed out trying to raise my brother and sister and having a hard time with it." Like China, Carmen highlights an aspect of school structure, the use of time, that interferes with caring. She speaks about the expectations (of teachers) that she perform in certain ways that deny or hide her emotional state, her "real" self. Care is not only thought about in reference to teachers, but to students' own abilities in the different school contexts.

Becka contrasts her ability to care for others in a public school and at CHS.

Becka: [Taking time to resolve a problem with a classmate wouldn't happen] in a public school because there are so many people to know that I would just probably not even care. I wouldn't care to work it out unless she was my really, really close friend. But in a regular school I don't think they really care, because there is so many people at regular schools that they could just forget. You know?

Michelle: Is it the kids that forget or the teachers?

Becka: I think both of them. There are, like, thousands of people there, you know. CHS is small. You get to know each other really well. CHS is so little and you have time. You spend all day with the same people.

Becka feels that public school personnel *and* students forget about each other and the relational problems that arise between them. She takes responsibility for deciding not to care about the same problems in public school that she was grateful to resolve at CHS.

In summary, participants “read” the relational dearth of their public school much like Fine’s (2004) students “read” the lack of resources in their school.” She notes that poor and working-class youth of color are *reading* these conditions of their schools as evidence of their social disposability and evidence of public betrayal.

These young women and men [in her study] critically analyze social arrangements of class and race stratification and their “place” in the social hierarchy. Like children who learn to love in homes scarred by violence, these young women and men are asked to learn in contexts of humiliation, betrayal, and disrespect. (p. 54)

Participants explain their disengagement in public school as based at least in part on a message being communicated through the relationships they had with school staff and peers. However, my informants differed in their expectations of schools to recognize

and account for different students. Croninger and Lee (2001) found that “social relationships between teachers and students play a critical role in whether students at risk of failure graduate from high school” (p. 572). Participants in this study confirm that finding. They identify how they decided whether teachers and peers cared about them, and this either distracted from or contributed to their sense of safety and belonging.

Creating an “Us” at CHS: Family, Tension, and Difference

In the first sections, I reveal how informants volunteered their awareness of multiple forms of institutional and informal organizers of their relationships in school. Forms of relational regulation, I argue, identify a hidden curriculum that informants are aware of, withdraw from, negotiate, consent to, and/or challenge. What about Conservation High? No school is without a hidden curriculum, and CHS is no exception. Dimitriadis, Weis, and McCarthy (2008) summarize Apple’s (1979, 2004) theory of hidden curriculum.

The day-to-day regularities of schools—what he and others refer to as the “hidden curriculum”—contribute to the reproduction of ideologies that support existing structurally-based inequalities. The impression of regularity and neutrality is sustained and maintained by notions that schools are “above politics,” that they remain outside the purview of individual, invested actors and groups. That these everyday practices tend to be invisible or unmarked only underscores their power to reinforce a structural-function view of schools (p. 5).

Informants show awareness that relationally disciplinary practices—such as school size, organization, and timing—contributed to their already-diminished position as youth marginalized by race, class, gender, and multiple educational labels (like “behaviorally-disordered”). In this section, I highlight how participants speak about their

experiences as a product of CHS's relational structure and hidden curriculum. Since every informant describes CHS as "a family," implying that they became attached to CHS more than to public school, I must be careful to avoid assuming that the looser relational structure participated in "existing structurally based inequalities" (Dimitriadis, et al., 2008) any less than public school practices. After all, CHS was an alternative high school, whose diploma held a lower status than one from public high schools.

I organized the following sections to demonstrate complexities of school-based relationships in which students work together regularly. I conclude that CHS informants learned relational lessons from opportunities that were denied them as students on the margins of public school "community."

CHS's structures organizing relationships. How might the practices of the hidden curriculum posited by Apple (1979, 2004) be made visible through young people's descriptions about how they became a "family" at CHS? What did they learn from these differing relational hidden curricula? Here's an example:

Anáwaké: I think when you are put in a situation like [Spike and the New Mexico Challenge], you are spending so much time together and you work so hard together that almost no matter what, it really creates an atmosphere where you are bound to get so pissed off that you want to like . . . whatever. You are bound to get really, really upset with those people that you are with, and you also really bond with them. Part of it really comes from bonding with them, however. But it comes from, like getting so angry at them and then, I don't know how to really explain it. Whether you make up or not or come halfway in between, you really have a respect for each other because you both went through that.

Anáwaké's statements point to CHS's relational hidden curriculum. The amount of time and tasks spent together are structural organizers that relationally matter. By spotlighting the relational climate at CHS, she also highlights informal organizers such as an expected "place and space" for "bonding" and getting "pissed off." For Anáwaké, mutual respect overrides interpersonal conflict, given the power of joint experience.

Informants' awareness of relational structures at CHS may be difficult to either observe or bump up against, given their former "restrictive" experiences." Their public school's organization scrambled students, while CHS's classes maintained student composition. My analysis examines relational structures here and there, but primarily focuses upon the examples participants give to illustrate their relational possibilities. Given the lessons they discuss, what was the hidden relational curriculum? For example, while CHS staff saw arguing and criticism as infractions that sometimes needed time to be talked about and resolved, informants seemed to accept that arguments and criticism are necessary parts of relationships.

Getting to know you. I found that most students at CHS had little faith that education could lead to success, yet still wanted to “succeed” both socially and academically. Participants’ memories of their former schools were fresh in their minds. Mostly, participants had seen their opportunities to receive a rigorous, challenging education pass them by. To me, they seemed similar to Fine et al.’s (2004) students who, “the more years they spend in their schools, the more shame, anger, and mistrust they develop” (p. 55), despite the differences between their students and my participants. Given the hope I perceived in new students, I thought their initial experiences were important:

Amelia: I felt accepted right away when I first got there. It was cool. I’ve never been to a school like this before that is actually willing to help out their students to learn stuff.

Amelia: People are really nice [at CHS]. People aren’t afraid to introduce themselves to each other. They are really outspoken. People at River High are all groupies. If they don’t think you fit in, they won’t talk to you. They won’t even look at you. Students [at CHS], they are not like that at all. Some of them, kind of . . . but once you get to know them, they are all right.

Amelia describes teachers’ willingness to help her learn at CHS, and the immediacy with which she was able to find students who introduced themselves and accepted her. The simple experience of being introduced possibly marked a different sociocultural territory that was evident to Amelia. As an administrator in a small school, I can affirm that it was easy to introduce a new student to her classmates.

Deirdre found a culture of acceptance that was passed down by students at CHS.

Deirdre: Because you have to fit in with everyone else [at Hills High].

Michelle: And you don't [at CHS]? [She shakes her head "no."] Why not?

Deirdre: It just doesn't seem like you have to. I think that it is just that everyone who starts here, everyone accepts everyone for who they are.

Michelle: How did that happen?

Deirdre: I have no idea. Just because, pretty much, it is because a person starts and everyone accepts them and then they just pass it on. Maybe it is because they all get along in school.

Deirdre puts CHS culture in students' hands. Though she says that "they all got along at CHS," she later acknowledges conflicts within crews. For Deirdre and Amelia, there were those who gave and received the "practice" of acceptance. To clarify, the acceptance they talk about here is not an unrealistic type that excludes conflict, problems, or stress. It should be noted that social scientists studying peer acceptance consistently find a positive relationship of it to school achievement and adjustment during adolescence (Staff & Kreager, 2008; Rubin, Bukowshi, & Parke, 1998; Wentzel & Caldwell, 1997). Marginalized students lose out in school and classroom cultures of exclusion because they are denied the lessons learned during the experience of being a centered student.

A more open relational structure did not make getting to know others easier for Lily. Lily found that her own "timid" withdrawal distanced her from others right from the start, cementing a perception that she was a "goody-goody"— a person privileged by the traditional school system, a potential exclusionary threat to the CHS culture:

Lily: When I came [to CHS], I still had that “Stay in the book, don’t talk to anybody. . . .” [I was] kind of quiet, really timid. [Being at CHS] forced me to come out of the shell. There was one student who was really, really persistent that taught me. She really likes to talk and be friends with everyone.

Michelle: Who is that?

Lily: Marissa. (We laugh). She was pretty much the first person I connected to. I was sitting by myself, and most everybody else would blow me off, like, “She is in her own world, like nobody would talk to her,” and she would come over and sit next to me and be like, “How’s it going, da da da.” She would really like put things out in your face. She would really be very blunt. She would be like, “You don’t talk much.” Like, no kidding. She would be like, “You just sit there. You need to socialize. You need to come down here.” It is just like, it made me think, it made me go, “Oh, yeah. I am not. Maybe I should go out and socialize. Maybe I should not just sit here by myself.”

Michelle: So she invited you in and opened the door.

Lily: Yeah, she opened the door and kind of like opened the circle for me.

Being at CHS and Marissa’s persistence “forced” Lily to “come out of the shell.”

Lily goes on to explain that it wasn’t until most students realized she wasn’t a “goody-goody” that she was more fully accepted. Lily’s self-exclusion was a self-protective strategy learned from more than eight years in public school. Her silence was misunderstood by some students, I suspect, as if Lily was excluding them. They may have seen Lily as similar to their former “goody-goody” public school classmates. Lily

picked up that her peers considered her an imposter. Yet Lily knew she did not have a “normal” lifestyle and did not put forth effort or take a risk to inform them of that fact.

Given her self-named “shell,” she was difficult to get to know. Lily attributed her exclusion to both social withdrawal and academic success. Some of her peers struggled to accept her academic success, seeing it as conformity with a culture they rejected, even though she too had left public school. Although Carmen, Autumn Moon, and a number of other students were also academically successful, Lily’s self-exclusion was coupled with academic success. This seems to have been interpreted in ways that maintained her isolation at first. Lily describes lessons, often called “skills” in the social skills literature (Lavoie, 2005). Marginalized students lack the relational opportunities that students who are centered in their classroom communities receive. It is not surprising that Croninger and Lee (2001) found that the “students with low social capital have a higher probability of dropping out than students with high social capital, regardless of their risk status” (p. 568). Their findings imply that the skills for surviving at the margins of classroom and school culture used by low social capital students so not prevent dropout.

Participants’ experiences with CHS peers were not necessarily unlike those they rejected at their former school—many continued to rely on constructions, like fears of how other students labeled “dropouts” or “goody-goodyes.” Relational practices such as taking time to get to know each other, consistent class composition, and introducing new students offered opportunities to break down some of those constructed social boundaries.

What do informants have to say about relational possibilities based upon consistent class composition? Carmen suggests that exclusion is not an option.

Carmen: Well like, at [Conservation High] there is one person [your crew leader/instructor] who is there and is responsible for you. They are with the same group all the time. They know what they know about you. They know how you feel. They know how you act. They know the things that you like to do. Like, they know when you are feeling one way and when you are not. They know when you are not there and they know when you are there. And when you are at [public high] school, it is like, “Oh, one of the hundred people I saw today wasn’t there.” Like “Oh, well.” But being on a crew and having the same people see you all the time, they get attached to you. You *have to have* a relationship with them. You cannot just not. You are forced to. You can’t be on a crew and be like, “Oh, I don’t know you guys.”

Carmen: And then you go to Conservation High and it is like, “This your little family that you are going to live with from this time to this time.” You know? I mean literally live with [them], like on Spike, or [when we went to New Mexico] or whatever. You see them everyday. And this is the person responsible for you and here is your second parent. You know?

In a small school where crews stayed together, students became “known,” became attached to one another, and missed each other when someone was absent. Carmen reinforces the discourse of attachment with one of responsibility by inviting adults to “be responsible for” youth. She counters common conceptions of adolescents constructed as resistant or oppositional to adult authority (Lesko, 2001).

Next, Autumn Moon advocates for a kind of relationship in which learning happens.

Autumn Moon: When you are with a crew of people you have this trust and knowledge of who they are because you are learning and growing with them.

They are not. . . . They haven't grown and learned it all before you. You are with them. You are in that crew and they are learning the same things. You are going out there and working *with* them, and you are learning and growing *with* them. So you build this incredible kinship and relationship you have with them. It is unbelievably strong, unbelievably. The family there is unbelievably strong.

Autumn Moon contributes a relational, rather than individualized, view of learning. She affirms tenets of cooperative learning by acknowledging that the community in which one is learning is central (Steinberg, 1998). Byline (2006) promotes cooperative learning for students' positive dependence "on each other in a team to achieve mutual learning goals" (p. 35), the development of "students' social and communication skills, increase in tolerance and acceptance of diversity, and improve[ments in] academic achievement" (p. 35). Autumn Moon recognizes a climate of learning together that develops kinship. She adds "trust" and "knowledge" of other students to the benefits of CHS's hidden relational curriculum. Autumn Moon experienced some significant tension with others on her crew. Importantly, she does not talk about that as a threat to building "family," but rather as "learning and growing *with* them." Sanchez (2008) asserts that "developing a trusting community of learners is vital for critical, inclusive, cultural conscientious social studies teaching" and that "understanding how to relate to others in a diverse group helps develop complex social

relationships as a member of a democratic society. Community as an element of critical praxis infuses learning with sentiments of care and respect” (p. 57).

Amelia and Helen describe barriers to and the complexity of getting to know each other.

Amelia: It was more because they were boys, they’re jerks. They were just jerks at first, they would say things to people, call people names, be really rude to each other. They were very rude to each other.

Michelle: It’s hard to feel accepted when people are like that.

Amelia: Very hard.

Amelia attests to the cruelty that some young men exhibited at CHS, and notes that such cruelty makes it hard for women to feel accepted. Helen notices when some students do not have the skills or ability to relate well to others, in this case, given the difficult family life they go home to.

Helen: CHS had a difficult position because it wanted to do great things with kids, but the kids couldn’t emotionally connect. A lot of the kids couldn’t do that, me included, because I still had to go home at night.

Michelle: What about students who really weren’t trustable?

Helen: I met Carl when he was being beat up in middle school, like five kids on him. It was during lunch in the hallway so teachers didn’t see. So he was totally cornered. I didn’t think that it was okay to do that. So I made those kids back off. I told them to. I made them. He always had to be cool and show off.

Michelle: It sounds like you really care for him.

Helen: No, he was like a beaten puppy that I had to protect. I wouldn't call him my friend. He was kinda like there. Because of his personality I was always worried that people were going to beat him up. He was like my brother.

Clearly, participants did not always trust each other or believe that their peers were "healthy." Helen gauged another students' relational capabilities and had compassion for his struggles as someone who needed to "be cool and show off," which left him vulnerable to being "totally cornered."

Arguments, nit-picking, and being at each other's throats. Marissa endorses interpersonal arguments as a part of "family."

Marissa: You work with them everyday. From that you know them really well, like a family, to the point that you have your arguments or whatever. And you have to get over it. You have to get through it.

She legitimates interpersonal arguments as a necessary aspect of interpersonal relationships. She implies that arguments are something to get through together, rather than an infraction, as staff often saw it. This section reviews seeming threats to "positive" relationships in "family." Participants voice different ways they thought about "family" relational practices under relational stress. For Deirdre, CHS's family was not always a community.

Deirdre: There would be little fights [arguments] going on in the van, and everyone would be yelling at each other, and Philip or Amelia would say something, and everyone would start laughing. Like Philip would make donkey noises and crack people up. Everyone still nit-picked on each other so it is not always a community.

“Community” broke down at CHS when nit-picking prevailed—relational practices that they also found in public school. The social contexts of both schools’ relational settings differ, such that the comparison is not quite on equal ground. When “family” broke down at CHS, students knew they would be working together tomorrow. Fern thinks arguing is inevitable:

Fern: I think everywhere you go somebody is going to fight [argue] with someone. You can’t stop it. Somebody is always going to be starting crap with someone else. I think that honestly in the end, like everyone [at CHS] who got in fights [arguments] with each other and little hissy fits and stuff. I think they all got over it and they ended up being friends in the end. It was just a part of learning or something.

What is it like to know “everywhere you go somebody is going to [argue] with someone” and “you can’t stop it?” Fern sees it as common terrain to “get over.” Marissa sees arguments as a wake-up call for the community to work together.

Marissa: If I saw some girl [at my old school] I didn’t like. Like, “I don’t like you because of this and that,” or “You don’t like me, blah, blah,” then [there would be an argument]. It’s like, [at CHS] you still got into arguments with people, but not quite as much. Just because we can’t have this. We are a community. This can’t happen because we’ve got to work together. You know? And so it’s like I respect them and they respect me. You know. I mean I’m still friends with them, but not as much as I would be, like with real friends. Actually, all my true friends I call my best friends. Right? I mean I am still their friends. You know? If anything

happened to them outside of school with them, I will still be there to watch their back. Just because they go to my school. I consider it a family.

At CHS, participants constructed a culture that included conflict, allowing a level of dissent as a part of “family.” Marissa defends “community.” She resisted getting in arguments and offered support to people she didn’t like. Arguing happened less often because her classmates knew they would continue to work together tomorrow. She took responsibility for maintaining “community” because she had a stake in the environment. These actions mark a difference in how informants describe their own participation in their former school. Marissa believes “family” results from working together for a common goal that is beyond mere “liking each other.” She advocates for the toleration of tension and conflict (Secomb, 2000). The context and consequences of problems within “family” are different than in public high school where students do not work together on a regular basis and where others are not known. Her insights belie constructions that adolescents are whimsical in their relationships and allegiances. When students come together to protect one person who has been singled out, Crystal calls this the “schooling effect”:

Crystal: We were such a tight community, we were like sisters and we were like brothers. So we had a sister-brother rivalry, like at each other’s throats sometimes. So close but it was really great because we were so close that it helped us, that if something happened we could go to people. We were really close, even though we fought each other and would yell at each other we would always have that closeness. If something happened bad it was kind of like this schooling effect, you know with fish, like they come close together and a big fish comes along and

scares it because it thinks it is a big fish, instead of all little fish. That is what we would do. It was like one big person would come and try to break everyone, or break somebody, try to pick out somebody, and we would come close together and protect that person.

Michelle: We had our fair share of problems.

Crystal: Things were really solved by students. Like you if you had a big problem that needed help, like little problems were usually solved between a teacher and a student and then the other students. We had a mediator so that the two people could work it out. But if it was a big problem it would be solved by the students.

In the context of talking about “a tight community,” Crystal names the “schooling effect” to describe how students would act together to protect someone being targeted. In such a community, there is someone to go to for help with problems. In addition, Crystal says significant rivalries, “like [being] at each other’s throats sometimes,” were solved by the students.

Schooling effects. As marginalized students, how did CHS students learn to work together, so much so that they “schooled”? Importantly, Crystal notes that significant rivalries, “like at each other’s throats sometimes,” were solved by the students through the “schooling effect.” She saw that little problems were solved between a teacher and students, but bigger problems were the territory of the students. Certain problems, in the hands of the students, did not always go well either. How did they “school” or work together to control membership, deal with crewmembers “egging” each other on, and the effect on the whole crew of individual crew members who “blew up,” were “sad,” whom they hated, or whom they were repeatedly let down by?

Crystal gives an example of when the schooling effect did not go well.

Crystal: We were like piranhas. We were just like. . . . We would pick on each other and pick on each other. It would be joking for us but if it was a new kid, they wouldn't realize it and it would seem overwhelming. I think we did that a lot. We had to test the new kid out. I think when it was pinned on us and [you] said like, "Look you guys, I am not taking any part in this, any fault." [Crystal here is speaking about an incident where I had a talk with her crew about hazing a new student who then wanted to leave the school.] We kind of realized we are doing that. We would watch each other then. We were kind of like, "Hey stop picking on that person." We kind of stopped picking on people after that.

Michelle: Really?

Crystal: It really helped when you said that. You pointed the finger and like, sometimes it is good to point the finger. It needed it. And like everybody there, we wanted the adults to be so proud of us. I remember like, "Oh look they are all happy that we are doing good." And then we were like hearing that somebody was disappointed in us.

Here Crystal demonstrates how, through the "piranha schooling effect," a crew can "haze" a new student that it does not know yet. She describes how her peers learned to "watch each other then" in an effort to stop "picking on people after that." This is an example of learning about one's membership within collective power—an experience marginalized students usually don't have. She also describes how her class wanted the adults to be proud of them and how they felt when an adult, such as myself, was disappointed in them.

Anáwaké describes using the “schooling effect” to play bouncer for sexist students:

Anáwaké: When I stopped doubting myself then it was easier. It was easier to stand up for myself and tell them that they were being disrespectful. I mean like during my last part of CHS, it felt like me and Fern and Carmen were like . . . I don't know how to describe it. You know how they say that the senior class rules the school? Well we were trying to influence them [new students]. We were like telling them what they couldn't get away with because we had formed our own community. At that point, all of us, we were in our power about it. I mean we wouldn't hesitate. I mean some new cocky guy would come in and we wouldn't hesitate to tell him that it's not okay to use those words here. We would just tell him. Some of the guys that came would quit. We got a few people quit with injured male egos. And then some started straightening up their act and [others] stuck in there and talked shit about us. We also had a lot of support, not just our little female group, but a lot of the guys there would back us up. It was almost like we were playing the bouncer, monitoring the incoming crowds. A lot of people thought that like “Oh whatever” or “Oh right sure [sarcastically]” and then Carmen comes up and says the same thing. Then they are like, “Damn we better watch it.”

Anáwaké describes working together in numbers to induct new students, particularly males, into respectful relations with women, with support from other male students. She learned how to stop doubting and stand up for herself, gain support, and

give feedback to new students about the ethos of CHS as a part of the “senior class” social fabric.

For Becka, “family” included “schooling” to protect someone, and infractions like “egging people on” and then having to deal with the resulting impact on their crewmembers.

Becka: Like in the New Mexico Challenge, you had to live with the people [here at CHS]. They are like brothers and sisters. You know? They are like your siblings, and you guys [administrators and teachers] are like the parents, uncles, grandparents. You know? We all look after each other. You know? If someone is getting harassed, we are all going to help that person. We are all behind each other. We all stick together. Like in New Mexico we have to live with these people for six weeks, and it is pretty tough. It is a long time, like with your siblings. So, they are all “Well, I don’t want to wash the dishes right now.” “Well, you are going to wash the dishes,” and you get in fights [arguments]. And it is really hard to live with people that you don’t know that well, to get to know them.

Michelle: Yeah.

Becka: Everyone gets angry at their own times, and maybe it is not anyone else’s fault, but when they get angry, they blow up in front of everyone. Then the other people feel like, “Well, you know, why are you blowing up at me? I didn’t do nothing to ya.” And you get in a fight [argument]. You know? Then after a while you know everything cools down and then they are like, “Oh, I’m sorry.” There’s like ups and downs where you just bicker with people. A lot of people I see, like on Spike and stuff, egg people on.

Becka learned to deal with, rather than avoid as she did in public school, “bickering,” “blowing up at” each other, and disagreement with space to “cool off,” return, and apologize. She claims that being “family,” “we all look after each other” and keep each other safe. Yet students also are seen as subverting community by egging people on and “just bicker[ing] with people.”

Deirdre speaks more specifically about when incidents are felt by the whole class:

Deirdre: You just have to pretty much work together to get the family kind of thing going. And if one person is out of place then it is everyone who is going to go off by that.

Michelle: You mean it disrupts everyone?

Deirdre: Right. It makes everyone else feel that they don’t want to be a part of something. If one person is out then more do the same thing because they think that they don’t have to do it either. That’s what happens.

Individuals have the power to affect the whole group. Working together, she says later, offers an opportunity to “either get stronger or they can pretty much mess themselves up.” Deirdre believes that “having to deal with people” is a legitimate school-based lesson because “then how are you going to get along with your boss or your own family?” Participants demonstrate their negotiation of how to work with each other to respond to a myriad of interpersonal situations.

Racism in the “family,” or learning to negotiate expressions of power. Racism is often seen as a divisive issue, with people of color on one side and white people on the other. How is racism experienced in a “family” context?

What follows are two separate incidents in which racism was seen by Helen, a Tlingit tribal member. The first incident is when a student, Peeve, states that “all Indians are alcoholics.” The second is when Cody called Helen a “Nazi whore.”

Helen: [This is a story from before you were principal]. I will never forget this one kid. I hated him, absolutely hated him. In front of the school . . . this kid, Peeve, was actually bragging about killing some ducklings. No one said anything about it. He threw this huge rock on them and killed them. And no one said anything because they knew it was wrong. They were going to let it go. He was someone who wasn't going to be there for very long. We didn't care about him because of something I will tell you next. I started punching him. I hoped he would hit me so I could lay him out. Dylan (teacher) jumped in. But you could tell he was also upset because the kid killed the ducklings. I didn't get in any trouble though. A week or two before, when the kid just began going to school he was trying to make himself sound cool. He thought I was Mexican. We are all sitting around the table. And then he starts talking about how all Indians are alcoholics. Kate and I are Native. Kate and I sit up real quick. We were some force. “All Indians are alcoholics huh? So I am an alcoholic?” I never saw a fat little white boy shit his pants so quick. Then he was like, “Not all Indians, just Alaskan Indians.” “Well I am Alaskan! Well all the Alaskan Indians I have ever seen.” He shut up and I can't believe he came back the next day. I am like, “I am not an alcoholic. My grandma is not an alcoholic.” Well, remember Cody? One time we were fighting and he called me and Kate “Nazi whores.”

Michelle: [Rolling eyes] What did you do?

Helen: We got more angry at him because we *did* care about him. We just about flew out of our chairs. I am fucking colored, how can I be a Nazi? [She smiles.] I have a mouth like a trucker. [We laugh.] But I knew he was going to use something like that. That was where he was in the conflict. He was at the point of using everything he had. I knew that. I knew him. But he lost it right there. He knew he messed up real good. He almost cried. He turned around and left the class. Get me and Kate going and it is scary. But see it all started when we called him a dork and for us that is a term of endearment, joking and sending notes back and forth, but this is a sore spot with him. We didn't know that. He had been harassed with that. I didn't mean to hurt. I felt bad about that and talked to him later. So we were still friends after that. We ended up digging trail with him only. I threw mud at him. We were covered and we just had so much fun. We were rough but we cared about each other. We were like brothers and sisters.

Michelle: What's the difference between Peeve and Cody? They both were racist.

Helen: Peeve was sick. I mean just the ducklings. See, with Peeve, he believed it. He used everything he could and he believed those things. Really thought he was superior. He was kind of slow. There wasn't anything really redeeming about him. Cody was delightfully nutty and well loved. We knew Cody really didn't believe it. He didn't normally use his white power. And then when he did, he knew he was wrong for doing it. He left with his tail between his legs.

Helen outlines two white young men's use of racism or sexism. In the first example she is present for Peeve's racist views of Alaskan Indians. In the latter example she is directly targeted by Cody's "Nazi whores." For Helen, how well she "knows" each

of these young men is everything. Peeve digs himself in deeper when he narrows his racist statement. Helen sees his use of “white power” to gain power. Given the “duckling” example, both students and teachers were concerned about Peeve. Helen determines that Cody’s use of “his white power” was for self-protection. Cody is “family.” She paid attention to the place he was in when he used racism. His use of racism (and sexism) embarrassed him but not in the way that Peeve lost ground. Helen knew his use differed in intent than Peeve’s because Cody “didn’t normally use his white power.”

Upon further reflection she realizes that she and Kate had mistakenly used “dork” in a way that demeaned Cody. She concludes that Cody had retaliated while at the end of his rope with white power. Helen used “dork” as a “term of endearment” while Cody had been “harassed with that.” She created time to dig trail with him and followed it up with a mud fight that was really fun. In spite of Cody’s racism-under-pressure, Helen apologized for calling him a “dork,” something that meant something different to him than what she intended.

At first glance, Helen represents herself and Cody as equals in their relationship. This could be a sign of blindness to sexism and racism—leaving her vulnerable. Yet, Helen acknowledges that the relational context in which power is expressed is central to its use, meaning, and effect. The relational context gave Cody’s racism a very different meaning than Peeve’s—one that showed she too had stepped on some toes. My point is that her savvy “reading” of Cody’s racism may not be possible with shifting class composition because Helen would not have had opportunities to know Cody like “a brother.” Racism and white privilege can be maintained more easily where relationships

are regulated through institutionalized practices and structures. The meaning of racism—as expressions of power—can be investigated when people know one another. In Helen’s case her “skill” was to see through Cody’s words when she knew he cared about them.

Summary. Many informants echo Becka’s words that in public school “I probably would not even care” to try to resolve interpersonal problems. Even if they wanted to get to the bottom of the problem, the large school setting is not equipped to engender the relational context that supports youth to voluntarily choose and create time for resolution. The above example attests to the importance of “knowing each other” as a potentially opened “place and space” to challenge “the reproduction of ideologies that support existing structurally based inequalities” (Dimitriadis, et al., 2008, p. 5). Yet players in such negotiations do not necessarily come to the table as equals or with common interests. Some may be in the position to “bargain” with power, while others plea bargain. Some, like Peeve, pretend that they wield a lot of power, but break potential social bonds when exercising this “power.” Some refuse to play. As Boler (2000) writes, they were “feeling power.” The problem with the word “negotiate” is that it does not convey the context of power relations or imply the level of coercion or “actions under pressure.” In this case, Helen negotiated the expressions of racist power differently, contextually, based at least in part on her social position of relational power as well as that of holding less institutional power than Cody.

Becoming family included the relational lessons learned by “dealing with” one another, getting attached, arguing, picking on each other, trusting, learning about each other, watching out for one another, schooling, and investigating when someone you knows targets you. In *Pedagogy of Belonging*, Beck and Malley (1998) posit that

the psychological sense that one belongs in a classroom and school community is considered a necessary antecedent to the successful learning experience. In an era when traditional sources of belonging have diminished due to changed family and community demographics, the school plays an increasingly important role in meeting this need.” (p. 133)

A sense of school belonging is positively associated with academic engagement and achievement (Bond, et al., 2007; Pittman & Richmond, 2007). Informants’ words support Beck and Malley’s statement that “conventional [classroom] practices may exacerbate feelings of rejection and alienation and place these students at higher risk for dropping out, joining gangs, and using drugs.” Further, researchers claim that “a sense of belonging to the school environment is an established protective factor for child and adolescent health, education and social well-being” (Rowe & Stewart, 2009, p. 396; Bond, et al., 2007; Hawkins, et al., 2005).

Concerning theories of community, Secomb (2000) notes that despite the numerous differences between [different] formulations of community, they all conceive of community as an attempt to achieve agreement and unity. Community is often understood as a unified political body founded on consensus and commonality.” (p. 134)

She argues that intergroup conflict is essential to “community as an expression of difference,” rather than an expression of commonality. Participants built “family” on the active expression of difference and the friction that produced. Although conflict can be a catalyst for the breakdown of community, for Secomb (2000), the negotiation of such differences has the most possibility for community

as an expression of difference and diversity that is made manifest through disagreement and disunity. While disagreement is generally conceived as a threat to community and a sign of imminent collapse of community, I will argue instead that disagreement disrupts the formulation of a totalizing identity, or commonality. The creation of a totalizing unity is the movement of totalitarianism and unfreedom. Disagreement, on the other hand, holds a space open for diversity and for freedom. It is not disagreement, resistance, and agitation that destroy community. It is rather the repression or suppression of difference and disagreement in the name of unity and consensus which destroys the engagement and interrelation of community. The conception of a unified community of commonality destroys freedom, alterity, and heterogeneity. It is only within a community that acknowledges disagreement and fracture that difference and freedom flourish. (p. 134)

Participants show that they are capable of complex social interactions that are group-centered, rather than the marginal relations that prevailed for them at their former schools. Yet exclusion was used in particular instances, like when Peeve's behavior threatened the safety of the group. Participants describe a transformation in their relational content, one they called "family," that included crossing borders within the group rather than retreating from those differences as they did in their former schools. Their lessons are similar to Perry's (2002) findings in *Shades of white* where students in diverse high schools demonstrated a much more complex and savvy understanding of institutionalized, relational, and individual difference than their counterparts who attended almost exclusively white schools. Participants' willingness to include conflict

may be a form of cultural capital that is misunderstood by traditional notions of “appropriate school behavior.”

Discussion

Conservation High serves as a backdrop against which participants compared institutionalized structures and organization. This chapter is an exploration of how participants negotiate institutionally and informally structured relational opportunities. Some of these relational structures encouraged young people to bond and provide a lived experience for these girls to examine. Participants all negotiated a discourse of school failure in public school, which positioned CHS as a “new slate” or “new start” for them. Thus it is not surprising that participants describe a more positive experience at CHS; yet it must be emphasized that they also describe significant concerns, which in any school program which are commonly thought of as infractions: arguing, nit-picking, and racism. For them, the difference was that incidents occurred within a context where they were permitted and encouraged to develop the skills to talk about such incidents and treat each other in ways that supported an overall notion of community.

Participants’ examples highlight how they see school structures and informal climate, as able to accommodate (or not) differing home lives. Informants were disheartened when unofficial school policies did not accommodate their very real, difficult, or alternative life circumstances. Participants made a distinction between activities that went against school policies that they could and could not control.

Participants struggled with a presentational culture in public school, which they constructed as opposed to the relational culture they found at CHS. They resisted being in schools that they saw as impersonal. There are a number of structural aspects that they

identified as contributing to a cold environment and one that precluded the communication of caring, including large school populations and large class sizes, shifting class composition, pervasive requirements for quiet individualized work, and lack of activities that involved working with other students consistently.

Schools play a role in their students' decisions to stay in them or leave before graduating. The most important finding in Lee and Burkam's (2003) study is that students are less likely to drop out of high schools where relationships between teachers and students (as perceived by the students) are more positive. While schools themselves have little ability to influence who attends them, we believe that the adults who work in schools (teachers and administrators) are able to consciously alter how they interact with their students. Quite clearly, students stay in school when social relations with their teachers are positive. This association persists even when students' background, school demographics, and school sector are taken into account. (pp. 385–86)

Participants describe CHS as a place where they could be successful because of the relationships they cultivated there. From my perspective as an administrator, these relationships seemed intense, difficult, and confrontational. Yet, they highlight qualities of CHS and its relational culture: students spent a great deal of time with their class, participated in group activities with them, had opportunities to get to know everyone during school-structured activities, and had someone to talk to when they were stressed or in pain.

Participants' relationships are important to their sense of safety in school, and a small number of students made relationships more possible for the others. Further, their

social capital is specifically strengthened when they have opportunities to get to know both peers and teachers. Lee and Burkam (2003) state, “The concept of social capital identifies a crucial observation about collective life: that the quality of social relationships themselves either enhances or hinders individuals’ capacity to attain desirable social goods” (p. 362). For these students, getting to know all the people in their class, and sometimes in their school, seemed to become the foundation on which their academic commitment and later success was built. No students left their former high schools because they were unable to do the work, although some often wanted more help with it. They frequently left because they felt that school was a cold place; they felt alienated, not cared for, or even pushed out.

Wexler (1992), in a comparative ethnography of three American high schools, found that schools discourage and block the development of meaningful relationships between students. Students’ responses to the regulation of school relationships are to work to “create a visible, differentiated and reputable self” as a way to negotiate the felt hollowness of school life (p. 132).

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. . . . Their 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 (1992, p. 155).

Participants had an experience of schools in which their own voice was managed and often silenced. Quiet learners can be easier to manage, especially in large schools. “Talking” in class can constitute an infraction and result in disciplinary charges, which in

turn can produce the habit of silence. These particular students resisted tolerating such a “cold” atmosphere in public school. Before I began interviews, I expected that students would talk about the struggles that they had had with other students and staff. Rather than that, clearly as a product of a small school experience, they talk about the size and impersonal nature of most interactions in their former school. It is on this basis that the construction of adolescence as obsessed with peers can be reframed.

Ultimately, these themes are grounded in the uses of power and authority in schools and how they are or are not negotiated. As Pace and Hemmings (2007) note:

The legitimacy of teachers as authority figures is not something that can be assumed but rather is granted during the course of ongoing interactions with students. Classroom authority is, above all else, a social construction that is built, taken apart, and rebuilt by teachers and students. These relations function in a variety of ways and to varying degrees in the service of a moral order that may be composed of shared norms, values, and purposes but more often than not is complicated by competing and contradictory values. (p. 21)

Participants demonstrate awareness and resistance to structures, organization, and policies that are not based on the importance of relationships. Informants certainly perceived what Metz (1978) calls the “air of inevitability” of structural organizations found in public school, and for some this was a reason for leaving school.

Michael Apple (1982) suggests that we notice the form itself. Most important pedagogic, curricular, and evaluative activities are designed in such a way that students only interact with the teacher on a one to one level, not with each other (except during “breaks”). The teacher

“manages” the system. This both increases efficiency and helps discipline. One could ask what could be wrong with that? This is the wrong question if one is interested in ideological reproduction and how the school responds to crisis. A better question is, what is the ideological coding in the material? How does it organize our experiences in ways similar to the passive individual consumption of pre-specified goods and services that have been subject to the logic of commodification so necessary for continued capital accumulation in our society? (p. 32)

Participants note how ideological and institutional formats organized their experience in ways to ensure (passive) individual consumption of the reality, in this case, of their regulated relationships. Yet they were aware of these structures. Fern, for example, demonstrates resistance to the lack of bonding opportunities. When there was not a place for “my life” at school, many participants like Amelia, Becka, and Helen came to believe that school personnel did not care about them, a determination based on the ways their lives and emotional experience were marginalized.

In conclusion, these participants describe how they experienced institutionalized and informal school structures within the context of representational culture in public school. The result is a lack of what they call “real” relationships. It is this lack that they resist when they cannot get to know others and when others do not have a stake in a relationship with them.

Chapter 5: Socially Constructing “Real” Identity in School

Michelle: Okay, next question. What about [CHS] made it like family?

Anáwaké: Trust.

Fern: Togetherness.

Anáwaké: Shared experiences.

Fern: Memories, future, opportunity.

Anáwaké: Fighting, arguing.

Fern: Drama, [pause] love, hate.

Anáwaké: Pain, community.

Fern: Communication.

Anáwaké: Real friendship.

Michelle: What are the qualities of real friendship?

Fern: Someone you can look up to, have to be by your side and not lie to you.

Anáwaké: Acceptance, they accept you for—

Fern: —who you are and what you do. They are not going to be your friend one day—

Anáwaké: and not the next, once you get past all the fake shit.

Fern: Yeah, once you dig up everything around it and get to the core of it. I think once you get to real friendship, you, you just don't have to worry about it not being real. It is there. It is just something that you have.

What is it like to see the relational world of school in terms of “fake” and “real” relationships and identity? Fern and Anáwaké complete each other's sentences about being at Conservation High School. Clearly they have talked about these things before.

They use the identifiers that most participants used in their interviews, such as the cultural constructions of “being yourself” and “being real,” against “fake shit” and “lies.”

Certainly, informants use the language of “real”/“fake” in specific ways in different contexts. On the one hand, Fern and Anáwaké agree that in “real” friendship there are shared experiences that include arguing, community, love, and acceptance for “who you are and what you do” “once you get past all the fake shit.” They define a “real” friend as one who “accepts you for who you are.” Here “real” is associated with “authenticity.” On the other hand, “fake” is associated with “deception” and lack of loyalty. For example, a “fake” friend is one who “lies” and is “not going to be your friend one day.”

Some participants exhibit binary thinking, broadly rejecting “fakers,” including many of their former classmates and teachers. Some participants use “fake”/“real” as a dialectic—an open-ended analytical conversation that seeks resolution of the topic at hand—referencing conditions of power and negotiation. “Fakers” are seen as complicit in informants’ social marginalization in public school, often without getting to know them. Yet such a sweeping conceptualization of “fakers” separates informants from the student body. By seeing others as obsessed with how they look and how they present themselves or their group membership, informants further distance themselves, marking social boundaries that are difficult to cross. Further, such constructions of fakeness reproduce relational divisions through exclusionary and monitoring social practices. Inside CHS, these monitoring practices on the part of students were intended to create safety and yet also mimic practices that participants felt victimized by in public school.

Informants, like Fern and Anáwaké, took steps to engage the more comprehensive social discourses of representation, social and school achievement, and meritocracy through the discourse of “fake” and “real.” These designations are versatile; while seeming like a binary opposition of “fake” *versus* “real,” they highlight the contradictions, contestations, intentions, context, and struggles involved in negotiating one’s presentation and relationships, and the social conditions. “Real and fake” discourse highlights, for example, the negotiation of discourses of school failure, femininity, and unsure futures, all of which include complex and contradictory lived experiences. While “real” ultimately requires negotiating one’s presentation, becoming another “pose,” this does not imply that all poses are equal in meaning or experience, particularly in this case, in regard to deception. As many informants attest, “real” is associated with accuracy, for example, not having to hide getting free lunches in school.

The use of “real” signifies their attempts to abandon passing in the normative and dominant middle-class culture of their public school. These students were in an educational environment where their everyday experiences were not the dominant experience. For example, 80 percent of students at Conservation High received free lunches. So Lily’s ability to admit receiving free lunches is directly related to her experience at CHS, where the majority of students share that experience and also do not hide it.

Above, Anáwaké suggests that even in Conservation High’s “real” culture, she got “through all that fake shit” with peers who became her friends. Like other participants, she identifies a process of “becoming real,” which entails sharing personally when she found that CHS was a safe place to expose her doubts and troubles. Therefore,

misrepresentation is understood as synonymous with being “fake.” This is read within a discourse of power where safety is a significant concern. Other participants, like Marissa, criticize “posers” at her former school, yet describe herself as “posing” there also, because her association with the “gangster wannabes” provided safety. In this sense, then “fake” also identifies a felt sense of negotiating an authentic identity in the face of an imposed identity (like “school failure”) within a discourse of power.⁷

My argument here is not that there is an inherent or essential difference in these youth, who actively co-create essentialist “real” culture as “better.” Instead, I ask what happens when we put marginalized youth in an environment where they both actively participate in forming the social structure and regularly talk about their interactions, in this case, about how they work together? I have discussed how, at CHS, participants came to value what they learned through opportunities to discuss how they, as a class, functioned. Participants suggest that, given opportunities to get over the “fake shit,” relationships develop across established group borders, whether those be race, class, or gender, based upon group affiliation or other affiliations. Yet, students who cannot overcome this “real” versus “fake” dichotomy are limited in their ability to see past the “insider” versus “outsider” constructions and, unfortunately, reproduce similar cultural practices to those that targeted them in public school.

In addition, what these youth have to offer is reflection upon their experiences as both marginalized youth and youth who participated as “insiders” in the “real” culture at Conservation High. From both of these positions, they use “fake/real” discourse as a critique of their school and social experiences, and therefore talk back to the broader social discourses of school and social achievement, representation and relationships, like

⁷ I thank Elena Chandler here for contributing to this section.

the pressure to “fit in.” CHS participants resolved “fitting in” in its most basic sense. They made complex inroads where they recognized their own and others’ reasons for engaging in “fake shit,” often for the sake of presenting themselves in ways that were socially advantageous. Some participants became critics of “posers,” while most also critiqued constructions of success and achievement in broad ways, including feminine, academic, and consumerist constructions of power. Others learned to reflect upon the function of representation, like what it meant for Anáwaké to wear high heels within their relational environment—a nuance in their worldview—that has socially political ramifications.

I argue that as they discovered a shared identity as insiders, they deserved support to negotiate and reflect upon that, so as not to reproduce the environment that led to their own marginalization. They deserved opportunities to reflect upon the role of representation and negotiation for themselves and in relationships in school, especially in this age of pervasive consumerist media targeted at youth (Giroux, 2003).

These CHS youth are fortunate not just because of their unwillingness to tolerate the marginalization of others, but also because of their awareness of their own alternatives to such a social dynamic. Young people in CHS, without the staff’s awareness, talked about how to negotiate their relationships; they were unwilling to marginalize each other, but also discussed how they reproduced the very habits they critiqued in public school.

In this chapter I will look at how these informers decipher who and what constitutes “fake” and “real.” What forms of regulatory practices in school do they identify when they use these terms? In this chapter, I primarily use “discourse” to signify

the disciplinary power expressed through conversation and constructions of identity, in this case the broad possibilities of “fake” and “real” identity. How might participants’ “real/fake” discourse critique, resist, and reproduce dominant discourses of representation, exclusion/inclusion, and educational inequality and failure? I highlight how informants employ a discourse of “real and fake” to describe their experience and to resist how dominant discourses are “used to regulate the conduct of others” (Hall, 1997, p. 44). My focus cannot be only what they establish as “fake” discourse, associated with misrepresentation, deception, and disempowerment, and “real” discourse, associated with authenticity, accuracy, and empowerment. I also analyze how informants use “real” versus “fake” as a counter-discourse that redefines the context of school failure in terms of an alternative representational and interpersonal context in which schooling occurs.

Macgilchrist (2007) notes that, given “the constant struggle over meaning,”

the “counter” of counter-discourse should not, then, be taken as a static entity; rather, this constant struggle over meaning emphasizes the “fluidity” of what is predominant and what is dissenting, leaving space for alternative representations to shift into a mainstream space. (Bamberg & Andrews, 2004, as cited in Macgilchrist, 2007, p. 75)

Counter-discourses also demonstrate a co-construction of meaning that includes contradiction and dissent. As I show in the following two sections, participants subvert, reproduce, and learn to avoid reproducing some of the social relations they rejected in public school. For example, Becka admits to not caring about resolving problems with peers in public school, whereas at CHS she gained the interest and skills do so. A strength of participants’ use of “real” discourse is the fluid process they offer to discover being

“real.” “Real” discourse signifies a space for dialogue about the active, lived experience of becoming in relationship with self and others. (Chapter 6 is dedicated to how they go about this task with regard to constructions of femininity.)

Chapter Organization

This chapter is divided into three main sections: Being “Fake,” Being “Real,” and Weighing the Cost of School. Being “Fake” has three sections: Cultural constructions of fakers, “Fake” experiences (efforts at being a faker), and “Fake” regulations and practices. The second section, Being “Real,” also has three sections: Cultural constructions of being “real,” “Real” regulations, and Becoming “real.” The parallel organization of the first two sections enables them to be readily compared. Throughout each section, I analyze data to show how the discourse of “fake” and “real” engages larger dominant discourses concerning social relationships, including representation, school and social achievement, and consumerism. The final section, Weighing the Cost of School, contains participants’ dropout stories as they relate to social relationships, being “real,” and being “fake.”

In Cultural constructions of fakers, and Cultural constructions of being real, I begin with the terms participants use to define the relationship between “real” and “fake” discourse in order to analyze how they construct their identity relative to these terms. I seek to answer the questions, How are these concepts used and what do they reference? In “Fake” experiences and Becoming real, participants offer examples of their attempts at “being fake” and the process they experienced as they “became real.” How do they talk about identity as “fake” or as “real”? “Being real” and “being yourself,” like constructions of racial and gendered identities, signify participants’ constructions of

subjectivity. In these sections I ask: How do participants negotiate their construction of “real” identity? What meaning do they ascribe to others’ identities that they see as “fake”? Informants’ use of descriptive terms of identity, including “faker,” “poser,” “pretender,” and “actor,” developed in Cultural constructions of fakers, reveals how they perceived the [hostile] social environment in public school as having little to do with “real” social or academic merit. On the other hand, the characterizations of “being real,” like “being yourself,” having “honest communication,” emotional authenticity, and shared experiences, identified in Cultural constructions of being real, constitute earned relationships like those Fern and Anáwaké refer to above when they speak of “trust,” “shared experiences,” “arguing,” and “communication.” I maintain that informants participate in a critical alternative discourse that reframes the terms of “real” cultural capital so that academic achievement and social connections can be repositioned. “Real” cultural capital (politics) attempts to distinguish one’s complicity with the representational “in” culture by marking it as a threat to community. This alternative discourse applies to the relational culture of both school environments and is talked about primarily, but exclusively, as the content of academics learned. At the end of each of these two sections I ask, What forms of regulative practices do participants demonstrate are at work in their use of “fake” and “real” discourse? How do they legitimate these practices? What contradictions surface when participants use regulative practices that were also used at their former high schools, such as threats of social exclusion? What hidden curriculum do these practices imply?

The third section, *Weighing the cost of school*, was developed with an overt recognition that students at Conservation High engage the discourses of “real” and “fake”

from their position as youth who have negotiated the discourse of school failure (Nygreen, 2011) as a reference point. I review stories that reveal my informants' decision making that led to their public school disengagement, based upon their "crises" of living within "fake" public school culture. I therefore offer these youth's constructions of "real" discourse as a viable one through which to engage youth identified as at-risk of dropping out of high school. These youth participate in a "real" discourse that responds to the need for "an alternative discourse to provide a different set of meanings and interpretations about school failure" (Nygreen, 2011, p. 1). Fredricks, Blumenfeld, and Paris (2004) confirm that there is as yet little to no research on student experience when it comes to "student engagement." They call for "richer characterizations of how students behave, feel, and think—research that could aid in the development of finely tuned interventions" (p. 59). With that impetus in mind, this analysis concerning "fake" and "real" discourses and identities situates their dropout stories not only in the literature on student disengagement (dropout and resistance) but also as a form of engagement. I argue that some participants' dropout stories could have been seen as an invitation by these students to engage and relate to them.

Being "Fake"

The first part of this section, Cultural constructions of fakers, presents one pole of the "fake" versus "real" dichotomy. I analyze what terms and conditions are used to construct "fake" discourse, the words the participants use that highlight their experience of negotiating dominant discourses of representation. In the second section, "Fake" experience, I underscore participants' experience of "trying on" "fakeness" and its relationship to myths they hold about "fitting in." Last, in "Fake" regulations I ask, "How

aware are participants of “fake” cultural regulative practices? What forms of practices do they present?”

Cultural constructions of fakers. This section establishes participants’ descriptions of their public high schools’ culture of performance as “fake.” How do informants form a definition of what is “fake?” While their descriptions of what is “fake” certainly vary, by associating themselves with what is “real,” they demonstrate a social identity as a group with “real” group members. Wortham (2004) says:

Social identification is the process through which individuals and groups become identified as publicly recognized categories of people. This process requires two primary components: social categories of identity that circulate through time and space and the characteristics or behaviors of individuals that are interpreted with reference to those categories. (Agha, 2003; Bourdieu, 1984; Urban, 2001, as cited in Wortham, 2004, p. 716)

How do participants formulate the social category, characteristics, and behaviors of “fakers” within the relational worlds of high school?

Michelle: What does “poser” mean to you?

Autumn Moon: A poser is someone who fits in with an image and does not stay true to themselves. You know, it is becoming an image rather than who you are. Those girls who hung out in the bathroom and put on makeup, the Goths, the stoners, and preppies, academic types.

Autumn Moon defines a “poser” by accentuating that it is “someone who fits in with an image” against those who “stay true to themselves.” Her description features examples of gendered images of girls who put on makeup and other popular social categories,

including “Goths, the stoners, and preppies.” She draws upon and critiques prescribed social categories and a dominant discourse of “made-up” femininity as represented in popular culture media and in her school.⁸

This was not the only way in which my informants defined “fake” and not the only way in which we can see how public school culture, described by Autumn Moon and her peers, was experienced as an imposition of normative inauthentic performance. The concept of being a “faker” also represented an adaptive style that allowed some informants to negotiate what they perceived as a hostile environment, while others, like Marissa, learned to take advantage of others. Marissa gives an example of how she portrayed herself as a “gangster wannabe” for group protection in public school. There, she became highly skilled at pretending to be anything. She gave this example to underscore what she meant:

Marissa: [Laughing with me] Right. I *could* pretend to be a bum on the street with nowhere to go or, or like [pause]. It is all how you present yourself because no matter who you are, you can change your outlook or like what people see you as. You know? You can go in a store and pretend, and have people leave you alone and not follow you or you can act sneaky. You can do that. I stole when I was younger for a while, from 13 to 15. And the reason why I was never caught is because I wouldn’t portray myself as someone who was a thief, right? See, but my

⁸ Certainly these social categories and the dominant discourse of femininity are also raced. Autumn Moon, as a Guamanian and Irish young woman, does not base her observations on groups that are racially/ethnically defined such that “all the Black kids are sitting together in the cafeteria” (Tatum, 1997). Possibly, a reason is that the traditional school she had attended, Hills High, had only 8 percent students of color with less than 1 percent of students who were identified as Asian-Pacific Islanders. This means that, on average, Autumn Moon attended classes with only one or no other student of color.

Dad found stuff in my room, twice, and took me back to stores.

Michelle: He did, huh?

Marissa: Yeah. And I did it again. But that was [pause] . . . I didn't portray myself as someone who comes in there stealing. It is really all about how you portray yourself. If you go in and are whispering to each other and watching everybody, doing this and that, then you are going to get caught. You could pretend to be anybody. That's what I think a lot of people in the schools do. You know? It's like [at CHS], you can't pretend because you are *with* these people, I mean you are on Spike and you *live* with them.

First, Marissa uses the verbs and phrases that all relate to performance: “pretend,” “act,” “portray,” and “change your outlook,” a consumerist representation. These terms demonstrate her self-conscious awareness of her ability to manipulate “what people see you as,” particularly in public school within a discourse of power. She also includes her misrepresentative and aggressive intentions to exploit store personnel who were unaware that she was portraying an “image.” She legitimates her learning to deceive by explaining that it's “what a lot of people in the [public] schools do” and then contrasts that with the inability to pretend at Conservation High—note that she neither rejects nor condones being “fake.” When she explains that people who live together find it more difficult to hold a “pose,” she highlights that the breadth of possibilities for “posers” at public high school are diminished in small communities that know each other. She confirms “fake” representational cultural capital—a capital Marissa lost upon entry into Conservation High. In Marissa's perspective, misrepresentation is a normative vocation in high school and a foundational aspect of performance-based group membership. Here Marissa

demonstrates an awareness of a dominant discourse of representation that engages consumerism, representation, group membership, and property. Her observation about not being followed in a store due to her ability to perform as a white teenager fails to recognize that one cannot “perform” visible differences, such as race (Alcoff, 2006, 2000) in a society where that matters. “Fitting in” where one is “faking it” is significantly different from “fitting in” where one is known.

These two examples demonstrate informants’ awareness of the complexities of identification, characteristics, behaviors, and discourses used to construct “fakers.” The examples show their awareness of a normalization of managing one’s presentation within the social worlds of the high schools they attended and their negotiation and resistance to that normalization.

“Fake” experiences (efforts at being a faker). Wegner (1998) states that “because learning transforms who we are and what we can do, it is an experience of identity” (p. 215). How do participants reflect on their experiences of “faking it”? What fake practices did they employ? What conditions or events do they identify that impacted their participation in “fake” or “real” discourse?

Carmen found that “fitting in” was a relational myth that did not imply the interpersonal relationships that “fitting in” would suggest:

Carmen: At public school, I didn’t fit in with the way that high school students have their groups. I would go into the lunchroom and there would be a different table for each type of people. You know? The super rich kids, the super poor kids, the gangster kids, the jock kids, you know all the different groups. And I didn’t

really fit into any of those groups. So I ate outside even when it was cold. There wasn't a table for me.

Carmen: I thought that I had to make myself a certain way so that I could fit in with certain people there [in public school]. So that is when I think I started obsessing over, you know, the things that other high school girls were obsessing over, like your hair and your makeup and having the brand new North Face fleece with no fuzzy balls on it. And the Adidas shoes that are very, very white and having a life that dramatically involves guys and your friends. Having the image that you are happy because that is what everybody wants you to be. So whether or not you are, you have to pull it off.

Having experimenting with “fitting in,” Carmen concludes:

Carmen: I didn't think there was really any possibility of fitting in. But then it was like, “Do I really want to fit into this anyways?”

Michelle: What cost would there have been to you if you put a lot of effort into fitting in?

Carmen: Failure, I guess, because no matter how hard you try, if you don't have enough money to have the new look every month, you can't. It is just setting yourself up for failure.

Carmen believes that she did not fit into the prespecified, socially-defined categories of her high school. In an attempt to gain social relations and power, she admits that she engaged in the discourse of “fitting in”—she obsessed over her hair, makeup, clothing, guys, and friends. Yet she wanted more than the presentation of “fitting in”; she wanted

interpersonal relationships. Ultimately, she concludes that it was a losing battle because she did not have the financial means. Here she questions dominant discourses of group membership and class, and counters with the discourse of interpersonal relationships and “being yourself.” She learned to reflect upon, assess, and question the established caste system set up through social group categories (Ortner, 2002, Eckert, 1989). By doing so, she seemed to become more aware of “how people are drawn into and compose social structures” (Rogers, 2006). Carmen’s approach demonstrates a kind of social capital that she brings to relationships.

Next Marissa describes how she became a “G Wannabe”:

Marissa: [To be a Gangster or “G Wannabe”], we wore the holed shoes and baggy jeans and the plaid, lumberjack kind of black and blue shirts [at public school]. You know. We just basically [were] like, “I’m all this and I’m all that and you can’t touch me because we’re a group.” You know?

Michelle: It has a lot to do with how you present yourself?

Marissa: Yes. It *is* basically how we presented ourselves to people.

Marissa: I wore the clothes that they wore or the styles they wore. I talked like they talked and walked like they walked. You know? I took a lot of shit from these people. Like my friends including, you know? Like Deirdre. I came to know her first and I was the loser of the pack, sort of. You always have that one person that stands offish . . . I got shit on a lot basically. And I just took it, you know? Like they’d be rude or this or that and I’d take it!

Michelle: Why’d you take it?

Marissa: Because that's the only way I'd be accepted. That was the only way I felt I'd be accepted. It's like I went through those steps and, like now, I learned I need to stand up for me because no one else is going to do it. Right?

Marissa highlights the pervasive discourse of group membership identified in how she fit into the "Gangster Wannabes." Marissa shows that "in" group membership does not end one's social struggles. Learning to stand up for herself seems to be a disciplinary effect within the relational structure of both schools—in other words, the Gangster Wannabes would be "rude or this and that" until their members' conduct conformed to "standing up for themselves." Here group membership includes "standing up for yourself."

Next, Lily tried to tailor her presentation within a discourse of class and being nonoffensive:

Lily: Yeah. Before [at public high school], I was really like . . . I tried to please everybody. I didn't want to offend anybody. So I tried to be just as plain as possible, like nonoffensive.

Michelle: That's a lot of work isn't it?

Lily: Yeah! And I made up a lot of false selves of myself.

Michelle: What do you mean?

Lily: Like I would talk about things that I didn't really [know] all that much. You know like [I use a certain] bank that I didn't know. I tried to just fit in more. . . .

In an effort not to offend anybody, Lily tried to please and be as plain as possible. As in Deutsch and Theodorou's (2010) findings, she used "false selves" to mask her class status. Being "nonoffensive" and masking her class status did not have the relational pay-

off she expected. The above participants found the interpersonal relationships they wanted out of reach.

“Fake” regulations and practices. This section establishes participants’ descriptions of their public high schools’ cultures of performance and who they felt they were supposed to “be” in school. Since participants had experiences they name as negative there, they mostly critique it. Participants investigate the forms of regulations that managed their identities. What practices illustrate “fake” regulation?

In the following excerpts, participants depict “fake” cultural constructions.

- Wearing the latest fashion, wearing makeup:

Fern: I think in traditional schools, it is more like, you don’t have to be, but for the most part, people try to act like someone they are not, so they fit in. They just like buy that cool Nike jacket because all the cool kids have it. Girls wear makeup to try to be cool.

- Having the right look, saying the right words and having the right possessions:

Autumn Moon: I [was] not only supposed to learn and be “educated” there [at public high school], I was supposed to look right, fit in, say the right words, have the right possessions. What a trap! And what a huge job for a 13-year-old girl to take on.

- Being happy and good, dressing like others:

Carmen: They [people in public high school] think that you are supposed to be happy and good and that is not the point to life, but then you think that you are stupid and meaningless. Those messages are just all over the place. They are

everywhere. Nobody has to say you don't fit in because you don't dress like me. It's obvious.

- Pretending about everything and having or pretending to have a certain kind of heterosexual life:

Becka: Now in other schools, I think they pretend a lot about everything, [and] about guys. I just think other schools pretend way lot, like all the time.

Lily: Like at [Hills High], you are supposed to give the appearance that you are normal. Everyone there . . . [pause] you have to have a boyfriend or you are nothing.

Here participants collectively observe multiple cultural constructions in “normal” dominant discourses of representation and power by highlighting a “disjuncture between ways of interaction, representing and being” (Rogers, 2006, p. 51), like when Lily believes she is obliged to appear normal, when she is not. Some informants subtly identify how these dominant discourses regulate some student's conduct. For example, Fern notes the consequences of social exclusion for those who resist acting like someone they are not, buying the cool Nike jacket or wearing makeup. In all of the examples, informants highlight representations, versus being “yourself.” Participants record an extensive system of representational regulations (examples follow) that appears neutral, yet monitor:

- identity: “what I was,” “act like someone they are not”
- emotional expression: “being happy”
- circumstantial conditions: “the appearance you are normal”

- consumerism/capitalism: “the right possessions,” “cool Nike jacket,” “wear makeup”
- heterosexual relationship status: “you have to have a boyfriend”
- cognition: “what I was supposed to think,” “believing lies”
- speech: “saying the right words”

These broad prevalent messages are seen as institutionalized practices with consequences for resistance. Bourdieu (1977) suggests that cultural capital is a symbolic form of literacy, representation, and language that have differing exchange values within the dominant culture of the school system. Here participants demonstrate how their cultural capital leaves them on the margins of their schools’ dominant culture. Carmen names a subtle mode of the transmission of “fake” discipline in her comment that “nobody has to say you don’t fit in because you don’t dress like me. It’s obvious.” in this context the power of representation is such that someone can be declared an “outcast” without a word being spoken (to the marginalized person).

These are not surprising observations about the representation-centered culture of public schools. Although the *form* of “appearances”—whether material, physical, verbal, emotional, gendered, or sexual—varies, the sense of being required to “fit in” is pervasive.⁹ In their study of urban youth, Deutsch and Theodorou’s (2010) found that “the act of consuming for the adolescents in this study is an integral part of their identity performance across the intersectionality of their experiences of gender, race, and class. For girls, consumption is linked to specific gender performances based on the maintenance of an attractive appearance as dictated by social perceptions of femininity”

⁹ Participants possessed varying material and cultural opportunities (access to cultural capital) to negotiate these expectations. I point this out because this discussion includes those who had little access while others who had access chose to reject these opportunities.

(p. 229). Deutsch and Theodorou name these consumerist representations as “omnipresent.” They confirm that

the omnipresent physical displays of identity through clothing, hairstyles, and accessories are assurances of recognition of not only one’s individual identity but also of one’s place in the larger peer group. Preppy, Goth, or Geek, each group is marked by specific consumer choices that identify their members not only as individuals but also as members of these social networks. This dual exercise, of individuation of self and connection to a social group, results in a relationship with material culture wherein consumption is used to both mark and mask difference. (p. 231)

They found that those youth with limited financial power face a choice to remain “identityless, or “unable to display your place in the social order” and “use consumption as a tool for future identity building” (p. 251). Youth herein question “fake” “assurances of recognition.”

In an experiential educational environment, “knowing each other” offered an opportunity for critical reflection on “fake” and “consumer” culture. Shaul (1970), in his introduction to Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, says:

There is no such thing as a neutral education process. Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate the integration of the younger generations into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity to it, or it becomes the “practice of freedom,” the means by which men and women deal critically with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world. (p. 33)

The ability to “participate in the transformation of their world” begins with an initial appraisal of the regulations that keep the social order intact. I am not claiming here that CHS teachers employed Freire’s philosophy of education for “the practice of freedom.” I suggest instead that participants investigated the regulations of “fake discourse” and also learned lessons about “being known” and “becoming family” that further solidified their interest in “dealing critically with reality” (Shaull, 1970) which included critiquing “fake” culture.¹⁰

In the next examples, informants offer their awareness of regulative practices and their negotiation of them.

Autumn Moon: Then there were those who just didn’t agree with all that [fitting in with an image and not staying true to themselves] and they were cast out, [labeled] weird, and it always ends up affecting your grades.

Autumn Moon reinforces Deutsch and Theodorou’s (2010) claim that students with limited financial power face being “identityless”—however Autumn Moon’s point is not specifically about financial power or her own “lack of identification.” She proposes that those who resisted the terms of “fake” discourse disciplinary practices by critiquing subscription to a particular group status and representation on which group assignment was based—were “cast out” and labeled “weird.”

She then observes that those regulations intersect with disciplinary practices of the discourses of academic opportunity and meritocracy. Wortham (2004), demonstrates

¹⁰ The pervasiveness of their critiques, however thorough, potentially disables participants from focusing upon ways to engage others in their perceptions of “the practice of freedom,” which was certainly a topic of discussion. A dismissal of “fake” culture, along with the lack of specific dialogue about the social conditions all students face in school, impacts the workability of co-creating relational cultural change in public school. It makes it a challenge to “deal critically with the world” (Shaull, 1970) without involving the complexity of “fake” participation with all students.

how one student in a ninth-grade classroom “developed a social identity through the same conversations in which students learned aspects of the curriculum” (p. 715). Similarly, Autumn Moon indicates an interdependence between social identification and learning, since being “cast out” “always ends up affecting your grades.” Wentzel and Caldwell (1997) find that students like Autumn Moon are not alone. These researchers find positive correlations between peer acceptance, group membership, and academic achievement in middle school. To Autumn Moon, successful “posers” are constructed as exerting the social power to “cast out” those who forgo fitting in with an image. By inference, the socially-centered position of “posers” supports a social climate conducive to academic achievement.

Carmen identified teachers’ participation in “fake” academic expectations.

Carmen: Well, it seems like the only way you could show [teachers] who you are is through your work because they don’t have the time to get to know who you are outside of your work. So it doesn’t really matter who you are [to teachers], it just matters whether or not you turn in the assignment or passed the test.

Michelle: In other words, you can’t show who you are in high school.

Carmen: You can show it by how you dress, that is really the only other thing, because they would see it.

Michelle: But you just said that how you dress is not who you are.

Carmen: It’s not. That is how the other people try to judge who you are. But it doesn’t really show anything real.

Michelle: And you think that public schools didn’t focus on you as an individual?

Carmen: Or as a team. Just as a student. As a person who fills out papers, shows up on time, passes tests. And sits quietly. It is like . . . all you have to do [to make a difference as a teacher] is be involved and fully participate in teaching.

Michelle: That makes such a difference doesn't it?

Carmen: It makes it important not just your work.

Michelle: So it is important when it makes a difference to other people?

Carmen: Yeah. It is like as long as you are detached from the people you are teaching, you might as well be a bricklayer and be detached from the bricks you are laying.

Michelle: Didn't you have any teachers that tried that in high school—that tried to get to know you?

Carmen: [pause, thinking] Oh, if you are not the kind of person that learns by being quiet and sitting up straight for six hours, you are screwed.

Michelle: [nodding]

Carmen: Well you are! They don't have time to make adjustments for different peoples' learning styles. It is one-size-fits-all. And you know what happens when you try to make one size fit everybody, some people don't fit. So they are left out.

Given the structural setting in which teachers do their work, Carmen believes that teachers are restricted to judging students on how they dress and relying on a narrow set of student performances in terms of filling out papers, showing up on time, passing tests, and sitting quietly. Her premise is that teachers, by being detached—by not making an effort to know their students—never get beyond the presentations of student performance. While she sees that “teachers don't have time to make adjustments for different peoples'

learning styles,” she believes they can “be involved and fully participate in teaching” in ways that enable them to get to know students. Carmen, like Knesting (2008), believes in the power of teachers to relate to and help “at-risk” students succeed in school. Knesting found that “teachers who sought to understand students’ behavior, believe in students’ ability to succeed, and accepted them ‘as is’ were especially able to help at-risk students stay in school” (p. 5). Carmen’s relational cultural capital seems well suited to classrooms that prioritize classroom community (Allen, 2000; Berry, 2006; Levine, 2008; Sanchez, 2008; Sapon-Shevin, 2008).

Fern also introduced “acting” skills needed to “pass,” and additionally questioned the institutionalized power of a high school diploma:

Fern: Public school, just being there, kind of brings you down, and it affects the way you change.

Michelle: How did it want you to be?

Fern: Under a list of expectations about everything [at public school], sit there and listen and believe what they say and do what they tell you to do and act like you are enjoying being in the class and you pass.

Michelle: So how did it affect how you thought about yourself?

Fern: It made me feel held back and it made me think that the things that I am learning, I don’t really need. It made me think that I can go out in the real world and learn on my own, learn things that will make me successful later on in life.

Michelle: Why do you think you have to wait?

Fern: Because it feels like if I don’t get my schooling done with now then. . . . It feels like I won’t be able to get a good job and then I might be unsuccessful

without an education, like with a job. I might not be able to get one or a good one. It is sad that we are so focused on [getting] a job. We're dependent. And I don't want to be.

Fern felt vulnerably dependent on the educational system. She recognizes an institutionalized threat—the power a high school diploma holds in the current economy—while she questions the applicability of what she was learning. She believes in the value of education, but also questions her curriculum's specific content and context. She asserts that being schooled to “sit there and listen and believe what they say and do what they tell you to do and act like you are enjoying being in the class and you pass” affects her growth and “brings her down.” Here she identifies physical, cognitive, representational, and emotional requirements in order to pass a class. Fern highlights a disjuncture between her expectations of education and the discourse of meritocracy. She questions the legitimacy of these hidden curricular lessons and their connection to economic employment. Autumn Moon, Carmen, and Fern underscore ideological, institutional, and informal prescriptions of “faking it” with peers and teachers.

Summary. This section began with the terms participants identify to construct “fake” discourse, like “act” and “misrepresent,” that “give the appearance that you are normal.” Such observations imply that “fake” discourse lacks relational merit to legitimate group membership. They discriminate between group categories based on consumerist or gendered representations, activities, or status designations, such as “Goths,” “jocks,” and “poor kids.”

Next, they account for how “fake” culture is reinforced or coerced through discourse, real or threatened acts of social exclusion or judgment, and institutionalized

power. Ideological regulative practices, as well as gendered prescriptions like “having a boyfriend,” are questioned for their educational and social value. Also, inconsistencies are highlighted between the discourses of education as a meritocracy, as applicable to employment and future endeavors, and the questionable legitimacy of the many forms of normative representational or “fake” culture. Real or threatened acts of exclusion, like “being left out” or “cast out,” or being judged as “not being cool” or “being nothing” cajoled informants. For some, this had an impact not only on their relational experience in school, but also on their academic performance. Institutional power was seen as expressed through the weight or threat of not gaining a “high school diploma.”

Subtly, in the absence of formally legitimated curricula and dialogue regarding the relational climate of school (as the context of the formal curriculum), school administrators and teachers were seen as complicit with the role social climate plays in conditions in which participants consider dropping out.

Last, I argue that informants, by having the experience of being marginalized in school, engaged in critical consideration of the social conditions and structures in which they were placed. This reflection engages Shall’s (1970) points about Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, in that informants made steps to critically assess their world. These are important steps to “deal critically with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world” (p. 33). Public school is a barrier to such critical work because, while there, youth are separated from each other—which may be an aspect of their experience that led them to ask questions in the first place.

Being “Real”

Cultural constructions of being “real.” How do these students construct their identities

as “real”? What does their construction of being “real” indicate about the dominant discourses in which they find themselves positioned? How might participants attempt to reposition themselves by using “real” discourse in response to dominant discourses that construct participants as “failures,” “troublemakers,” and “losers.”

Many participants, like those below, believe that working with each other and telling the truth makes it impossible for them to be “fake.”

Autumn Moon: I think the reason you can’t be fake at [CHS] is because everybody expects you to be a leader, and there is no following. There is just leading. And you push on and shine as yourself. There, the [“in-”] “look” is realness. You are out there and you are in your rain gear. And you are sweating from head to toe, and it is not about what name brands you have on your sweatshirt. It is about how much you are pushing yourself. You can’t do that if you are being fake.

Autumn Moon: Well, when you are out there and you are working really hard and you are in the classroom and thinking about all these political and social ideas, you are forced to think about your own ideals.

Autumn Moon: You are there [in class debating], and you are speaking for yourself, and it is coming from who you are, not anybody else.

In Autumn Moon’s narratives, binaries *appear* explicitly and implicitly abundant, marking her effort to distinguish the “real” culture of CHS from constructions of fakeness. Autumn Moon constructs identity around binaries of “leader”/“follower,”

“sweating in your rain gear”/“name brand” clothing, “pushing yourself”/“being fake,” thinking and speaking for yourself/for others. However, when she says, “It is not about what name brands you have on your sweatshirt,” her point is not to establish “no name brands” in opposition to “name brands”; instead she breaks the binary construction here. She sees individualized effort and achievement as something to be positively valued. Categories and representations are not necessarily the problem for Autumn Moon, but instead are relational and meritocratic façades. Participants imply that CHS’s structure/culture was a setup for “real” success, in that it was impossible to resist being “real” in a muddy work-oriented environment.

For Lily, the culture of CHS made dialogue more “open and free”:

Lily: At [CHS] we knew everybody isn’t normal. When you entered there, you were like, “Yep, I get free lunches. . . .” It wasn’t like this abnormal thing. You didn’t have to hide anymore. When you break down those barriers, it leaves you open to talking about other things about your life. When you start bringing those barriers down, you become more open and free.

Lily highlights the “abnormal”/“normal” constructions of “free lunches.” She describes the role that safety played in being “real” when she managed personal information for her own protection in public school. Lily could be more “open and free” to maintain “consistency between ways of interacting, representing, and being” (Rogers, 2006, p. 51).

Helen sees “real” as a class issue:

Helen: Rich kids get to get together and show off their new cars and horses. Poor kids get together and talk about who had it the worst. We’d talk about “I hate that I had to eat that” and I was like “I love that because I got to eat.” You know I

almost beat everyone. We were talking about our mortality rate. Between my friends at [River High], we would talk about who we knew that died. One drowned. Some got picked up from a party, brought up to the hills, raped, beaten, and shot. We all went to the hospital that night.

Helen describes the content of rich and poor kids' talk, as she sees it. Rich kids demonstrate their material dominance. Helen does not account for the possibility that rich kids may also face difficult events, just like poor kids. "Real" talk can include the disparity between the students at River High—a disparity she does not believe rich kids talk about. Poor kids have the freedom to tell it like it is, including her "unchildlike" talk about death, violence, and hunger, and the lessons one learns from being hungry and hungrier. Real culture includes such lessons about the "reality" of their lives.

Marissa established "exposure" as a good "real" thing:

Marissa: Like at [CHS], [there are] very strong people. That is what I think it brings out in people. It brings out their strength. It also makes them believe in themselves more. Because they are able to take part in all this stuff. Because they are not able to hide. Like someone who goes to school, they sit behind their book, or whatever. You can't do that at [CHS]. Why? Because there was always something going on. You have to work with somebody. You don't get that alone time, like somebody is going to find out no matter what. Somebody is going to find out who you are, no matter what. Somebody is going to realize what you are. That you are a good person. It helps you to realize what you are, that you are a good person. It also brings out . . . [pause] It tends to bring out better morals, as in a work ethic and school ethic. It is not just regular daily life. It brings out a lot of

things. That is one of the main things I see that came out of it. People go in really timid but the next thing you know they have some opinion on something that needs to be dealt with right now. You know? [We laugh.]

Marissa echoes Lily's belief that at CHS, hiding is impossible. They found a sense of shared identity as "exposed" students. "Real" culture is constructed as one where students talk about and negotiate each other's opinions. They see "fake" culture as closing down critical thought and interaction. For many participants, "real" culture opens up dialogue and the right to question where there may be discomfort, disagreement, and opposition.

Last, Deirdre highlights helping each other as important in real people's lives.

Deirdre: Well, working at the [County Food Pantry], that really made a difference for me. Instead of just sending people stuff, we got to put the boxes together. We separated the food by cans and dry foods and put it in boxes for homeless people. It changed the way I look at people. I see how many caring people there are out there.

Michelle: I had no idea [about that].

Deirdre: Well, that's a lot of food. We were busy the whole time. We were really into it. The people who worked there were really nice. They seemed like they were having fun doing what they were doing for other people. It changed my view of the world. There are people that you can have a decent conversation with and then there are people that are just like "whatever." They don't care pretty much. They are just like, "I don't care." Most people that I have talked to at [CHS] were people that made a difference to me. They were really nice people.

Being around people who cared for others changed her worldview—people that spent the time to have a “decent conversation.” This suggests that Deirdre had not had many experiences around people who served others. This could very well be a statement about her formal education. She learned to look for people who care because she believed they were sparse. Her “real” discourse centers on caring people who serve others in need. “Real” talk is often constructed in opposition to “fake” signifiers; however, this is not the whole story. “Real” discourse can include a process orientation and has the flexibility to question, to relate to others’ narratives, to tell the truth, to argue, to speak about difficult experiences, to care, and to think and speak for oneself. Sometimes, “real” designates a sense of truth about oneself that students felt they had to “hide” from others. “Either/or” language can limit the complexity of what participants talk about.

“Real” regulations. How do participants get inducted into the discourse of “real culture?” What relational regulations keep “real culture” intact? How aware are participants of the practices that frame “realness?” How do these practices compare with those that they resisted in public school?

I begin with the most overt form of regulation: a threat of physical assault from other students.

Autumn Moon: It was interesting coming from a school where you had to come from a certain look or group. Then I came to Conservation High, and I was told I would get my ass kicked if I was a poser. That was only one kid but there was this initiation.

Autumn Moon’s “poser” representation was monitored by other students’ “fake assessments,” one classmate’s threat, and an “initiation.” While the student’s warning

may have been informative, it threatened her safety—clearly reproducing the sense of being cajoled by classmates to assume a certain “look,” in this case, a “real” one. She identifies it as an initiation into “real” culture, and in so doing demonstrates an awareness of some of the same potential tactics used to enforce “fake culture”—tactics that participants previously rejected or glossed over.

Next, Lily and Autumn Moon endorse social acceptance as hinged on “being real.”

Lily: [Public school] was like the opposite at CHS, instead of like being . . . I was offensive for being a goody-goody [at CHS], which is the opposite than in traditional school. So what I had to do to be nonoffensive [at CHS] was be a rebel. And so I still had those barriers of being a goody-goody. So it was like a hard flux to go through because you still had to be a rebel and you still had to be a goody-goody. There was such a fine line of doing that.

Lily: At [CHS] I learned to open up more and talk about who I was. And I don’t have to have barriers and make up fake images of myself. I don’t have to . . . I can just be myself. I don’t have to hide it and wonder what other people think of me. I can just be myself and if they don’t like who I am, that is not my fault.

Autumn Moon: You can’t be fake.

Michelle: Why not?

Autumn Moon: Because you are exhausted and tired (working) and because you won't make it. People won't accept you if you are fake. That is what I think. You get a lot of shit there if you [pose]. . . .

Although somewhat different, Autumn Moon and Lily's accounts highlight how the threat of social exclusion was used to discourage "posing." Autumn Moon got "a lot of shit there" when she posed, while Lily was "offensive" for presenting herself as a "goody-goody." Lily's two comments appear to contradict each other. On the one hand, she learned to talk about who she was, and on the other hand she thought she had to walk the "fine line" between being the "goody-goody" that *she* identified with and being a "rebel." She suggests that "who you are" requires some "rebel-ness" to counter "fake" presentations.

To be understood as "offensive" implies a threat of social exclusion—a coercive relational practice—reproducing the public school environment that most students critiqued. The "threats" to both Autumn Moon and Lily demonstrate an inconsistency by using social exclusion as a legitimate tool in "real" culture. However, with the experience of "opening up more and talking about who I was" Lily can now "just be myself." She explains that the relational regulation did not actually function as coercion, because she learned that "if they don't like who I am, that is not my fault." Her critique of the use of social acceptance as pressure to be "real," became a quality worthy of admiration by some at CHS. The complexity involved in assessing "posers" yet resisting re-enacting social exclusionary practices is a challenging relational lesson—some students may not have experienced such a relational climate before.

Marissa used "fake monitoring" as a regulative practice:

Marissa: You learn stuff you don't want to know about [your crew] and you learn stuff you do want to know about them, all together. You know who they are and what they are like. Most people here can't hold a pose for that long. Like, I was down with some of the newer kids that have been coming here and I've been like "Hmmm" [scratching her chin looking around].

Michelle: Wondering if they would fit in?

Marissa: Yeah. They were from a different class of people. They seem more preppyish than a lot of the people here. So I was just like, warning, you know? What is going to clash here? You know? But I mean I didn't know them that much because they were on the younger crew.

Marissa attests to using what I call a "fake-detector" to evaluate incoming students' "fake warning signs." She uses a familiar exclusive discourse and judgmental orientation to do so in the name of protecting her community. She adjusts her assessment by noting her unfamiliarity with them—subtly acknowledging that presentation is secondary to who they are. Yet, she too had "tried on" being "fake" by talking and walking like the "Gangster Wannabes." She gains power by positioning herself as a "fake" supervisor.

Autumn Moon illustrates a dichotomy between meritocratic and representational discourse within the structure of labor and debating at CHS.

Autumn Moon: You are busting your ass on trail. You cannot be anybody else! You are forced to become yourself. And your criteria and standards for yourself are definitely higher. People have higher standards for you. It is not about fakeness. It is not about what you look like at [CHS]. It is about what you can do and how much you can put into a team.

Autumn Moon: And we had debate teams. You can't use somebody else's ideas on the debate team. You are there, and you are speaking for yourself, and it is coming from who you are, not anybody else. And that is what people expect. And that is accepted there, and people look at that. And instead of thinking that it is a bad thing, it is accepted. You are a stronger person for it.

The practice of regularly being called upon to speak up about one's opinions and engage in physical labor impacts one's ability to "pose," according to Autumn Moon. The merit of how much you can put into a team by what you can do and by speaking for yourself is evaluated as "coming from who you are, not anybody else." She implies that one's authentic contribution to a group was a basis for status. Certainly, all language is the product of "appropriation" because language is learned (Bakhtin, 1983). However, her point is that, in an institutional structure that encourages dialogue about merit, youth can have an experience of success by talking about what they believe in the context of discussion, under the rubric of "speaking for yourself," and the merit of "contributing to a team," challenges the constructions of these youth as "failures."

Lily derived lessons about "who you are" from the conversational structure of learning at CHS. Dialogue became a regulative practice in this way.

Lily: When teachers ask to hear from you, you find out about who you are more. If you are able to state your opinion, you figure out more about who you are because then you can define it with your own words. . . . When you are just thinking, you can go in 12 different directions, but when you are speaking, you define it in your own words and you become familiar with it. And you realize that

that is what you believe, when you speak it. It is like once you speak it, you are like, “Oh yeah, that is what I think.” It is like you believe it once you say it because your thoughts are made more concrete. When you are thinking, that is your rough draft, but when you are speaking, it is your final copy.

Lily’s description reveals classroom and field-based dialogue as a regulative practice of the discourse of “being real.” She illustrates how the discourse of “becoming real” includes assumptions about identity as a process. The term “regulative” implies “to limit or control.” Here “regulative” becomes a “strategic educational opportunity.” Lily retains the “controlling” connotations by confirming that the ongoing practice of instructional dialogue framed youth’s talk in particular ways. Lily explains why interactive instruction is a personally relevant exercise. She positions herself as an agent in constructing herself through dialogue with others. Lily sees that she went into CHS timid and left taking an active stance when speaking about her opinions. Many of the participants’ prior examples also offer evidence of dialogue as a regulative practice of identity and relationship building. The examples indicate relationally encouraging and reflective pedagogic practices.

Becoming “real.” What do participants say about their “real” lessons at Conservation High? Proweller (1998) notes that “inside classrooms and corridors, youth engaged in the project of ‘becoming somebody’ are working to shape felt notions of self across multiple and intersecting discourses through which meanings are organized, mediated, and filtered.” How do informants discuss the process of “becoming themselves?” How do they describe “real” identity and how does this serve them?

Anáwaké speaks of how the transition to CHS culture is characterized as a “real” initiation process.

Anáwaké: I think that everybody that comes there, like at the beginning, thinking, well I don’t know what they are thinking, but they end up acting in whatever way they used to [at public school]. Whatever is familiar to them, like from a past school or whatever. . . . They immediately start acting that out, usually. And then they just kind of. . . . There are all the things together. I think that like in general, at the heart of it all, eventually there is not really . . . there is not a lot of fakeness and pretending once everybody gets used to [CHS]. But there is always new people coming in. Like in the beginning of the year everyone is coming here and like I was saying and they start doing whatever it is they used to do [at their former school]. They act out in whatever way or not. Whatever pretending or fakeness there is comes from that. But then everyone realizes pretty much, you know, that it is not really . . . that you don’t have to pretend at [CHS]. You know? You can just be who you are and be accepted, pretty much, but then there is always new people coming in throughout the year.

Michelle: So how do people get that message?

Anáwaké: I think just like. . . . There is just a drastic difference in the ways things are. You don't have to act out to get attention because most people are used to being in a classroom of like 40 people and, you know, taking notes and listening to the teacher and they don't get any one-on-one attention.

Anáwaké makes sense of new students' initial fakeness and acting out by determining that it results from their prior experiences in public schools. She saw this fakeness subside when students were "accepted" and they received attention no matter what they did. "Pretending" is constructed as necessary for avoiding social exclusion in public school. This awareness on the part of new students takes time and that process disrupts current "adjusted" students. Anáwaké emphasizes "becoming" "real" as a hidden curriculum. "Real" culture provided hope that school could, at the very least, be tolerable or even enjoyable.

Autumn Moon learned that becoming "real" was intertwined with "becoming a team," including learning to find out "what the lines and boundaries were" in relationships:

Autumn Moon: So at Conservation High we were a group of the kids who were not accepted [at our former schools]. We formed together and became individuals who worked together. That was the whole thing at Conservation High; there is no "I" in teamwork, but we were still an individual. We all looked and were so different and we had to figure out what the lines and boundaries were for each other, every day. We came closer together when new people came because they showed us how close we were, because of how separate they were when they got

there. We would come together to show them how we worked. That would be their initiation and we would look for strength and to see if they could be okay with mud and dirt. We would tell our muddiest, rainiest, back-country adventure and see what their reactions were.

The bonds created between the members of Autumn Moon's crew were spotlighted when new students arrived without such relational currency. Autumn Moon reports that she saw new students being tested. Tenured students used their "muddiest, rainiest, back-country adventure" to challenge "poser" identification. She endorses the discourse of individuality and teamwork as they initiated new students, an initiation based on how they had learned to "form together and become individuals" on a daily basis, by "figuring out what the lines and boundaries were for each other, every day."

CHS's structure used discussion as a sanctioned and primary tool for dealing with interpersonal conflict. Regular dialogue supported opportunities to engage (and disengage) in discussion and relationships rather than leave them managed in other ways. Autumn Moon asserts a postmodern notion that selfhood is relationally constructed (Gergen, 1994; Gergen and Kaye, 1993) and continually in process. The institutional structure and culture of CHS provided a framework in which Autumn Moon then recognized that "becoming real" was an ongoing process—a hidden-curricular relational lesson she learned there.

Autumn Moon points to the relationship between leadership and individuality:

Autumn Moon: I think that you are given an opportunity to shine there. And so like at other high schools, even other places, people don't really want you to stick out as much. You are supposed to be lumped into a crowd or with a group of

people. [CHS] gives people an opportunity to shine, to perform in a different way.

To perform with more intensity and more passion and definitely more creativity.

Michelle: You said before that people at [CHS] become leaders, but what if who they are isn't a leader?

Autumn Moon: Well, becoming who you are is a leader. You are not following other people, you are following yourself. You are growing into who you are; that is why you are not taking other people's ideals or morals or anything like that.

Michelle: Oh, I get it. So what do people at [CHS] do to encourage that?

Autumn Moon: Well, you are treated as an individual. There are crews, they are small, 11-person crews, and you are with them all the time, and you are treated as, not like a classroom of people being passed on period after period. . . . You have a name and you have a personality. The curriculum is based on what we need and what we want. It is based on individualism [too]. It is not based on what needs to be learned or what needs to be taught [independent of who we are].

She positions herself as a leader who was given the opportunity to perform differently and more creatively than a "poser" or a conformist. Her idea of "growing into who you are" engages the construction of adolescence as a time frame marked by identity "crises" (Lesko, 2000). Such a construction of adolescence can be used to imply that one is immature, unstable, and without an identity (Lesko, 2000). Autumn Moon attempts to use of concept of fluidity of identity in order to engender respect for the process of "growth." She "talks back" to disempowering constructions of learners and youth and encourages a curriculum that is connection to who the students are. She sees curricula as attending to both lesson plans and the students who are positioned as learners.

Summary. Wortham (2010) claims that his ethnographic data “show how identity emerges across a trajectory of events, as subsequent events recontextualize earlier ones as having established some social identity for participants” (p. 2869). Participants’ experiences of “real” culture recontextualizes their former experience of “fake” standards of performance in their former schools—“real” identity was constructed across “events” and therefore is marked as “in process” and “fluid.” Their talk compared “fake” and “real” representational discourses within their school experiences and how they negotiated these constructions of identity. “Real” identity emerges as a congruent alternative that engenders reflection on the purposes of “fake” identification.

I examined some underpinnings of informants’ binary and more complex use of “fake” and “real” discourse. Informants tend to construct rather consistent descriptors of “being fake” as opposed to “being real.” “Being fake” included specific inaccurate or deceptive representational words like “act,” “portray,” “misrepresent,” “pretend,” “pose,” “the appearance that you are normal,” “an image,” “a look” or “a posture.” Participants used these terms to identify prescriptions of group membership that were based on possessions, qualities, and *consumerist representations*, as in “Goths,” “preps,” “gangsters,” or “popular people”; *activities*, as expressed by the “stoners,” “academics,” “nerds,” “jocks” and “having a boyfriend”; or *class or emotional designations*, such as the “poor kids” and “being happy.” Across interviews, these group designations are critiqued for the lack of personal relationships as a medium for bonding legitimated through rigid boundaries. When informants did become members of these groups, they found that membership did not imply equality or connection.

Not surprisingly, CHS participants construct their identities by making sense of

educational disadvantage. This contrasts with Howard's (2010) examination of how students with life and educational advantages construct privilege as a dimension of their identity. He finds that

the students' understandings reveal their use of particular ideological operations and modes to justify their own advantages in life and schooling, construct between-class divisions, establish within-class solidarity, and rationalize the disadvantages of Others. . . . These particular ideological operations and modes are not simply methods or competencies that affluent students know how to use but also formative elements of their respective identities. This analysis illustrates the way that these students construct their own privilege not, fundamentally, as what they have, but rather, as who they are. (p. 1971)

In Howard's study, affluent students also use a discourse of identity, "who they are," to legitimate their privilege—rather than an examination of what opportunities or material reality they have been given access to. In the racial identity literature, when this rationale is used with reference to race to legitimate privilege, it is named "white supremacy." Howard's study contrasts with what I saw with CHS students. CHS students often see affluent students as having more power to ignore "who they are" and posture "who they are" as representative of their "better than" status, and the CHS students critique a perceived stance of supremacy on the part of those who patronize "fake" cultural standards without the merit earned in relationships.

The idea of "becoming who you are" offers fluidity of identity. My informants drew upon the popular discourse of "being yourself" to legitimate "real" discourse as an alternative relational field—a discourse in which they resisted and dissociated themselves

from the meanings ascribed to “fake” culture. “Real” talk put them in an empowering position to point out the priority of the interpersonal relationships through which schooling happens. The students imply that to “be yourself” is to disengage from representational group membership. Group membership is based on one’s own merit through being known and “being yourself,” which are also problematic constructions. Because “real” discourse is also a critical one, informants demonstrate a willingness to dialogue about problematics when it supports the process of “becoming real.”

While most participants were eager to leave their social marginality behind, informants attest to “becoming real” when they became “individuals” rather than followers, experienced a “real” initiation/transition, and engaged in a process of becoming less “fake” and more “real.” They had diverse initial experiences, including Becka’s immediate acceptance, Autumn Moon’s being threatened to refrain from “being a poser,” and Lily’s gradual social inclusion. Participants use relational terms to signify their transition, like “you didn’t have to pretend anymore,” “becoming known,” “finding out about who you are,” and “opening doors to my mind.”

Participants explicate “real” regulations when they reflect upon initiations at Conservation High. “Real” discourse marks cultural capital and complicity with the representational “in” culture as a threat to community—not unlike the “fake” culture of public school in which participants were possibly marked as threats to its exclusive dominant cliques. Informants used regulatory practices that were also employed within “fake” culture, like threats of exclusion, “schooling,” and expectations to “be yourself.” Many students also found that “being real” is a learning process. Anáwaké recognized that new students needed time to realize that they “didn’t have to pretend” before they

could become “known.” “Becoming known” served as an “enforcer” of acceptance, since eventually “somebody is going to find out who you are, no matter what,” as Marissa and others attest.

Participants changed the terrain on which “school failure” and “fake” discourse is founded by prioritizing relational ways of evaluating legitimate group membership. In their interview responses they evoke the meanings of *meritocracy*, *fairness*, *relevance*, and *dialogue*, and in so doing introduce regulations that public school did not use. For example, Becka and others critique the “better than you” status of many groups at their former high schools because they used ascribed characteristics, rather than achieved relationships, as measures of group membership. Here participants connect to a meritocratic discourse—the same discourse they believe school culture pretends to espouse. Relational and achieved merit is thus aligned with the discourse of “being real.”

The constitution of “merit” is expressed in diverse ways. Merit is defined through what one contributed, learned, or earned. For example, Marissa learned that she did not have to pretend anymore, and she learned to stick up for herself. Helen spoke about the truth of her life. Autumn Moon, Lily, and China expressed their thoughts during class discussions and learned about themselves. In this way, what one gave, did, learned, or contributed to a discussion, team, work environment, or oneself weighed more than one’s “look.”

CHS teachers structured “real” practices by regularly holding discussions and debates where students had “to think about your own ideals” (Autumn Moon). Classroom dialogue, where you had to “have an opinion” (Marissa), and fieldwork, where what mattered was “what you do,” served as regulative practices that promoted a discourse of

meritocracy. In this context, arguing between students was normalized by informants as a part of “real” dialogue. This meant that the emotions that go along with arguing were also legitimated by students as a part of an educational space. Their discourse of “becoming real” accentuates empowering readings of the social context in which those constructions of identity occur. In the story of the *Velveteen Rabbit* by Bianco (1983), a stuffed rabbit is made real through his relationship with and love for a boy. “Realness,” as participants clarify its construction here, includes the ways they increasingly noticed, cared for, and argued with each other—indicating a “process” of becoming “real.” Realness, like in the *Velveteen Rabbit*, is made through relationship.

Weighing the Cost of School

In this section I foreground four participants’ thoughts about the very personal cost they incurred when negotiating public school culture. Why is this an important aspect of a discussion on the utility of the discourse of “being real” as a forged alternative to the discourse of school failure? I wish to demonstrate here that some participants’ dropout stories are inextricably tied to the relational context of their school, rather than to academics or problems they believe resided in themselves.

Here are three participants’ stories that describe “costs” of attending school, beginning with Autumn Moon’s.

Autumn Moon: I would dread [the teacher’s] disapproving eyes . . . when I was a minute late. [I was] so scared, that I wouldn’t go [to class]. I would skip the class if I was late just for my reputation. This is what this did to me. Me, a little “flower” child that’s not supposed to care about her reputation! I felt myself compromising myself, my integrity, for my look, my attitude, my school “self.”

Autumn Moon: Adults and older kids who had toughed it out promised me my feelings of being discarded, outcasted, and frightened would change, and they would go away. Well, they didn't. I started feeling frightened of myself, thinking something was really wrong with me, because I hated it so much, because I felt like I completely didn't belong.

Autumn Moon's use of the term "flower child" suggests she was "not supposed to care about her reputation." But she did. "Caring about her reputation" is a regulatory effect of internalizing the teacher's gaze. "Being yourself" by "not caring about what others think" are common, pop-psychological notions of an individuated self. She takes responsibility for betraying her own integrity because of her willingness to care about her "look," "attitude," and "school 'self'."

Next, Carmen and Fern go into detail about the far-reaching and repetitive messages they received that students like them were not especially welcome in school. I include long transcripts here of their stories so that the reader can see the context.

"My life in school isn't good for me." Carmen believed access to educational opportunities were restricted because she, as a Mexican-American and Irish-American girl from a poor family, was not like those students whom teachers liked.

Carmen: Teachers in school liked some people more than other people. I was one of those people that was generally liked less. Most of the teachers liked the people with lots of money whose parents they knew and who dressed very nicely and had a very large interest in school. Some teachers liked boys more than they liked girls. Some teachers liked girls more than they liked boys. That bias of the

teachers affected how well you do in that class. I felt like I didn't get a fair chance, you know? People weren't going to like me or dislike me based on who I was. So I didn't have much of a choice. Even if I did do a good job.

Michelle: You felt you couldn't do well?

Carmen: Yeah. And if I was trying to do well, nobody would notice anyway.

Michelle: You lost hope?

Carmen: Yeah. In middle school there were two Black students there. The teachers did not like them as much as they liked the rest of us. So one of them got kicked out of school before middle school was over. And the same kinds of things happened in high school. It just wasn't as much in high school because we were older and we could figure it out easier, because you were a different color, so they didn't show it [racism] as much.

Carmen lost hope that her achievements would be recognized in an equitable manner when she witnessed the racial pecking order in her elementary school. She knew she was on thin ice as a Latina living in poverty in a single-parent household. Here Carmen engages discourses of equal opportunity and racism when she recognizes that the privileged position of particular groups as superior depends on a social arrangement that determines who can and cannot gain membership—an arrangement she found was supported by teachers and privileged students. It was within this context that I asked Carmen, “How did you see yourself in this environment?”

Carmen: Yeah, I thought that there was something wrong with me. Because I wasn't as happy and interested in school as everybody else was. So I thought that that was some flaw that I had, that I was lacking what everybody else got. I

decided that, because of that, I should just not be there. And that as long as I wasn't as pretty or as nicely dressed as the other girls, that I wasn't going to get any attention from all of the high school guys, so I might as well forget about that whole thing.

Like Autumn Moon, Carmen questioned herself. She determined that she had neither the access nor the willingness to participate in the "fake" academic culture. Next, she critiques the system within which this occurs, where schooling meant expressing one's heterosexuality (boyfriends), exterior representations of (financial) stability, and the performance of happiness.

[continued from last quote]

Michelle: Do you mean school or guys?

Carmen: Both, because that is the whole thing. That is not what education is supposed to be about.

Michelle: So on the one hand, you thought you were a loser, and on the other, you rejected it as well. Tell about both of those things, how it isn't supposed to be like this.

Carmen: So, I really didn't fit in, but inside I knew that I didn't really want to fit into that kind of society. There is a lot of pressure to be like them and do what they do, by the school system and your family, because that is what you are supposed to do. But I knew that that wasn't what I was supposed to be doing, because I wasn't learning much besides numbers and words. And I wasn't enjoying my life as a high school student. And it felt like if school is what I am

supposed to do and I don't want to do it, then there is nothing for me to do. It was pointless for me to be there.

First, Carmen rejects "fitting in" as legitimate terms for a meritocratic educational environment. Just prior to this statement she endorses the discourse of equal opportunity, yet here she questions the value of what she is learning during her "life in school."

When asked about "what was at stake for you if you kept going?" Carmen mentions depression and suicidal thinking. Her alienation contributed to an already challenging home life. When she realized "my life in school isn't good for me," she left.

"I would have lost my honor." Fern also uses "real" discourse in empowering ways to question her participation in school.

Fern: I remember in Bologna [Middle School] I felt like one of the mess-up kids or like one of the fuck-ups, just because I couldn't keep my grades up. And I didn't really enjoy being there. There was like this dark shadow cast on me there on my whole experience. And I felt really unmotivated.

Michelle: Why?

Fern: Just because [pause]. Well, the teachers weren't very inspiring. Even if there was a cool teacher, there wasn't enough time for them to get into everyone. There wasn't one-on-one time. There wasn't enough time for them to get into teaching, like there is a lot of kids there. Too many. And the kids are distracting.

Here, like others, Fern begins to see herself within the discourse of school failure because she was unable to keep her "grades up." She felt like "one of the mess-up kids" or "fuck-ups." It sounds at first like she is blaming the teachers for her low grades by stating that they were not "very inspiring." Yet she values education and wanted help. She noticed

that even “cool teachers” have limited time to “get into everyone.” She implies that her public school structure limited teachers’ ability to attend to students’ needs, in this case, her need for “one-on-one time” and to remove the distractions that other students presented.

[continued from previous quote]

Michelle: So, you are saying that when teachers are inspiring, they get into teaching and their students?

Fern: Yeah.

Michelle: How?

Fern: They just kind of . . . you can form a relationship with the teacher. When you get to a certain level with them, you understand each other more. They understand the way they need to teach you for you to learn. Like in a public school, they seem to teach one way. In an alternative school, there are various ways of teaching that give you choices in how to learn. Like some people are visual and some hear and understand things more. In a public school, they will just give you a textbook. It seems more confusing. There isn’t a relationship that makes you want to learn from them.

Clearly, a relational teaching approach is central to the discourse Fern uses concerning educational quality. Fern argues that when teachers get to know students, they can change their teaching techniques so as to cater to the ways particular students learn best. Fern conveys her hopelessness about being known and being inspired by teachers in order to have her learning style and relational needs understood. Her clarification of the purpose of relationships with teachers here is solely limited to learning the curriculum.

During the interview with Fern, I sense that there is a lot more that she isn't saying.

Michelle: So I have this idea that it would have cost you something to have stayed there.

Fern: Yeah.

Michelle: What would it have cost you?

Fern: This is kind of corny, but I think it would have cost me my honor. Just because . . . It is not what I want. It's the way I feel. They [teachers] go against my feelings toward schooling and everything we have been talking about. I think it would change, maybe, make me worse of a person [to have stayed in public school].

Fern tempers her use of "honor" with "corny," possibly to make it more socially acceptable to enter into the discourse of emotions and feelings. I note that the conversation has shifted from concrete comments on teaching techniques to the underpinnings of "honor"—a word associated with "self-respect" and "dignity." Fern describes being between a rock and a hard place, caught between losing a high school credential and her sense of "honor," or being a better person. What a poignant position to be put in. She echoes the experience of Carmen, who left public school feeling there was "something really wrong with me," "I completely didn't belong." For the cost of leaving school Carmen regained her "integrity," a word that introduces "self-respect" on the one hand and "coherence" or "wholeness" on the other. In both cases, these "principles" were definitive factors, though they seemed neutralized by "dropout choice" terminology. I wonder how many young people who either stay in school or who drop out feel put in

this kind of caught-between-a-rock-and-a-hard-place position—a position that is often glibly described as an “identity crisis.”

Fern demonstrates how dropping out had to do with being an active participant in her own identity construction.

Fern: I want more of an experience than just being there. Like you are just *physically* present.

Michelle: What would be missing?

Fern: Because if you don't want to be there, you are not going to make an effort. You are not going to mentally be there. They can't force an education on you.

Michelle: So you know that you have power in not accepting their education?

Fern: Yeah.

Michelle: Tell me more about what you mean about losing your honor. What your honor means.

Fern: It just kind of like, my standards, the guidelines in my life are how I want to be or what makes me who I am. I am kind of against the way things are with schooling where you have to be just the way they want you to be. You can't really be who you are if you have no choice [pause] no choice in blooming. Like going through school helps you grow up and it is just a part of your life. A lot of people around that age discover things about themselves. And it is hard to find out things about yourself when you are on unsteady ground. What I mean by unsteady ground is, like, being in a school is an uncomfortable situation. It is a place that you don't want to be. Public school, just being there, kind of brings you down and it affects the way you change.

Michelle: How did it want you to be?

Fern: Under a list of expectations about everything, sit there and listen and believe what they say and do what they tell you to do and act like you are enjoying being in the class and you pass.

Michelle: So how did it affect how you thought about yourself?

Fern: It makes me feel held back and it makes me think that the things that I am learning I don't really need. It makes me think that I can go out in the real world and learn on my own and learn things that will make me successful later on in life.

Fern resisted by being “just physically present.” She recognizes the power of her resistance by taking “her” out of the classroom, while her body remains—a step toward dropping out of school. The simple physical presence in school changes someone, and Fern wanted more than to just be present in school. This suggests that she was well versed at “just being physically present” in school and had realized that this “learning” was changing her in ways she did not want. Fern had higher expectations of her own performance in school, and yet decided to resist the form of that education because it was changing her to be someone she did not want to be. At first glance this seems like a contradiction. Everything changes you, but “they” can't force you to change. Fern is saying something a little more complex: The intent of “an education,” no matter how long it is forced upon someone, can be resisted. However, the experience of that resistance will change you. Like the Modoc song in the Introduction, “I change you, you change me,” we are changed by the experiences we have with one another—even if the experience is resisted. Fern was losing her honor in school.

Like Lily, China, and Autumn Moon, Fern positions herself as an active, purposeful agent in her own construction. She sees that academics, identity, the relational context of school, and her sense of power to engage in relationships and dialogues all support what she wants to get out of learning. She believes that identity is co-constructed and that she could not be herself if she had no choices in how she grew. Relational regulations, like her “fake” culture description of “sit there and listen and believe what they say,” allow little participation in “discovering things about yourself,” through first-hand experience. The sad fact of her story is that she had practiced being physically present and mentally/emotionally absent in school for reasons that school personnel apparently never discovered or inquired about.

Academic learning and the relational context in which it happens are inextricably tied to who young people are becoming (Deutsch & Theodorou; 2010, Proweller, 1998) and what lessons they are learning. Being taught within a “fake” relational context, Fern deduced that school was holding her back, teaching her things she did not need, and, in effect, making her become “worse of a person.” In public school, Fern feels positioned as a victim to the self that is being prescribed. She engages in the discourse of “being real,” which offered her a broader perspective through which to understand the structures and practices of public school—possibly making those more apparent. Further, this discourse attributes “failure” to school constructions rather than the individual. For example:

Fern: So at CHS there were more people that were categorized as failures too, and they were some of the most intelligent people I’ve ever met. So because they had a different way of thinking, they were shot down [in public school]. Maybe just

like targets. They were going through the same reasons. Like maybe just growing up in a different environment that makes you see things differently.

Fern mentions the place of mutual respect and dialogue. The discourse of “being real” offered an opening to dialogue about different ways of seeing the world, and, therefore, discussion became a centered activity that encouraged opportunities to learn about each other and official curricula.

Discussion

Crystal, Autumn Moon, Carmen, and Fern’s negotiations of the question of whether to leave public school center upon who they were becoming in that environment. Their words are reminiscent of Kohl’s (1994) words in *I Won’t Learn From You*. There he states:

To agree to learn from a stranger who does not respect your integrity causes a major loss of self. The only alternative is to not-learn and reject the stranger’s world. In the course of my teaching career I have seen children choose not to learn many different skills, ideas, attitudes, opinions, and values. (p. 6)

Participants retracted their agreement to learn in public school. Kohl gives examples of how education can represent a “crisis” of selfhood. Kohl (1994) offers an example of an African-American young man who resisted racism in the curriculum and classroom by not-learning in all of his classes—effectively achieving all “D’s.” Learning the racism that the Eurocentric-curriculum represented to him created a crisis of selfhood for the African-American student, Kohl argues. My informants confirm a similar way of seeing learning in public school, for example, Autumn Moon’s sense that she was compromising

her “integrity,” Carmen’s conclusion that “school isn’t good for me,” and Fern’s use of the word “honor.”

These informants declare a similar challenge. Yet, Autumn Moon, Carmen, and Fern’s crises are not centered upon racist curricular-centered representations, but on “fake” relational culture. Although Carmen and Autumn Moon (elsewhere) contribute observations of the privileging of white upper-class students and the disadvantages suffered by students of color, their descriptions focus more on the dismal returns on their relational cultural capital investment. Fern in particular does not name an “ism” against which to define her relative social position as an Italian-American lower-middle-class young woman. Slighted by the dominant culture of schooling (and whom this culture privileges), she does not in her interview identify with a group, other than “young people.”

Autumn Moon, Carmen, and Fern paid an additional personal price for staying in public school, because they were unable to fully separate their identities from their experiences of alienation. Their accounts stress how they attempted to assert themselves under what they experienced as oppression. The distress that Autumn Moon, Carmen, and Fern experienced are examples of “the reality . . . of [how] psychological oppression [has] been obscured or mystified” (Bartky, 1996, p. 23). They show their distress when they acknowledge contradictory experiences of self in the public school space. They felt like a “loser,” or “a fuck-up,” or believed there was “something wrong with me.” In other words, they blamed themselves. Yet they also voiced a critique of the institutional conditions that required their performance. They resisted representing themselves as if they were “normal,” constituting their “othered” status.

No participant rejected outright the stances of teachers and school personnel—they believe in the mission of public education. They collude, at least somewhat, in the “school’s” mission for them, in that they want to do well in school. In Kohl’s terms, Autumn Moon, Carmen, and Fern are choosing to *both* learn and not-learn, with the result that they blame themselves and blame “fake” cultural prescriptions, institutionalized structures, discourse, teachers, and peers. Such experiences left these youth traumatized by the environment in school. Gergen (1993) explains that

from the postmodern vantage point, the relationship takes priority over the individual self. That is, selves are only realized as a byproduct of relatedness. It is not independent selves who come together to form a relationship, but particular forms of relationship that engender what we take to be the individual’s identity. (Gergen 1993, p. 255).

If identity is a byproduct of relatedness, then negotiating a culture of “fakeness” in relationships at public school may account for the stress participants talk about experiencing. Thus, for youth in this study, the social construction of “identity crisis” may be the result of negotiating normative “fake” and “real” discourse. These participants understand their experience and the residue it left on their sense of self in much the same way that Kohl (1994) understands living in a ghetto:

Living within a ghetto on the terms set up for it by the outside world is an insulating and isolating experience. It is not the same as creating your own community out of choice or love. A ghetto is separated. The culture of the ghetto is a response, both positive and negative, to the conditions of being separated out.

In the case of my community, the separating force was anti-Semitism, just as racism is a similar force in the lives of many of my students. (pp. 59–60).

For many informants herein, theirs was a ghetto of alienation in a culture whose priorities differed relationally from their own. They did not see their experience of being left behind by others as solely an act of social inequality and “isms.”

Conclusion

I argued that informants’ contrast of “fake” and “real” discourses was a response to the ways in which they were positioned by discourses of school failure and by the socially regulative environment in their public schools. The discourse of “being real” challenged and subverted the discourse of school failure in which they found themselves positioned, and it empowered informants to reclaim and redefine their identity from one related to the “at-risk” and “school failure” labels to one of authenticity and integrity. Participants’ narrations reveal their efforts to be active participants in who they were becoming, and their conclusion that public school culture, practices, and discourse placed their in-process identity on a trajectory they refused to follow. As they gained this awareness, they also became aware of particular school structures, practices, and discourses that supported this trajectory. They changed the terrain of legitimacy for the discourse of school failure to the social relational context in which schooling happens. They focused upon the relational underpinnings of all people involved in school, and the social practices that impact identity, using discourses of acceptance, merit, integrity, caring, and learning.

Informants attempted to reform meaning in response to how the dominant discourses of school failure (Nygren, 2011) constructed and positioned them as “at-risk”

youth. I analyzed participants' use of "fake" and "real" discourse to illustrate how they repositioned meaning in response to the discourses of power in which they found themselves positioned within their high schools. They responded to the discourse of "at-risk" youth and its relationship with school failure in complex and contradictory ways, in this case by focusing upon the relational context in which schooling happens. This context included constructing "fake" and "real" discourse, which established parameters of safety, accountability, and empowerment, particularly concerning what is relationally deceptive or "fake" (which also serves and reinforces established power relations), and "real" ones, which, they argued, served to establish interpersonal relationships between students and teachers in which they "knew each other" and where academic risks were secondary in meaning to interpersonal relationships through which formal schooling occurs.

Chapter 6: Dirty Femininity and Normative Cleanliness

While it was typical for all students to have mud on their jeans and work boots at school, CHS girls received a gendered form of attention in both the school and community with regard to this muddy fashion statement. Fern once told me that I should take the city bus home with her sometime and see the way people look at her in her work clothes, covered with mud. Fern describes how feminine prescriptions were put upon her without consent:

Michelle: What was it like to be a girl and be dirty all the time?

Fern: Like on the city bus ride home. It is a trip. People just stare at you.

Michelle: They stare?

Fern: Yeah. They just can't handle it, [me] being dirty.

Fern noticed these strangers staring at her girl “otherness,” as she rode the city bus home with her clothing caked with the mud she got on her at school. She interpreted these stares as having to do with her breaking of dominant “feminine” constructions of normative cleanliness.

In this chapter, I look at participants’ awareness of the dominant discourse of femininity and how they negotiated that in their school (and other) relationships, particularly around doing work in the field where they sweat and got dirty. How did they experience the discourse of femininity as a regulator in their relationships? Fern believed that people stared at her because they could not handle her breaking the unspoken rule that a white girl must be clean. How did participants understand dominant prescriptions of femininity and how did they talk about that playing out at school with others? In other words, how did they negotiate this particular social construction of “femininity” at school and in relationship with others? The “dirty” context of conservation labor in the Pacific

Northwest created a condition rarely seen in public school: teachers and classmates covered in mud, dirty raingear, dirty hiking boots, and dirty jackets, with dirty faces and dirty hands. In this chapter, the place that dirt, sweat, and physical labor had in the participants' accounts highlights constructions of femininity that they held, negotiated, resisted, celebrated, and so on, in relationship to others.

Participants negotiated complex personal and institutional expressions of femininity in schools (see Weis & Fine, 2005; Best, 2000; Weis, 2000; Susinos, 2000; Marecek, 1995). By studying the experiences of getting muddy, I could understand how they made meaning of particular popular constructions of femininity. Outdoor conservation work in the Pacific Northwest is messy. It rains most of the school year in the chilly, however green and dramatically alive, outdoors. Snow is rare, but it is cold in the winter.

There was always dirt and mud in the mudroom, dirt tracked in the hallways, dirt caked on students' and instructors' clothing and boots, and dirt in my former office. Conservation High staff and the parent corps' organization valued productivity and strenuous work, which produces sweat. This was established long before I arrived at CHS. Conservation High rules required that students in work sites wear "work" clothes and gear that suited OSHA regulations, including eight-inch-high work boots and a hard hat. Most participants, while finding it challenging, valued physical labor in their working-class families. They saw work as a legitimate way to succeed in the world, even though they had witnessed the ways that some people skate on others' labor.

Doing physical labor in the rainy and muddy outdoors afforded young women at Conservation High opportunities to participate in activities that would not have taken

place in public school. Opportunities to get dirty put participants in the position of negotiating and challenging dominant constructions of femininity, in this case, a hygienic femininity. Participants negotiated these constructions within the “real” and complex culture of CHS, already described in Chapters 4 and 5. When asked, “What was it like to be a girl and get dirty all the time?” participants described instances where they interfaced with their peers and teachers. For example, Crystal describes how she taught new girls that getting dirty was cool. Participants highlight gendered forms of living when they believed they were challenging the exclusively masculine association with getting dirty, being strong, being highly productive, sweating, being a leader, having a voice, and being yourself. Some participants say that “dirty femininity” is not about girls appropriating masculine values. They describe how they stopped caring about social prescriptions of femininity, or felt empowered to break the constrictive feminine rules. For others, femininity is about the flexibility they choose when they appropriate aspects of both “masculine” and “feminine” constructions. Femininity is fluid. Students are more invested in the process of becoming real, which includes the removal of cultural gendered prescriptions, although it is not solely about that.

In this regard, CHS’s school culture stands in contrast to that of a traditional high school, especially the forms that pay tribute to consumerism through cleanliness, hygiene, and fashion. In general, girls at CHS dressed in muddy, sweaty, wet jeans, shirts, and boots. Moreover, yellow rain gear and scratched-up hard-hats are rarely seen as fashionable for teenagers in and out of public schools these days. Girls in this study say that their dirty attire smeared trendy constructions for teenage girls—even constructions for tough or “bad” girls—and that they negotiated this untraditional work and attire.

Fieldwork at CHS also challenged norms of cleanliness (in gendered and raced ways, of course). Even when worn-looking new jeans were “in,” cleanliness and hygiene were next to impossible. Students had to make this transition to being dirty in front of tenured peers. Conservation High trampled on constructions of clean sanitary femininity and students negotiated these shifts. That is the subject of this section. It answers this question: *How did participants see and negotiate the complex territory of femininity in the “real” culture at CHS?*

I am interested in how girls’ experiences of doing physical labor in dirty clothing and bodies helped to produce, represent, resist, and reconfigure relationships of power. How aware were they of prescriptions of femininity regulating their relational opportunities? Next, I present their experiences of negotiating dress and their bodies in a program where they consistently were muddy, wet, perspiring, and often appeared in public. The girls’ empowering readings of these experiences seem to strengthen their resistance to assumptions that “they can’t do it,” and to consumerism. The three sections include: the Dirty Femininity Learning Curve, Barbie Didn’t Make it at CHS, and The Buffest Chicks’ Labor. It is important to acknowledge here that Conservation High’s structure was not “free” from relational regulation, but instead disciplined young women’s bodies through labor, which experience stood in stark contrast to a pervasively hygienic, clean, and physically passive “feminine” education.

The Dirty Femininity Learning Curve

The “Dirty Femininity Learning Curve” refers to the process whereby participants transitioned to doing physical labor in the wet, muddy outdoors. I begin with comments made by Conservation High young women specifically about the feminine fashion rules

in traditional school and their experience with a different set of rules at Conservation High. I am interested in how girls adjusted to getting dirty while working among peers who were used to that. How did they organize their thoughts about this transition? How did they construct femininity in these conditions, especially in relation to “real” constructions used at CHS? How did they think about work clothes, hard hats, and peeing in the woods?

I asked Helen about broad differences in her experience in both schools. She responded in terms of gender and fashion:

Michelle: What changed in your experience in CHS [versus East High School]?

Helen: [She laughs.] My first field day!

Michelle: What happened?

Helen: [She looks at me, knowing I don't know the story.]

Michelle: Oh, what happened? [I plead and laugh.] Come on, tell me. Uh oh. I don't know about this.

Helen: I thought I was just too good for all those tacky clothes. My boots were too small.

Michelle: Oh no.

Helen: The work shirt was not fashionable. The hard hat was a fashion no-no. But I mean I got . . . I walked up this type of driveway and I was out of breath. Like princess Helen couldn't do this. [We're laughing still.] We ended up having to hike this mountain, Mt. View.

Michelle: Right.

Helen: And my shoes were too small. I complained and bitched and moaned all

the way up. All the guys were running and I was going really slow. I had blisters everywhere that day!

Michelle: What did you learn from that day?

Helen: That I wasn't too good. I used to think I was too good to get dirty. I mean I like playing in the rain, occasionally playing in the mud. Occasionally. But it was just so cold and the lunch was just not enough.

I notice how Helen organized this story: When describing her first day of field work she did not highlight the students she met, the newness of being in the van and going on a trip, or even emphasize the strain and pain of this hike. Instead she highlighted breaking fashion "no-nos." How "princess Helen" was "thinking she was just too good to get dirty" and too good "for all those tacky clothes." Helen's social construction of femininity included being "too good to get dirty." Helen's dirty feminine learning curve was full of blisters, tacky clothing, and bitching. Work also came as a shock:

Helen: I wasn't expecting to work [at public school]. That was a shock at first.

Michelle: Why was it a shock?

Helen: I had done physical work but not like that, for a week long. Everyday you put your helmet on, which screws up your hair, and your work boots and work clothes. God! I had never actually had to do any hard physical labor!

Michelle: Why was that good for you?

Helen: And then to have them expect me to do it again and again. I was really proud of myself for being able to do it. I wasn't stronger than all of the boys, but when it came to work, I did better than they did and they knew it.

Michelle: Well, most girls outperformed the boys.

Helen: I learned that I could accomplish a big task and I had to learn to work with a group, which was huge! A lot of these tasks you could not do by yourself. Up until that point I could only trust myself to get things done.

Helen's learning curve included many transitions. First, she had to get used to daily physical labor with messy hair under her hard hat. Helen's viewpoint doesn't mean that "fashion sense" disappeared at Conservation High. Instead, girls gained a critical flexibility with fashion. She seems shocked that prior to CHS she "had never actually had to do any hard physical labor!" She became proud of herself "for being able to do it," "again and again."

Second, central in her mind is the girl/boy dichotomy of physical strength; she noted that the boys knew that while she wasn't stronger, she outperformed them. During fieldwork, female and male teams often competed to complete a project. A team of girls, often fewer in number than the boys, regularly and almost exclusively outperformed male teams. This gendered "success" was meaningful to girls who recognized patriarchy. Some girls, like Helen, took the opportunity to use her labor for antisexist ends, which in this case meant being more productive than the boys' team on a regular basis.

Last, Helen commented that through fieldwork she learned to work in a group—that as a freshman she did not know how to work in a group, only to "trust herself to get things done." Therefore, she had to learn to trust her crew leaders and fellow peers. While at first glance this may not be seen as a gendered phenomenon, it directly followed her comparison to the boys on her crew. She had to learn to trust boys *and* girls, since she was learning to work (and compete) together with and without them.

Carmen: There were people who wear makeup and fit into that whole thing and

then it is field week and they are in their dirty jeans and . . .

Helen: Maria and I would sit right in the middle of the trail and do her eyebrows!

[She laughs.]

Participants negotiated representing themselves as feminine differently. Some chose to wear makeup in the classroom and not in the field, others were interested in dressing with “fashion sense,” and still others rejected fashion sense completely, sometimes opting for the male polarity: “being one of the guys” (like Crystal in the next quotation below). Fashion sense did not disappear at Conservation High. Instead girls gained a critical flexibility with it.

Helen: Maria and I would sit right in the middle of the trail and do her eyebrows!

Doing eyebrows in the middle of a trail, a worksite, is likely an act of feminine resistance. It seems that Helen was aware that her body is inscribed in power relations because she and Maria chose the middle of the trail—a place in the way of others’ working. It seems that she actively engaged producing femininity with an (unfashionable) hard hat on; however, her level of awareness is unclear. While Bartley (1988) argues that the rebellion against patriarchy “is put down every time a woman picks up her eyebrow tweezers or embarks upon a new diet” (p. 82), Helen shows that it is not that simple. As a young woman in a nontraditional school and job-training program, she seemed to be resisting a docile femininity by using a timeout on “her eyebrows” to resist work and possibly her teacher’s authority, in front of her coed crew. Helen’s perspective at the time was a lot like the Rosie-the-Riveter saying, “We can do it,” during World War II; it was rather liberal and equality-oriented. This perspective has done little to disrupt current

cultural constructions of femininity, but historically has helped to make progress in women's career possibilities.

Crystal describes how Conservation High was into girls being loud, heard, and dirty:

Crystal: Okay, so there were these girls that bit into that image of we're supposed to be quiet and not heard, only spoken when we are spoken to. I only talk to my grandparents that way. But the school was not into that. The school was into being loud and heard. A lot of the girls were not used to that. They were like, "Oh? My opinion counts?" And they were like, "I can't get dirty, I can't be like the boys, I can't play in the mud." I noticed a lot of girls were not into that. They were really into makeup. I remember going into the bathroom and girls are hoarded over that mirror and it is like break. I think the teachers, especially the female crew leaders, really helped the girls to be like more loud, and to express their feelings more.

They didn't have to bite into the image and be the All-American girl. They could just be like one of the guys.

Michelle: Is that the choice?

Crystal: I know some girls kept the girly image and they still did really well with working and stuff. It just wasn't what I did. I guess I did keep the girly image, I wore skirts and dresses and stuff. It is kind of hard to look at that because I think of myself like, I don't even think of myself as a girl, I think of myself as me. And if I like find myself putting on makeup or put on a dress, sometimes it is fun to put on a costume and be fake and not be like myself. It didn't really work for the school. They would see through that.

Crystal first notes that Conservation High's staff and culture were supportive of "loud girls whose opinion counted." She observes that her female classmates found this new and surprising; at first they felt they were crossing gendered boundaries where they were not to be heard and where getting dirty was an exclusively male enterprise. Next, Crystal presents "getting dirty" in opposition to "putting on makeup." Crystal rejects the "All-American" girly image such that "she does not think of herself as a girl." A foundational assumption here leaves the choice to be "girly," with its "All-American" reference, always falling into association with "fakeness." Crystal's "they" in "they didn't have to bite into the image of the all-American girl" seems to denote "white girls." A white-centered approach to "All-American girl" overlooks alternative constructions of femininity, like Helen's Tlinglit worldview. While Crystal observes that girls at CHS learned to have a voice (thus challenging the view that girls should be "seen and not heard"), her own dirty femininity has resulted in "being like one of the guys." This choice, contradictorily, seemed more "real" to her. How the notion of "being like one of the guys" is raced, is unclear. Crystal is caught running from the girly image in an effort to resist "fakeness," a cultural norm at Conservation High. While she acknowledges that sometimes she puts on a girl costume, she leaves room for other girls to maintain the "girly" image if they choose.

Crystal sees herself as someone who retrained other girls to appreciate being dirty:

Crystal: [The new girls at CHS] would wear lots of makeup and have to have their little girl clothes. I just couldn't handle that. I was like "ugh." Like remember a lot of the girls that were new, we would make fun of them, not really bad but . . .

[pause]. They couldn't handle dirt. You get dirty. A lot of the girls would complain about it. "Oh my gosh, I am dirty." But two months later they would be really into it. We would have to switch them out of that. I have always loved the dirt. It wasn't any problem for me but for a lot of the girls it was. It wasn't what society . . . [she pauses]. Society takes girls and says, "House." You know? It is like what girls are supposed to do [she pointed across the room]. "House."

Dirt was useful to Crystal, who felt free to oppose society's gender prescriptions. She turned the marginalization issue around and used her freedom to be dirty to empower her and distance herself from "girly" girls. Crystal does not have tolerance for girls who grasp at the privilege they lose by being dirty. Her answer was to encourage (haze) new girls to learn to get dirty.

Helen had a different approach:

Helen: I have always liked being a girl because I get the best of both worlds. I can do whatever I wanted. I could wear dresses or I could play in the mud.

Michelle: Yeah and that's what we do.

Helen: Yeah. [We laugh.]

Because Helen has "always liked being a girl because I get the best of both worlds," Helen did not have much of a dirty femininity learning curve—because the dominant construction of "femininity" in this sense is a hygienic white femininity. Helen has created a win-win versatile Tlingit femininity.

In the three examples above, there is subtle recognition of the social context of patriarchy within which "being dirty" happens. Helen describes learning about strong Native American femininity:

Helen: Well (before CHS) I had already rejected society's view of femininity.

Michelle: What I want to know is, how did CHS attempt to teach you how to think and act . . . ?

Helen: I had already had those seeds instilled in me and through all of my teachers. But CHS gave it a place to grow. To let me sort of experience femininity in a different aspect, in that it wasn't . . . I didn't have to wear a dress or makeup every day. I could be as tough as I wanted.

Michelle: Yeah. . . . How was that femininity raced?

Helen: In some ways CHS was more Native. Native women are strong and are expected to be strong. They have to be in order to have a life wrought with trials. I knew from a young age, five years old, I cried myself to sleep because I would not be able to look like Cinderella. Then I had come into contact with so many people that were not like Cinderella or dependent on magic or a man to give them what they needed. They got what they needed on their own and from their communities and from each other.

Helen came to Conservation High knowing that, as a Native woman, she was not subjected to the same cultural expectations as non-Native women. Helen had grieved her distance from Cinderella. To Helen, Conservation High's culture was similar to Native communities where women are expected to be strong. Here at the intersection of race, gender, and CHS's physical work format, Helen chose to be as tough as she wanted. She did not have the learning curve that Crystal discussed earlier.

Carmen highlights the transition between "cool" femininity at CHS and public school:

Michelle: What is cool at CHS?

Carmen: To be cool at [Conservation High], you have to know how to work and not be a slacker and not be afraid to get dirty and not complain about your fingernails breaking. If you do those things, which is the cool thing for everyone else, like at East High. To be cool [there], you just have to make your hair look pretty and wear makeup and wear clothes that make your boobs stick out and like, things like that. If you do that there then you are cool. But if you do that at [Conservation High] it doesn't mean anything, people are like, "What is this?" Everyone is like, "Big deal" [said sarcastically, Carmen rolls her eyes].

Carmen begins comparing the constructions of "coolness." At CHS knowing how to work and getting dirty made keeping pretty hair and "wearing clothes that make your boobs stick out" a challenge. Carmen's contribution challenges the sexual constructions of teenage girls' sexuality as "dirty" (Hemingway, 2006; Haywood, 1996) as she contrasts what she sees as a standard expectation for girls to "wear clothes that make your boobs stick out" with a so-called "conservative" fashion statement (cloths where one's boobs do not stick out) that is needed for strenuous physical labor. Carmen's description of CHS is particularly gendered in comparison to her description of public school. She respects "knowing how to work" over "body projects" (Blumberg, 1992) like makeup, breast exposure, and looking pretty. The learning curve of "dirty femininity" describes many forms of gendered cultural constructions in which "dirt" mattered.

Barbie Didn't Make It at CHS

Perhaps the best way to illustrate the "dirty femininity" cultivated by girls at CHS is to ask the question, How would Barbie, the epitome of white, middle-class hygienic

femininity, fare at CHS? Why wouldn't Barbie be cool there? The responses revealed how the girls not only made meaning of Barbie—an icon of American consumerist femininity, marketed as the white, middle-class “every girls’ dream”—but also how they made meaning of femininity in school and how that impacted their relationships. Comments about Barbie’s persona contrast consumerist (media, “American,” “made up”) representations of women with local (CHS) prescriptions of “being real.” Below, I was struggling in the interview with Fern, wanting to hear what she felt about the gendered expectations at CHS, especially when she was describing Conservation High as a place where “everything is cool.” Finally, I asked about Barbie. This question was only asked of the interviewees after Fern.

Michelle: Well what is it like to be cool at [Conservation High] . . . because there is that, right?

Fern: Yeah. In my opinion, just be yourself. I think a lot of people did that.

Michelle: Well, what’s uncool?

Fern: Nothing.

Michelle: Okay, what about makeup?

Fern: Well, that’s totally not cool. [OC: Fern doesn’t explain and I really wish she would. Long pause.]

Michelle: Okay. If Barbie came to [Conservation High], she wouldn’t be cool, right?

Fern: Totally!

Michelle: Why? [OC: Phew, glad I found the question].

Fern: Okay! (Excited) She would not fit in at all! [Conservation High] is like a

place where you can actually get dirty and like, not care. If you are afraid to get your hands dirty and like be in the woods and take a piss in the outdoors, you shouldn't go there. I think it makes people stronger to be able to do that. Barbie would not like it very much. It is not the place for Barbie. Like most of the people go there because they enjoy the outdoors.

To Fern, Barbie is afraid to be dirty, to be in nature, and to pee in the woods. Barbie enjoys being inside. Fern says it makes people stronger to be able to do those things. Her use of "people" likely denotes both men and women.

Barbie is circumscribed within social practices that make her unable to do things that would let her express herself and get dirty, and cannot attend to the functions of her bladder too far away from sanitary facilities either. Fern alludes to white cultural constructions of cleanliness and being "ladylike" that do not include getting dirty, being in nature, or peeing outdoors. She highlights certain hygienic bodily routines as regulated and oppressive. For Fern, this Barbie-like femininity does not go together with the natural world and female biological needs. Next, she describes how this impacts being in relationships with people.

[Continued from former discussion.]

Michelle: What is it about Barbie that she doesn't like the outdoors?

Fern: She is fake.

Michelle: How?

Fern: Well, she *is* plastic? [She smiles and pauses.] She is completely made up and pretty much like the example of every girl's dream that they want to look like or something like that. She is supposed to be like that.

Michelle: How come what every girl dreams won't make it at [Conservation High]?

Fern: Because I don't think . . . Barbie isn't herself. Nobody wants that [here].

Being plastic, as Fern says, is a powerful emotional and relational metaphor. To me, Fern's very last statement, "Barbie isn't herself. Nobody wants that [here]," sums up how some participants talked about the role of "being cool" or "fashionable" at Conservation High, in that neither held cultural capital in relationships at CHS because no one wanted someone to have to be fake. Here she describes that "being yourself" was highly valued by students at Conservation High. To Fern, Barbie's "makeup" is to be restricted from participating in "real" relationships. My evocation of Barbie, the representation of "every girl's dream," elicited comments from interviewees about how Barbie can never "fit in" because she does not possess the ability to relate "for real" about life.

Carmen, while not addressing Barbie per se, uses similar language and examples of sanitary femininity:

Carmen: Like digging trail and being muddy and doing those things that women aren't expected to do makes you so much cooler at [Conservation High] than doing the regular thing [public school] that everyone else does. It definitely feels good to know all the things that happened to women in the past and even now in our society and just totally break all the rules and have everyone be okay with that. Like "if that is what you want to do," they are okay with that. But you can't do that in regular [school] classes.

Michelle: So breaking the rules is what is cool at [Conservation High]?

Carmen: Yeah. And there are so many things that go along with that. Like peeing

in the woods. Like driving and saying, “I need to pee” and pulling over and peeing in the woods, because you have to pee. Not like, “I need to go to the bathroom” (in a high soft female voice). You know, holding it for an hour until you get to the gas station. Just like be more real than the societal norm, just not what you are supposed to be. It just doesn’t have to do with reality somehow. It’s like there are bigger things to worry about than who showers and who doesn’t. If you don’t take a shower then you don’t. It is your own choice. There are bigger things to worry about than who showers and who doesn’t at [Conservation High].

Carmen states how she feels good to have everyone be okay with the “breaking the gender rules” culture at CHS. Carmen compares dirty femininity to “dominant femininity” and remarks how the latter does not seem to have to have a basis in reality. She exposes a relationship between women’s diminished voices and women’s body routines, like needing to “use the bathroom,” as a living aspect of sexism. This “I need to use the bathroom” could be included in Bordo’s (1989) list of ways women’s bodies are disciplined. Bordo (1989) observes that women’s bodies are regulated through the repetitive tasks of makeup and dress. “Viewed historically, the discipline and normalization of the female body—perhaps the only gender oppression that exercises itself, although to different degrees and in different forms, across age, race, class and sexual orientation—has to be acknowledged as an amazingly durable and flexible strategy of social control” (p. 14). Carmen’s mocking of “feminine” girls’ need for a bathroom seems to be meant to highlight another hygienic strategy of social control.

This excerpt from Carmen describes a dynamic where students co-create in resistance to all those things women are expected to do that constitute for them gendered

exclusionary practices. Instead, they prioritize “being real” in relationships, which includes peeing in the woods, and using one’s natural voice, not a “high voice.”

Participants’ distance themselves from superficial gendered expressions in response to regulatory constructions of femininity. The dirty femininity learning curve, in Carmen’s experience, suggests asking, “Why is it so dangerous for women to pee in the woods?” Hygiene is a foundational site of power that uses constructions of health, cleanliness, and consumerism. While Fern and Carmen may seem to have rejected a “Barbie” fashion for acceptance of a dirty one, their rejection is about more than just clothing. They strive to reject judgment of others based on a distrust of “performance” that comes with being a consumer.

Helen too describes the relational culture at CHS as one that valued “being real” and personal strength. Helen begins by noting that Barbie, being unable to work, would be hazed at CHS:

Michelle: How would Barbie do at CHS?

Helen: [Laughs.] Oh, she would be tortured! Because she can’t work. And because she is so into herself and her possessions and looking good. You just can’t do that there. You are going to be covered in mud, you are going to get hurt and you can’t wear makeup all the time. And that is the fun. Being able to do that. Being able to break some rules. When I first went, I hated the [new] crew leader. She was just a weak woman who played tough and she couldn’t just be herself. It was just a bluff. She didn’t do very well with teenagers. She had this touchy-feely forced affection. Real close, real quick. I just hate that. I hate that about white women; the sweetness is just forced. I harassed Jennifer [crew leader] because she

acted like she was too good for everyone and refused to work. She would leave and smoke. She was self-entitled. She would also just yell at people. I wanted her to leave. I pushed her. She didn't [leave] and I respected that. She eventually embraced the dirt. I actually came to defend her because she was really, really skinny and looked like an easy target and the guys liked harassing her. It went on and on.

Michelle: What would Barbie have to do to make it?

Helen: Oh Lord! Get some clothes she didn't care about. She would have to overdo her whole personality, make it over? [Laughing]

Michelle: That is such a pun! [Laughing]

Helen: She would have to learn how to work with a group and not to exclude others. To be more inclusive and get over her image. Yeah. Stop caring about her image.

In these statements, Helen describes the what-it-means to be a woman in CHS culture: learning to work with a group, being dirty, learning not to exclude others, becoming less materialistic, being able to be yourself, being able to get hurt, and having fun doing that. Constructions of femininity are wound up in relations of power between students and teachers and students and students.

Helen applied this model of femininity to her crew leader. Helen does not respect teachers and leaders who she sees as subscribing to "fake" culture. Speaking about Barbie gets Helen to talk about her assessment of a white female crew leader's performance of being tough, and forced affection that is "real close, real quick." Barbie's "torture" would probably not be so different from how Helen challenged Jennifer, the female crew leader

she saw as weak. Helen exposes her efforts to get Jennifer to quit, yet respects Jennifer's endurance and learning curve when it came to dirt. The foundation of Helen's relationship with Jennifer concerned pivotal perceptions about women's strength, timing of sweetness and affection, and being "too good." Helen learned that she was not "too good" as a woman to do physical labor. Helen eventually defended Jennifer because she saw how the guys enjoyed harassing her. Helen's perspective on Jennifer points to a student-teacher dynamic that, if prevalent in a classroom or school, has the potential to impact learning.

Anáwaké's approach differs in that she gives Barbie the benefit of the doubt:

Michelle: How would Barbie do at CHS?

Anáwaké: So, how would Barbie do? Well it is true, she very well may run away screaming and go home to paint her nails, but only maybe. How could she grow if she gave into the experience and let it whisk her away onto a path of self-discovery? In every way possible! She would learn the meaning of hard work and the sense of accomplishment derived from it. She would learn that women who defy the social norms of femininity are able to develop themselves on a deeper level and gain respect in doing so. Barbie would learn to stand up for herself as an equal human being, not a pretty object. Barbie would become a well-rounded young woman. She would take pride in her intelligence and her ability to do the dirty work. Barbie's appearance would take a backseat to all of that and she would see her image as a choice of her own expression, not the soul of her existence. I am very different from the Barbie ideal in a lot of ways.

Michelle: How so?

Anáwaké: Most having to do with intellect and upbringing, but what do we really know, Barbie is a doll after all. . . . I think I can say even the skinniest girls I know do not have Barbie's waistline. I did not play with Barbies growing up so I never really looked up to that. I do remember when Black Barbie came out and it was almost like a joke. Oops, did we forget something? Different color, same Barbie. Where was reservation Barbie, college Barbie, or bi-lingual Barbie? After high school as a teenager and an adult, I imagine from the outside people who didn't know me probably saw many similarities to this ultimately feminine physical appearance. I developed a passion for heels. My closet was overflowing, and I had a bag to match most of my outfits.

How does Anáwaké interpret Barbie as a representation of women's regulation?

Anáwaké's perspective sees possibilities for self-discovery and for participating in and "defying the social norms of femininity." An underlying assumption is that bodily representation can be a "choice to express oneself" but also can cost "the soul of her existence." Whatever Barbie is into is potentially dangerous business. At first, Anáwaké offers a similar line of thinking: Barbie is afraid of being real in relationships and being dirty, and may go home screaming, only to paint her nails. Most responses to the "Barbie question" support a "we can do it" form of feminism employed during World War II. In a sense, some CHS participants saw fieldwork much in the same way—as the physical reality that "we *are* doing it."

Yet only Anáwaké offers Barbie the meaning of hard work and accomplishment, defying feminine norms, showing self-respect and standing up for herself as an equal human being, taking pride in her intelligence and ability to do dirty work, *and* having a

passion for heels. Anáwaké observes the lack of multicultural representations of Barbie. She concludes that people may stereotype her much like Barbie. Biracial participants and others may use the words “fake” versus “real” to describe the contrast in culture between CHS and public school performance-oriented culture that also may denote a racialized critique. I will take up this idea more thoroughly in Chapter 7, which deals with difference and identity.

Helen did describe “fakeness” as a particularly white-centered phenomenon. She is relieved that she did not get accepted into the white-girl consumerist crowd:

Helen: I am really glad that I didn't fit in, in middle school, with the white girls and their need for lipgloss. And their need for all of the possessions and not being able to learn things for themselves. Not being able to question what they are learning.

Michelle: That is a real mark of Whiteness, huh?

Helen: Yeah. That is white privilege because they don't have to think about those things or question things.

Michelle: But it keeps them stupid.

Helen: Yeah it does.

In this case, Helen describes white privilege as a lack of ability to question or relate. This theme of “fakeness” as a construct participants use to perceive institutionalized privilege within relationships is central to this study.

The Buffest Chicks' Labor and Success

What did participants get out of doing physical labor together? How did “being a buff chick” relate to being successful? Physical labor was a new experience for most students

at CHS. With that experience came a kind of bodily regulation that differed from seated academic work. Helen had pride and enjoyed her work.

Helen: I like working. It is like a sense of pride.

Lily thought that CHS staff set their (11 member) crew up for impossible goals:

Lily: [When our crew believed we could not build a mile of trail each day,] every single person at the end was like, “We did it! We did it!” Even if we would of come, even if we wouldn’t have finished it, or even just had 100 feet to go, I bet every single one of those people would have stayed there until it was finished because it was, that was how important it was. I mean it doesn’t really affect us in any way. That trail. We’re not going to walk on it again. We’re not going to see it again. But we had such drive and determination, we would work hard and for a long time on a trail that is not going to affect us, just for our personal growth and self-esteem, because it makes us feel absolutely wonderful that we finished that trail. With that competition comes the glory that you really can’t get anywhere else. It is not the thing, the trail. It’s the insaneness I think. Because you can see the end. You know it is the end. You know somebody is going to win or lose. You know you are going to lose when the challenges are set but then you win. It doesn’t make any sense. It is just not possible and you do it and you are like, “Oh my God, how did we do it.”

For Lily, competing to finish a goal that seemed impossible, and a setup for failure by instructors, gave her a powerful sense of success. This success is relational and, by implication, working individually removes the opportunity to succeed as a team. She describes the trail on which they were working so diligently and yet would never walk on

again (because it was out of state) as a sign of their personal growth, glory, and self-esteem. Autumn Moon describes how coming home tired in her dirty, sweaty jeans made her feel like she had done something more than her sister who came home in her clean jeans and white shirt.

Autumn Moon: I remember coming home and laying down right in the middle of my living room floor, happy, dirty, and exhausted and feeling so superior to my sister who would come home in her perfect little jeans and white shirt and hair. I felt like I have accomplished so much more. And it gave me a great sense of self. I always felt so strong and accomplished. Like I was proud of myself. *I got myself this dirty*. And I got voted the hardest worker. I always was a hard worker and . . . a lot of us have so much angst, you know a lot us at the school had so much angst and it was a good way to become productive. You know the other thing I would do with angst was sit and watch TV or get into trouble. I used to be bad, fill up my water bottle with alcohol, and go downtown and talk to boys who were older than me.

Autumn Moon felt personal accomplishment. She also felt superior to her sister because “I got myself this dirty.” She has reversed a hierarchy here, which runs the risk of dividing women, in this case her relationship with her sister. She compares her success working and productively channeling her “angst” rather than drinking alcohol and talking to boys downtown who were older than herself.

The next set of comments demonstrates different ways that participants negotiated femininity in a physical labor setting. Like Lily, Helen, and Autumn Moon, Carmen felt a sense of achievement from her work in the field.

Carmen: But at CHS, having the all guys at school calling me the buffest chick.

You know, not being like, “you are a girl and you wear a dress. And you don’t get dirty.”

Michelle: Is that a compliment? The buffest chick?

Carmen: Totally! They are all checking out their biceps and then they will look at me in the back of the room, like writing in my journal or something and be like, “Carmen, no Carmen has the biggest one. Carmen is really buff.” And they are like, “No, you don’t know what you are talking about. She is a girl.” And they are like, “Come on Carmen show them, just show them.” And I do and they are like “Oh, my God.” Just to be like not the woman the world wants you to be, the girl on the Coors Light commercial. You know the person you are supposed to be.

Carmen’s physical fitness, recognized by the males in her class, became a quality that constructed Carmen’s distance from the “girl in the Coors Light commercial.” She used the physical labor setting as an expression of resistance to particular representations of women. For Helen, being the toughest girl was a new experience since she was not very fit when she began.

Helen: We had to hike [into our first week-long Spike]. Pat [teacher] said it was only a mile, but it wasn’t. It was a lot longer than a mile. Up and down, up and down. I can’t go up. I suck. So we are carrying these big water jugs. And you know Maria? She is skinny-skinny. So she ended up having Dylan carry it for her. I got really mad at her. I ended up being the toughest girl there. Which is kind of funny to me, you know with the guys, rough housing with them. I ended up sneaking into their tents because the girls were pissing me off. It was just that I

wanted to be around the guys. It wasn't that I was going to go and screw around with somebody. But I can't get in trouble for that anymore.

Helen too breaks feminine rules by roughhousing with the guys and is quick to explain that she was not sexually interested, seemingly assuming that I might put that meaning on it. Helen talks about being mad at Maria for letting a male teacher carry her water jug, instead of toughing it out. Being the "toughest girl" is also a relational identity because she suggests that "we" toughed it out. This assumption contributes to her anger at Maria for having Dylan carry her load.

In the next three examples, participants note how labor impacted the way they see success and achievement; however, "success" is described differently by each of them.

Lily: Before [Conservation High] the most important part of me was getting a good grade in the class. But it is like, now it is like, even if I failed the class, did I learn it? Do I understand it? Does it make sense to me? I mean like that is what success is to me, that I put forth my hardest and still get an F? OK, then I am fine with that. Did I slack off and not really care much about the class and not really learn anything and get an A? Well that's not success to me. Success to me is where I faced a challenge and I had to sweat and I had to work and I had to really put my mind in a different space than it was. Like I had to be like, "Lily you can't do this, you have to sit down right now and do this," rather than, "I cannot turn it in and still pass the class."

Michelle: Right. Success has more integrity in it?

Lily: Yeah, and it has to be hard. It has to be a challenge for me to find it successful because if there is not a challenge in it, it is no fun. You didn't learn

anything. Whatever. If it was like the hardest thing you ever did, even if you did miserable at it, you were still really successful even if you ran a 10-mile race and came in last. You did great.

For Lily, her meaning of success transformed to hard work. She deconstructs what success means to others, such as getting an “A.” I also suspect that her use of “you” not only speaks to the application of her words to herself, but also to others; she would use these words to support a friend.

Becka too deconstructs what success is to others. She became the first person in her family to graduate from high school.

Becka: I try my hardest. I think success in school is to try your hardest and not be like, “Oh, I don’t care about it so I am not going to do it.” Try. Just keeping trying. If you can’t do one, go to the next one. Stay on track and get stuff done. Then you can achieve all things. I never thought I’d graduate at my school because I never did anything. And I came here and I work and I graduated and I stayed on task and did my work. You know. I got it done and it has helped me. . . . I think I am pretty successful, getting my work done, graduated, take a few months off before college and I am going to try my hardest to get through that.

Michelle: So it is not just getting good grades? It is being determined and . . .

Becka: It’s like, I don’t know, I think in order to be successful you have to have goals. Goals, I think are a great thing, because I never had goals, one of my goals is accomplished. It helps a lot. . . . When you accomplish a goal it is like, “Oh, I am going to do more and I am going to get it done.” You know. I think successful means accomplishing things. Being determined and just, I mean it can mean a lot

of different things. To me it mostly means getting your goals done, and even if you can't get them done it doesn't mean you are not successful. You know, keep your head on your shoulders. Like if you try your hardest and if you can't accomplish it, it doesn't mean you were not successful. Say I didn't graduate but I still did my hardest at it. I put my effort into it. And I had goals and I accomplished them and I was determined. And if I didn't graduate I could keep trying.

It may seem like Becka contradicted herself by changing the meaning of success mid-stream, yet both accomplishment and how one “keeps their head on their shoulders” are different aspects of her definition of success. Becka mostly slept on her desk in traditional high school. She did not have hope or goals. She did not know if she could do it and needed inspiration to try. She cultivated a new relationship to goals at CHS and it changed the way she related to school and her ability to achieve there. When she says success is “if you try your hardest,” I suspect she is using the plural “you” to speak about how she sees others' successes as well.

Amelia comments on the gendered terrain of “bitching” while she works:

Amelia: No. I might be a bitch while I work or complain a lot, but I still work. I do. I am not going to lie about that I really do complain a lot. I saw a bunch of people in the school that complain a lot and then don't work. Which that means we don't get nothing done. So if I complain and work I get something done. And I will feel better even though I still complain. That's the only thing I have problems with, complaining. But that's okay, everybody complains. Complaining kind of makes me feel good. It gets me kind of angry so that I work harder and I get

things more accomplished.

Michelle: Give me some examples [of accomplishment]?

Amelia: In the rain in the snow whatever, we work. Mainly rain. Okay, the 10 miles of trail we did in [New Mexico]. That was awesome. I loved it. And then working for the youth corps we reconstructed like a little creek and I was covered from head to toe in mud when we got finished with that.

Amelia is proud of the 10 miles of trail her crew completed together while enduring snow, rain, and sunshine. She used the act of complaining to work harder and feel accomplished. She re-frames “bitching—a gendered term—as fuel for working hard rather than an excuse to stop working. She used complaining and anger, two experiences not well accepted in her public school experience. Amelia felt productive and learned that she could use her emotions to connect with her peers. She was not interested in being silent and passive. She gained a place in her crew through being loud and funny.

These three examples demonstrate a committed approach to learning and achievement. These are the kinds of experiences strong young adults formerly labeled “dropouts” can have. Being a “buff chick,” however, does not stop sexism, sexual advances, or sexual energy in general. Crystal describes herself as “being one of the guys.” Being “one of the guys,” however, did not make it easier to negotiate sexual issues:

Crystal: But it was hard being a girl there [at CHS]. Like the guys and the sexual energy you know. It was awkward, like if you were in a relationship with somebody. It was such a close community. Everybody knew everyone else’s

business. It was hard to be like a girl and have that energy pushed at you and yet be one of the guys. That has always been my problem. Like I won't notice that someone is hitting on me. I'll just be like one of the guys. I will walk like one of the guys. Like flirting and stuff like that, I won't notice that somebody is flirting with me. I think that happened a lot. There is a lot of flirting going on and energy. When you are a teenager, there is a lot of sexual energy. That was hard to work with that energy though. It was hard to take the energy and put it to good use. Because the energy was just kind of there and you couldn't deal with it. Sometimes it would be too much.

Crystal's effort to be one of the guys doing physical labor did not protect her from having young men direct their sexual interest at her. It is almost as if Crystal's effort at "being one of the guys" was to protect her from male sexual interest. She may have used "not noticing that someone is hitting on me" as self-protective strategy to deal with her discomfort.

Anáwaké discusses sexism also. She experienced a particularly intense situation when her crew began with three females and seven males. Then two fellow females left the crew or school, leaving Anáwaké as the only young women. At first, Anáwaké chose to stay. In speaking about it, she notes:

Anáwaké: [My crew leader] just tried to assure me that [the male students] didn't know what they were talking about. But I think that . . . [pause] I mean he understood and was a great crew leader. But I think that he didn't completely understand because none of them have ever been a small girl on a crew of all guys trying to make it. He understood to some degree. I mean he was really supportive,

as he could be. But, I think that he talked to them once or twice but they really didn't get it. They just couldn't get over themselves, so it didn't hit home until . . . After that, I switch crews, I tried not to for a while [not to switch crews]. I wanted to show them that I could make it, but then I realized that it was more about me. I had to do what was best for me. Then Darla came back and she was put on the crew with all guys. And I didn't talk to her too much about her experience there but she eventually . . . they had a talk with that crew again and it was more about the degrading comments. But they all liked Darla a lot better because she was kind of a flirt and so they got along better. They were her friends because of that I think. You know. I guess it worked out because she did okay on that crew. Well I don't know if she did okay, but we just had a big talk with them and I think they kind of got it at that point. But not completely. I think the flirting had a lot to do with it because she made a place for herself there because she was a flirt. I think that is one of the reasons I didn't make it there because I wasn't putting up with anything. She got in there and was friends with them because they all wanted to hook up with her and stuff. So there was concern for her when she finally had enough of it.

Anáwaké describes a very difficult situation where she witnessed and was the target of ongoing sexism from many of the males. Instead of being competitive with girls, and working harder in the field, the boys sometimes targeted the girls, in this case, a small young woman. Anáwaké gives her male crew leader an "out" saying he didn't completely understand. She was faced with making the decision to leave the crew for her own well-being. She noticed another girl seemed to have an easier time because of her willingness

and ability to flirt. Many of the young women were physically stronger than the young men by the end of the school year, especially given the fact that they regularly completed more work. But this did not stop a rather constant barrage of sexist commentary from some males, despite processing by teachers and crew leaders. She decided to not take on the responsibility for teaching her mostly-male crew about their sexism, while also describing how another girl was able to exchange flirting for more acceptance.

In summary, I observed participants negotiating dirty femininity as opposed to a docile or uninvestigated femininity in their interpersonal relationships in school. However, their choice was not necessarily easier. Some resisted weak or sexualized representations of women by negotiating the “girlie-girl” image. The “dirty femininity” of these participants means that they constructed their identity and relationships through the lens of gender—through creative, resistant, and oppositional prescriptions and perspirations. Their experience of marginalization was used by some as permission to break gendered rules, like roughhousing or “being one of the guys.” Participants also broke antifeminine rules, for example, by “doing my eyebrows in the middle of a worksite” and “having a passion for heels.” Getting muddy and sweaty opposes, interacts with, and subverts the normalized femininity. Certainly being dirty is its own fashion statement. Participants integrated dirt into their negotiation of being buff, having goals, and dealing with sexism.

Discussion

Participants clearly have a lot to say about their negotiation and resistance to dominant prescriptions of femininity and how their work in the field supported a critical consciousness in evaluating whether those prescriptions were practical, served

themselves or others, or became a barrier to being productive, strong, and successful. Negotiating femininity is connected to all sorts of relational constructions that were challenged by the girls' working in a dirty environment.

In this chapter, I inquired about how participants talked about the ways their identities, relationships, and experiences were constructed with regard to dominant discourses of femininity. Participants demonstrated what was it like for them, for example, when their school administrator and teachers at Conservation High required them to break hygienic prescriptions of femininity through physical labor, and getting sweaty and muddy on a regular basis. Participants exposed how their expectations, resistances, and expressions of femininity were relevant to their day-to-day reality as they navigated being dirty, being "buff," and working on a coed team. Negotiating complex social constructions of femininity impacted how they thought teachers and peers saw them and what it meant to be a girl in interpersonal relationships with others at school. Some participants saw femininity as a well-publicized tool to manipulate, restrict, or name their relationships, epitomized in their commentary on how Barbie would do at Conservation High.

Informants identified how they were served by being dirty in a school with relational structures that were relatively flexible. They used this experiential opportunity to consider if they were appropriating masculinity as they broke feminine rules, and how they were reforming femininity in a "real" way. I see the opportunity to overtly discuss and consider such concerns as an educational opportunity.

Chapter 7: Conclusions

Maya Angelou (1969), in *I Know Why The Caged Birds Sings*, writes that “the caged bird sings of freedom,” but the free bird “thinks of another breeze and the trade winds soft through the sighing trees.” Similarly, when participants’ relationships were centered at CHS, they no longer primarily criticized the limitations on relationships, but instead focused on the quality and content of them. Formerly, participants yearned for opportunities to be part of the community they saw that other public school students enjoyed.

I claim that participants herein, like students across the country, in 10 to 12 years of schooling learn significant relational lessons about the priority and meaning of interpersonal relationships (or lack thereof) in educational institutions. Institutional and informal structures and discursive contexts inform and determine how students make meaning of relational possibilities. Their own “real” versus “fake” discourse demonstrates an encoding system to navigate the social worlds of high schools. This dissertation describes how 12 young women did so within an alternative high school. At Conservation High, these youth on the periphery learned what it means to be “family” as insiders. Here they were challenged with interacting with each other as an essential part of the school’s relational structure.

This dissertation is about how informants learned “to school and be schooled.” Being “schooled” or “taught a lesson” can be an experience of being dominated. The young women described learning how to survive from the margins as “others.” Participants discussed being marginalized and, for some, isolated within their public schools. They built important skills to negotiate this experience. Leaving school was for

many an attempt to resolve problems in school. Other literature confirms this finding (Fine, 1987; Croninger & Lee, 2001).

Another meaning of “schooling” is the collective movement of a group, such as how fish move in coordination with each other. Participants demonstrated how they “schooled” others: they taught new students about the social boundaries and cultural forms of Conservation High School; they talked about how to become a team; they engaged in collective peer pressure, at times reproducing the exclusionary conditions at their former schools, and they learned to deal with each other and become “family.” At Conservation High they bonded and learned to school—albeit in ways that both reproduced and altered the culture of power in their public school.

Dissertation Summary

In this dissertation I argue that participants’ discussions of completing alternative high school were centered on their stories of negotiating different relational structures of schooling. Out of participants’ stories, I categorized the different forms of relational regulations and documented how they used the discourse of “real” and “fake” to respond to a relationally restrictive school structure/culture/discourse.

Institutional regulation included the formal structure, policies, and procedures for the management of youth within the school building, which limited their ability to get to know others. Such institutionalized regulations included school and class size, the organization of time and hall passing, and shifting class composition. These regulations created few conditions in which participants felt they had an opportunity to get to know their peers and teachers. Informal regulations included regulations outside of the formal structure of schooling, but which could interact with official policy, such as expectations

from school staff about students' home life, emotional experience, and students' participation in school, which inhibited the students' experience of inclusion. For example, many participants felt that they were expected to act like students who had economic security, happiness, and no problems. Many found that the school/home dichotomy falsely categorized their lives in ways that left them at the bottom of the social order in school.

In the latter section of Chapter 4, I highlight how participants became “family” to each other—an effect of the hidden relational curriculum and relational regulations at Conservation High. However, this “family” is not some idealized type of allegiance without conflict and friction. Belonging could include conflict, arguing, and even racism; they did not always seem like a community. There were fractures and struggles that characterized their relationships. I theorize here that what was seen as “oppositional” or “conflictual” behavior in participants' former schools may have been a product of the limitations placed on relationships such that the students did not gain the skills to relate in more productive ways. This behavior may have been, as Kim (2010) implies, an invitation to take up the place of conflict and voice in institutionalized relationships. It may also be seen as a response to the relational regulation they experienced—their resistance against the lack of relationships as the center of educational communities—in ways that generated dialogue rather than silence.

Participants describe the social context of school as a hidden curriculum that was central to their experience and decisions to stay in school or leave. They noticed the possibilities of “real” relationships at CHS, which is significant because in their accounts of public school it was *relational*, not only academic, opportunities that passed them by.

Based on their contrasting experience of an alternative high school, they reflected on public school and, however complexly and sometimes haphazardly, the differences in their small school experience. “Real” relationships, they found, deal with conflict, unlike the conflict-centered relationships that were sidelined and that often festered in public school. They talk about competing identities and social groups, much like Lutrell’s (2000) and Fine, Burns, Payne, and Torre’s (2004b) participants in that they both critique the system and blame themselves for their “inadequate” social and academic positions.

At Conservation High, participants learned to dialogue about relationships and become active participants in the community. Such “social” lessons are central to how youth see what they have to offer any social environment. At Conservation High, some participants, like Crystal, came to see how their contributions to their school community were at times divisive and fragmenting, while at other times the students served as role models of inclusion and acceptance for others. I argue that such lessons about one’s contributions to a classrooms’ community are lessons that not only happen during schooling but are part of the civic education that schools as an institution have struggled with (McNeil, 1986), as high-stakes testing and preparation for economic participation take center stage. Yet, students learned multiple lessons based in part upon their social position in their classroom, school, family, and society. The students’ social position becomes a powerful educational tool, especially considering the meaning that young people make of their future possibilities and opportunities. Rather than seeing themselves as “others,” “outsiders,” and “school failures,” I hope that these CHS graduates saw themselves as co-participants in a community that encouraged the well-being of the group and helped others work through the challenges they faced, yet also had the ability to

critically negotiate the margins of this community.

In Chapter 5, I highlight “being real” and “being fake” as strategies to negotiate dominant discourses, like being “at-risk” of school failure. While “being real” was often defined as a more authentic effort at relationships than “being fake,” a term closely aligned with misrepresentation via consumerist representations, the relationship between “real” and “fake” is more complex than that, given the relations of power in which students found themselves. “Real” youth culture is contextualized by a media-saturated “fake” dominant culture that markets cool, raced, gendered, classed, and other representations of youth. I was curious to learn whether youth’s interest in “being known” and “being real” is a negotiation of growing up in such a complex representational environment. Participants discuss how they negotiated some aspects of consumerist culture through their analysis of “for real” relationships and group membership in their former high school and in Conservation High.

I conclude Chapter 5 by sharing three participants’ stories of how public school represented a crisis—not the identity crisis so commonly associated with constructions of adolescence (Lesko, 2000), but rather a crisis of “integrity,” “honor” and “what is good for me”—a terribly sad crisis that “pushed-out” these students from public school. As Fern notes, she left public school so that she could respect “who she was becoming.” I examine the “real” discourse they participated in because this discourse, I believe, has a dialogic usefulness for examining high school students’ experiences and negotiation of what constitutes relationships and community. Further, it offers a forum to investigate the role that representation plays in constructing their identities and in the social organization of the school and, later, society. These are important critical and civic skills. These

particular participants felt coerced into the position of weighing the costs of public school for their own identity by rejecting a public high school diploma. Making choices is an important lesson, yet one that makes educators like myself worry about the context in which such youth feel they have to make those particular choices.

Last, in Chapter 6, “Dirty Femininity,” I review how informants expressed their experiences of and identification with femininity within the context of being dirty. I use a particular circumstance: getting dirty while doing physical conservation labor in the Pacific Northwest outdoors. This context contrasted with how informants experienced gendered representations at their former school and seemed to become a place where they more overtly resisted the dominant discourses of femininity that were prevalent at their former high school. These young women took advantage of opportunities presented within the CHS structure to resist and transform contemporary forms of gender domination by rejecting and altering feminine prescriptions of hygiene, gaining physical strength, and over-achieving during work projects. Young women experienced forms of “resistant” femininity and identified with them in different ways. Some, like Crystal, describe how she assisted in “breaking in” new female students to show them how getting dirty could be cool and fun. Other girls, like Carmen and Anawake, inducted the new young male students into the antisexist atmosphere that these young women expected. Some participants distanced themselves from a “girlie” appearance, “being like one of the guys,” while others represented themselves in more fluid ways. These young women took active measures in order to impact their own educational environment.

Significance and Limitations of Study

Educators and educational policy makers consider how young people in alternative

schools make sense of their schooling. The meaning people make of their experience matters because it is a foundation on which people act. A strength of this study is that, in being the participants' principal, I was able to use the relationship that participants and I had already established to ask specific (yet open-ended) questions, especially when I knew I was not hearing complexities of their stories. My hope is that my subjectivity has been minimized by disclosing my place in the research, by holding open-ended qualitative interviews, and by using quotations from participants.

This study is not intended to be generalizable to all "at-risk" students or even those in alternative schools. Yet it is relevant to young people's experience in public and alternative schools across the country. It is limited in that it specifically addresses how 12 young women made meaning of their schooling experiences. This study examines four female graduating classes of Conservation High. There are many other stories and experiences that are worthy of research and review. However, this is also a time-limited study. Some themes participants discuss, like the support some students gain in small school environments, are confirmed in the literature. The significance of this study is in the meaning these students made of their experiences. The sheer pervasiveness of particular themes indicates the need for further investigation into the connections between interpersonal relationships, constructions of identity, and school commitment.

Participants herein give teachers and policy-makers things to think about, such as the unintended consequences and meanings made of school structure, culture, time schedules, etc. Some participants saw being alienated as a viable reason for dropping out of high school, and the invitation to be included as a reason to stay in school, even during difficult social circumstances. How important is it that many of the students interviewed

here shared this relational culture? While this study is not intended to be generalizable, this question inspires me to ask further questions. This is because I believe that every young person deserves an education in which their school experience is not felt by them to detract from what they gain from school. For example, what might be done to identify young women who feel alienated in school? How might small and large school environments be organized in such a way that young people regularly discuss the relational culture in schools? How might such dialogue build relationships that tolerate differences rather than passively support exclusivity? Much research has dedicated itself to these questions, which continue to be relevant.

Another significance of this study is that it reveals young women's ways of seeing themselves in relation to prescriptions of femininity, their relationships with peers and school staff, and what they got out of their school experience. What they got out of it, the lessons learned, went far beyond academics. For example, some participants describe learning to go beyond what they *think* they cannot do. Some describe allowing teachers' opinions to, as Crystal notes, "break my spirit really." While others, like Carmen and Amelia, decided that teachers did not care about them so it was not worth going to school. This study identifies some meanings that youth made, which led them to decide that the adverse environment was worth leaving school altogether. How might educators and peers intervene in such decisions? How might the relational lessons youth are learning be a more overt part of the curriculum?

Implications for Schools

A problem arises when educational administrators and faculty are willing to raise academic standards during budget cuts at the expense of what students learn or do not

learn from the environment of so-called “efficient” education. My point is that schoolteachers and administrators must be aware of and take steps to prioritize “citizenship” educational aims (McNeil, 1986).

Relationships and the relational structures and discourses used in schools matter to young people who inhabit them. My data show that young people need to talk to each other in “real” ways. The burgeoning literature on school communities and inclusive educational environments are in alignment with these findings. Investigation of forms of relational regulations would shed light on the standpoints students construct from their relationships with school cultures. Next, I address the implications, for educational policy, school structures, and teaching approaches, of this study, which suggests the need to foster social interaction in line with broader educational goals of citizenship, inclusion, and community.

Educational Policy Implications

Strike (2011) claims that “good schools need to be communities. They need to be communities because there is an intimate connection between authentic learning and belonging. They need to be communities because good education is more likely to occur when we approach teaching and learning with a sense that we are all in this together” (p. 1). There exists significant research that focuses upon schools as communities (Rowe & Stewart, 2009; Buchanan, et al., 2010), the interpersonal competencies that teachers with higher quality interpersonal relationships with students demonstrate (Brackett & Katulak, 2006; Brackett & Caruso, 2006; Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning, 2008; Gil-Olarte, et al., 2006; Lopes et al., 2006; Zins, et al., 2004), and teacher satisfaction with regard to classroom climate (Goddard, Hoy & Woolfolk Hoy,

2004). The issue here is institutional implementation at federal, state, and school district levels. Implementation requires an understanding of the educational policies in place that function against the goals of inclusive community-focused educational environments.

As “school communities” and “inclusive” philosophies and research abound, a contradiction arises where federal and state educational policies have interpreted accountability in narrow ways, particularly through an emphasis on high-stakes testing. High-stakes testing policy, for example, has long been seen as undermining democratic citizenship-oriented educational goals of “school communities” and “inclusive educational environments.” Yet such policies were pushed ahead with the knowledge of their consequences.

McNeil (1986), in analyzing how school knowledge is shaped by the organizational context, suggests that public schools have historically evolved as institutions that

serve two potentially conflicting purposes: to educate citizens and to process them into roles for economic production. The results of the first [purpose] can be unpredictable because children’s intellects and skills develop in ways that we cannot predetermine. For the second goal, schools process students through stratified steps leading to predictable, marketable credentials for the workplace. The steps and some of the outcomes, can be managed and controlled. . . . School knowledge is shaped in the tension between the school’s goals of education and of controlling students. . . . The bureaucratic controls designed to facilitate this credentialing can easily trivialize the course content and thus undermine the educative goals of the institution.” (p. 3)

McNeil questions defining public education as solely at the service of businesses' uses rather than the broad skills and experiences co-created with/by students' participation as they come to understand the complexity of democratic citizenship.

Educational goals such as “citizenship,” “inclusion,” and “community” run the risk of becoming inconsequential to educational policy makers who attempt to steer public schools toward fulfilling capitalist needs. This is where teachers unions need to regularly offer, to state and federal boards of education, evidence that students' sense of belonging is an antecedent and motivation to pursue academics (Beck & Malley, 1998; Martin & Downson, 2009); it increases academic achievement (Bond, et al., 2007; Pittman & Richmond, 2007); it aligns students' lived trajectories that are personally and socially fulfilling (March & Gaffney, 2010); it keeps students labeled “at-risk” in school (Croninger & Lee, 2001); and it functions as a protective factor for child and adolescent health, education, and social well-being (Rowe & Stewart, 2009, p. 396; Bond, et al., 2007; Hawkins, et al., 2005). Teachers need to realize that we all make public and alternative education possible and to create ways to have our voices heard.

Policy makers require an understanding of the history, philosophy, and sociology of education because capitalist aims alone leave a dangerous legacy for the future. McNeil (1986) argues that policy makers tend to lack an understanding of the historical inadequacy of the control model and, “unless challenged, the legislatures and school boards who see tighter controls as the solutions to educational quality will snuff out the last vestiges of educational expectations” (p. 9) instead of managing and controlling skill-based outcomes. Noddings (2007) argues that aims of education that center on academic goals have not considered the history of education in the United States, with its

commitment to the physical, social, emotional, social, moral, and aesthetic aims that are associated with educating the whole child. I, along with Noddings (2007), argue that such aims, in addition to academics, recognize young people in broader ways. We need to ask “*why* we have chosen certain curriculums, pedagogical methods, class-room arrangements and learning objectives. . . . Students are whole persons—not mere collections of attributes, some to be addressed in one place and others to be addressed elsewhere” (p. 5).

Such accountability measures as No Child Left Behind (NCLB) put unneeded pressure on all who inhabit schools and also produce unequal opportunities and outcomes. Usher (2011) recently wrote a report for the Center on Educational Policy estimating that 48 percent of public schools across the United States did not make adequate yearly progress (AYP) in 2011 according to the requirements of NCLB. This demonstrates an increase from 29 percent since 2006 and is the highest failure rate since NCLB took effect. Noddings (2010) notes that “public schools in the United States today are under enormous pressure to show—through improved test scores—that they are providing every student with a thorough and efficient education” (p. 3). In this age of high-stakes testing, budget cuts, and standardized curricula, goals of education for citizenship and community lack priority in comparison. McNeil (1986) predicted that as educational budgets continue to be reduced—and they have continued to be cut on the federal level every year since 1971, accounting for inflation (Lyons & Drew, 2006)—educational policy in the United States (e.g., NCLB) has responded with counter-productive increases in bureaucratic and disciplinarily and controlling institutional practices (Lyons & Drew, 2006) that serve a narrower and narrower number of students.

For example, researchers found that the consequences of high-stakes testing includes schools that serve fewer students (Beatty, et al., 2001; Hamilton et al., 2001; Menken, 2008) and produce more dropouts (Beatty, et al., 2001; Porten et al., 2006).

High-stakes testing narrowly defines educational accountability while removing accountability for other aims of education. Such policies have a direct effect on students. High-stakes testing and outside-of-school service-learning requirements to receive a high school diploma were being implemented in the local school districts during the time this study occurred. Such structures of “accountability” ignore educators’ responsibility to the citizenship and community role of public education and to our mission to serve public, rather than only high achievers’, needs. In addition, such policies of “accountability” suggest that policy makers bear little responsibility for the increase in dropouts that result from such measures (Porten et al., 2003, 2006). What might accountability look like for how such policies increase dropout rates and organize large schools to benefit from higher dropout rates by lowering the effect of poor achieving students’ scores on a school’s overall achievement (Rumberger & Paladry, 2005)? Educational accountability must include educators’ service to “lower” achieving students. This might include valuing of skills outside of the skills measured on standardized testing, service-learning organized within the school building, and early intervention for those who are disenchanting. Serving the public means providing for *all* students until graduation. I recommend that teachers and principals take back their schools and their integrity and use their expertise to meet the whole child’s needs.

How does this crisis of accountability impact students? McNeil (1986) predicts that when students see more attention paid to controlled content, controlled student

behavior, and controlled student participation and therefore interaction, students will learn that control is a more important hidden curriculum to teachers and administrators than the overt curriculum, and they will resist. What is the cost that young people pay under such controlling atmospheres, as schools are also becoming increasingly disciplinary and punishing places, with paramilitary personnel stationed at schools (Drew & Lyons, 2006)? McNeil provides one framework within which to understand CHS students' resistance and students' resistance throughout the nation to controlling, disciplinary, and punishing atmospheres with few opportunities for community and emotional expression.

Some CHS participants had strong potential (based on test scores and the value they placed on education) to be moderate and high achieving high school students. The social conditions of their schools had limited accountability when it came to their collective experience of alienation, so much so that the students responded with their own discourse to navigate the social conditions of isolation and marginalization within the school building. My presupposition here is that students and ultimately school personnel are all responsible for school culture. What policies would strengthen the "community," "inclusive," and "citizenship" goals of public education and how might educational leadership, schools of education, and state teacher certifying agencies endorse such policies, especially under stressful economic circumstances? After all, teachers are role models who demonstrate how to develop community in the midst of challenges.

Ultimately, building community and education for citizenship is a shared responsibility among federal and state policy makers, local school boards, schools and families, schools of education, and teacher credentialing boards. These parties need to get

behind definitions and applications of accountability that structure collaborative and cooperative work, interpersonal relationships, and regular dialogue in educational settings. This means that students' relationships must become a focus of classroom dialogue, and that dialogue should focus critically on the connection between their social relationships and the reproduction of social inequality and school culture. In addition, our collective force as educators should be applied in legislative endeavors.

Implications for Inclusive School Structures and Teaching

School communities need to be supported by relational regulations that permit young people and teachers to form relationships where students can conclude that they are cared for and belong and where they have the space to dialogue about their experience. Small learning communities make this a viable possibility, especially those with students who experience a variety of settings together. In this section, I briefly review characteristics of school communities. Next I describe the role of school structure and teaching strategies to support students' critical investigation of their experience and the structures in which they find themselves. In this way, students can be offered an awareness of the complexity of the role of schooling in society, as well as a demonstration of their part and voice in it.

At the building level, educational institutions are responsible for taking seriously students' experiences of lack of emotional, social, and physical safety in their classrooms. Much work has been completed about what is required to develop strong communities in schools to counter these concerns. Strike (2010) suggests that schools that are communities that have the following characteristics:

1. They have shared goals expressed in a publicly acknowledged shared educational project.

2. The curriculum they provide has coherence because it expresses shared goals.
3. While there is some division of labor involved in different subject matter expertise, teachers are not highly departmentalized. They teach their subjects as to express shared goals, and they see their task broadly as one of achieving the school's overarching mission rather than as one of communicating their subject matter.
4. Students come to understand and internalize the shared project of the school and see themselves as cooperating with teachers and one another in pursuit of shared aims. Knowledge is valued for its contribution to the understanding and appreciation of experience and its contribution to justice and citizenship. It is not merely a commodity.
5. Tracking and electives are minimized in favor of a shared curriculum and other shared experiences intended to create community.
6. Behavioral norms flow from shared goals and a shared conception of justice. The school has moral authority because teachers and staff are seen as acting from commitment to shared aspirations.
7. Trust and care are seen not only as features of the relationship between some individuals, but as flowing from shared commitments. (p. 36)

Strike's (2010) characteristics of school communities directly address the relational structure at Conservation High. For example, teachers had flexibility in implementing a shared curriculum, yet maintained its connection to environmental conservation and creating classroom communities. The conservation-focused curriculum included not only awareness and the effort to live sustainably with a long-term vision of the natural world,

but a commitment to do so as a community of “different” people. In this way the formal curriculum resulted in a complex “family” experience where differences did not divide “family” but constituted it by “getting to know one another.” One might argue that we successfully demonstrated that empathy can go hand-in-hand with teamwork and a consideration of how to live sustainably with the alive world in which we live that leaves a healthy world for generations to come. This is a demonstration of Rifken’s (2010) argument about the hopeful relationship between empathy and a sustainable global civilization. This model, however, requires more staffing, as we recognize the power of the ability to develop relationships within and across difference in our social and environmental context.

My data suggest beneficial experiences from service-learning activities that also gave students the opportunity to share while working. I would like to see more frequent and overt connections with our local community in our descriptions of the purpose of education within social and environmental contexts. This would have helped students establish familiarity and a network upon graduation. At CHS, a half-time staff member was dedicated to scheduling places where CHS students could engage in conservation work as well as participate in local community efforts. Most projects occurred in local parks, farms, watersheds, and National Forests. Should a project not be going well or finish early, teachers needed the freedom to make decisions and at times change their schedule. They had prepared lesson plans for such circumstances. For example, should a project be completed early, we had relationships with local organizations, such as our food bank, that welcomed us at a moment’s notice when our students could help sort and serve food to people in need. Students debriefed the experience afterwards according to

guide questions and wrote in their journals about poverty, social service, and responsibility. Such experiences became some students' all-time favorites. Lesson plans prepared for a wider range of service-learning opportunities could have served students better when environmental conservation projects had lost much of their educational value due to repetition. Access to transportation and parents' recognition that we were a mobile school were required assets.

I believe that CHS students' hunger for relationships was satiated as they "internalized the shared project of the school" (Strike, 2010, p. 36) of not only building community among students but serving others once classes had bonded. Students who may have been resistant in other settings were often, although not always, willing to attempt group activities like team-building exercises when they found that most exercises were structured to solve a group problem rather than to produce losers. In addition, educating the whole child means there must be a welcoming place for emotions. Goodlad, Mantle-Bromley, and Goodlad's (2004) observations of most of the 1,000 classrooms that they observed is that there were few expressions of emotions: joy, caring, anger, excitement, and amazement. Emotional neutrality cloaks a broader hidden curriculum of control: the absence of feeling. Making classrooms safe for emotional expression requires teachers to model welcoming expression and create a climate where students can get to know each other and learn how to listen, have compassion, share, communicate, and reflect on the meanings ascribed to the experience of emotion. This requires educational policies that authorize teachers to choose curricular materials that evoke feelings, and spaces to dialogue about them.

I suggest that Strike's recommendations be implemented not only with youth labeled "at-risk," but with all youth. In this way, youth who are seen as the "excluders" could reflect on their position. They would have to occupy a different social position in an inclusive setting and hopefully develop related skill sets.

Next, how might school structures and teaching strategies set the conditions for students' critical engagement in school? By offering young people activities and conditions that challenge dominant notions of power, like team-building exercises or the expectation of getting dirty, students have opportunities where they decide from their own experience what they understand about particular configurations of power. In a chapter titled "Girls Make Music," Jennings (1999) listens to the responses of female guitarists to the construction of them as both sexy and incompetent (Bayton, 1997). Such important work demonstrates how women, in this case, respond to dominant constructions through their lived experience. Jennings (1999) asks a vital question: "What set of circumstances, internal and external, afford these women the license to defy gender codes?" (p. 176). In this dissertation, I review how young women were required to defy clean, docile, gender codes. They describe a multitude of ways they identify, negotiate, and produce discourse about negotiating prescriptions of femininity. These data suggest that such conversation engages youth who are making decisions about how to navigate contradictory feminine prescriptions.

A set of circumstances afforded young women attending CHS a space, place, and opportunities, for example, to defy gender codes in a way legitimated by service-learning through physical labor in the outdoors, and to dialogue about that. The instructional goal was not just providing freedom to resist particular codes that are seen as repressive in

society, although there is a place for that. Having the space and place to reflect upon those codes and their enforcement and potential legacy, students could see that their critical investigation was centered and valued. I recommend this structure as a way to engage young people.

Students listened for forms of instruction that required their collective input. I suggest that careful consideration of notions chosen to defy constructions of clean, docile, femininity were useful, not only because they were counter-positional, but as an experience that prompted young women and men to decide for themselves the legitimacy of familiar prescriptions and school-based activities. In addition, students' use of potentially dangerous tools such as axes, Pulaski, and hog hoes communicated expectations of safety, trust, and maturity. In this way, I believe students felt treated and respected as adults. By training teachers in approaches that put students into the position of critically examining the cultural text of school—whether structures, discourses, prescriptions, or the opportunity to form of interpersonal relationships—we hoped to hone their awareness of the potential consequences of social structures in and outside of schools. In other words, we hoped they would learn to take a cultural studies approach, while not particularly engaging that literature. What if how young people are situated through the use of structure, purpose, and content of school and its connection to society were an ongoing topic of discussion?

Last, while this dissertation is primarily about young people, teachers are the moving force for developing communities in their classrooms. Teachers deserve training and support to develop community in their classrooms, and consultation concerning the very interesting and complex topics that interacting with young people bring up. Teachers

must have an atmosphere where they can regularly dialogue. Some research questions that might be asked include: How do good teachers make decisions about when to focus on the relational climate within their classroom within and apart from curricular standards? What different approaches to decision making might teachers critically consider in order to create a climate that takes building community seriously? How might teachers need to be supported to strengthen how they cope with such stressful workplaces?

Teachers deserve the time and training needed to coordinate a focus on the relational context of their classrooms, schools, and communities in ways that reduce their stress rather than increase it. What approaches to facilitating reflection by students and teachers on interpersonal relationships would support such a possibility? Jennings and Greenberg (2009) found that “teachers influence their students not only by how and what they teach but also by how they relate, teach and model social and emotional constructs, and manage the classroom” (p. 499). Teachers are in an important position as they influence the next generation. Yet many teachers regularly experience emotionally provocative situations where they cannot simply leave the classroom and take a break. Research suggests that the emotional demands put upon teachers continue to rise while the rate of teacher “burnout” is increasing, and teachers are leaving the profession at an increasing rate (Provasnik & Dorfman, 2005). The primary reasons teachers disclose for being dissatisfied with teaching and leaving the profession include emotional stress and inability to manage emotions (Darling-Hammond, 2001; Montgomery & Rupp, 2003). Teachers deserve institutional structures to support their success and professional enjoyment. This includes school board support, small class sizes, planning time,

alternative school structures, and classroom formats that increase student-student and student-teacher interactions in contexts where the quality of those interactions are significant. In our small school setting, we found that combining classes for particular forms of large-group activities freed teachers up to help individual students and offered them planning time.

In conclusion, I am an advocate for schools that focus on serving the needs of mainstream students rather than catering to paradigms of high-stakes testing, making public schools specialized training centers. Education of the “whole child” approaches recognize schools as negatively impacted by economic and capitalist paradigms where children become educated as consumers for inclusion into the economic system (Barber, 2007) rather than as a school community. Repealing the intensive, nationwide focus on academic accountability in schools, for example, in terms of high-stakes testing, is challenging.

Further Research

Certainly, further study is needed about the interpersonal relationships that youth develop and the skills that go with them in a variety of educational settings and from a variety of social locations. In particular, more scholarship is needed on youth who participate in small school communities and engage in positive political action outside of public school.

These youth highlight the relational curriculum in both of their school experiences. Youth’s relationships are regulated in complex ways. Youth who are centered, through their increased social and cultural capital, receive different kinds of relational regulation for their academic or physical success. How do teachers and students who are “centered” in terms of dominant school culture, who witness “othered” students

being marginalized and isolated, make meaning of that experience and the institutional value placed on students' relationships? In particular, what meaning might they make when students are marginalized by life circumstances, race, class, gender, sexuality, and/or ability? In other words, why not investigate school culture and students' sense of welcome on the part of a school community to study inclusion? These youth contest the relational regulation found in public school. Are the methods employed by educators and school structures suitable for the students who contest them?

Kim (2010) concludes in her study of student resistance, "Education has become synonymous with rigid disciplinary practices while trust and respect give way to fear and suspicion, having a detrimental affect on relationships between teachers and students" (p. 274). She argues that "intolerance of students' resistant behavior has become the 'rule of thumb,' which calls for a better understanding of student resistance. Resistance theories that focus on a mode of self-action in which students' acts of resistance are viewed as "acting out" or a mode of inner action in which resistance is viewed to challenge authority that is imposed on the student, may help us understand why tensions and conflicts occur in school. However, they do not sufficiently provide knowledge about how both teachers and students can work together to ameliorate the current oppressive school environment." Kim argues for a "mode of inquiry as communication in which tensions are viewed more holistically and perceived as an organic entity that is in the process of evolving and becoming" (p. 274). What different approaches might be implemented to put her suggestion into practice? How might disciplinary practices support such a mode of inquiry? There are many possible relational structures, disciplinary practices, and modes of inquiry that could be tested with populations within

schools including youth who are diverse by academic achievement, social status, race, class, gender, geography, school size, etc.

As I stated in the conclusion of Chapter 6, I believe that Conservation High students are the “lucky ones.” This is not because Conservation High School staff was particularly talented in facilitating relational concerns among students. I believe they are lucky simply because they were given opportunities to work on their relationships on a regular basis. All students deserve such experiences because it is necessary for people in general to learn how to strengthen their collaboration with others and put problems in a larger perspective. Students are served by dialogue about the school community in which they find themselves, specifically their relationships with peers and teachers. Such a project can be approached in many different ways. This is an area that deserves programmatic research.

This is not the only work that looks at the relational lessons learned in public school. The current efforts in small schools and learning communities, as well as the literature on bullying in school, consider relational conditions that students and teachers experience. I argue that a form of “schooling” that ignores reflection upon the interpersonal relationships occurring within the school building demonstrates not only an abandonment of the importance of relationships, but also a condonement of hostile relationships. Participants in this study suggest that the large school environments in which they attended high school supported a climate in which talking with others about interpersonal and intergroup conflict was seen as impossible. Yet the students who *stayed* in public school are absent from this dissertation. The experience of *these* youth is an important area of further study. How might students who are seen as having either little

or ample social status experience the relational environment of the traditional high schools from which they graduated? What regulators are they aware of and how are they negotiated?

Next, the role of growing alternative schools as “catchalls” for students not served in public school settings is concerning. Becker (2010) suggests, “Future research on schooling processes in alternative educational settings, regardless of the specific topic, would add to the existing literature on the social reproductive effects of schooling and on school-based factors that contribute to student success or failure. Studying student success or failure in these settings is important because of the role alternative schools fill in the educational system.” What is the role of alternative schooling in (re)producing social inequality? What forms of service-learning participation on the part of alternative school students might saturate more local forms of economy and trade, repositioning the relationship between alternative schools and local economies? A synthesis of the wide variety of students, structures, and success claims of alternative schools is needed. What roles do alternative schools serve in relation to high-stakes testing and other policies established by state departments of education, credentialing agencies, and school districts across the nation? What experiences do students have in the variety of forms of alternative schooling?

In considering the complexity of the relationship between educational policies that focus on high-stakes testing, further research might consider how educational standards themselves are part of declining achievement. In addition, are there educational standards that could be put in place to protect and assist teachers and students who

recognize citizenship education of the “whole child”? If so, how might a lobby be made among progressive educators to implement it?

Final Words

Public education has an important role to play in preparing adolescents for more complex social relations, and currently, opportunities for such relational lessons are not often given to marginalized youth. Giroux (2003) argues that the defining purpose of education is “not to train students to take their place in either the corporate order or the existing society, but to encourage human agency as an act of social intervention” (p. 12). Social marginalization as well as social privilege limit youth’s education. It is an issue of educational opportunity. An openness to young people’s complex relationships across difference is instead replaced by a construction of adolescence as “in crisis”—in effect blaming adolescents for their own problems and constructing them as a disempowered population. What would an empowered adolescent population look like?

The youth in my study are aware that institutional, informal, and discursive structures of public school disorganize, separate, and distract students and teachers in ways that make getting to know one another a challenge. Their effort to cultivate “real” relationships and to take action that makes their environment more safe and hospitable is to be congratulated. Yet it is also evidence that the adults who were responsible for their public education had let them down. As educators of young people from early childhood through to young adulthood, we are responsible for what 12 years of schooling collectively teaches them about relationships, their identity in school, and their place in the social order. If few students develop substantial relationships while in school, what

are these students to expect of society, employment, and civic engagement? I align with critical theorists who support a model democratic education that uses the critical reflections of young people to forge allegiances across the axes of division and to consciously co-create educational communities where all children trust that they are welcome, cared for, and safe. This, I argue, is the best context for students to critically learn about the society and world in which they live.

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Appendix A: Codes

The following are the codes that I used to categorize the data:

academics	Class	dropout/outcast as an
acceptance	Class-size	identity marker
achievement	Class as an identity	emotions
acting out	marker	empathy
agency	classism	empowerment
alienating pedagogy	conflict	exclusion
alliances and identity	competition	expectations of others
anger	community (building it)	family
“at-risk”	contradictions	fashion
attention	conservationism	feeling different
being a poser	consumerism	field experiences
being challenged	crews/classes/groups	fieldwork and the body
being cool	cultural capital	friendship
being dirty/muddy	culture	fun/enjoyment
being who you	dealing with difference	gender
are/real	difference	gender as an identity
body and emotion	discipline	marker
body preception	discrimination	grades
body gaze	distinct groups in school	hidden curriculum
caring	dropping out	home life
CHS teachers		homework

I did it: achievement	personal costs	romantic relationships
and	personal problems	school comparison
goals	physical work/strength	school culture
Identity	popular culture	school ideology
identity representation	power relations	school rules
impersonal	proving it with the body	seeing for yourself/hands
experiences	proving yourself	on
inclusion	race	segregation
individualism	race as an identity	sexism
intelligence	marker	sexual talk
knowledge and	racism	social change
power	respect	social construction
like family	relational examples	social expectations
love	regulating youth	small groups
looks/body perception	rejection of traditional	smartness
making community	relationships	struggle/conflicts
non-fashion as an	representations of	student voice
identity	self/markers	substance use
marker	of identity	taking responsibility
other's expectations	resistance	taking risks
participant	respect	taking care of others
introspection	risks	taking things in stride
performance	role of choice	teachers

teachers and attention	testing each other	trust
teachers and bonding	(hazing)	what I learned
teachers and curriculum	too large (classrooms or schools)	what I got out of it when I got there
teachers and exclusion/inclusion	too many people traditional school (Name School)	what you can do as an identity marker

Appendix B: Guide Questions

Original Guide Questions

1. What has your experience been like at CHS? What are the most meaningful things you got from being at CHS? Can you give me some examples?
2. What are the pros and cons about CHS? Tell me some of your favorite/worst memories being in CHS. What would you change?
3. How did you get to CHS? Why do you think that happened?
4. This is a study of students who feel successful at CHS. What does successful mean to you? How did you come to that definition?
5. How did you come to see yourself as successful at school? What experiences helped you to do that?
6. What has school been like for you before you came to CHS? Please explain.
7. Tell me about the peer culture at CHS. How did your peers help/not help you while you were here? Tell me about what friendship is to you. How did your peers impact you while you were here? Please explain.

8. Tell me about your experiences with teachers and crew leaders at CHS. What stands out to you? What did you learn from them? Them from you? What would you add to help them reach female students more? Please explain.

Revised/Second Interview Guide Questions

1. What did you think CHS was going to be like before you got here?
2. How was your interview? What did you think then?
3. How was your first day?
4. What about now?
5. Tell me about the quality of your interactions with teachers at CHS and in your previous experience.
6. Tell me about the quality of your interactions with peers at CHS and in your previous experience.
7. Many students said CHS is like a family? What do you think? How so?
8. Students often get referred to CHS because their previous school sees them as “at-risk”? Why do you think they thought that? How did that happen?
9. What was it like to be a girl and be dirty in the field all the time?

Focus Group Questions

1. Let’s brainstorm about what it means for you to be successful at school.
2. Tell me about how you all came to these ideas. Can you give me some examples.
3. How did you change while you were here? How did that happen?
4. What are your experiences at both schools?
5. How do you get to know people at CHS? At public school?

6. What did you do as part of your team and how did it work?
7. What does it mean to be a family and not a family?
8. What does it mean to “be yourself” at CHS? How should I interpret that?
Please give me examples.
9. What kind of room is there to be an individual? Be on a team?
10. Talk to me about the similarities and differences about how you could be social at CHS and public school.
11. What kinds of strides did you make at CHS?
12. What do you think about the idea that people in a community need to be similar? How is difference dealt with at CHS?
13. How do you take care of each other?

Appendix C: Descriptions of Participants

This is an introduction to the participants. These are the young women who contributed their stories to this project. Here I include their age, graduation date, personally descriptive information, and quotes to better acquaint the reader with each individual's personality. I include a quote that describes something they received out of their experience at Conservation High to demonstrate their character and ways of speaking and what they choose to highlight. I have already listed (in Chapter 3) their racial and ethnic identities in order to provide an "already-raced" foundation from which to hear their school experience. In this way readers will be more prepared to attempt to understand their experience. This analysis is in this Methods section, given the pervasive "invisibility of race" and "color-blind" ideologies critiqued in schools today (Tatum, 2007). When race and ethnicity are not foregrounded as a main topic, sometimes critical race and ethnic analysis can disappear, perpetuating racism and uncritical acceptance of white norms and values. In the case of this study, the constructions, diversity, and similarities of participants' racial and ethnic identities are important to note as one reads data and analysis. While their social constructions of class, age, gender, sexuality, and ability are also relevant, participants mostly just share class, age, gender, and sexual orientation. How participants negotiate social constructions of femininity and the ways that that regulates relationships is the topic of the third theme in the first data chapter (Chapter 4). Gender is centered in the content and analysis. Ability, especially as it relates to disabilities labeled "learning," "behavioral" or "psychological," are described in participants' descriptions as well. This will assist readers in hearing each participant's perspective of school as someone labeled "special education."

Amelia (pseudonym)

Amelia is a natural leader with an extraordinary sense of humor. She can be silly, mocking, sarcastic, brash, ridiculous, and outrageous with her humor. She describes herself as “loud” and a hard worker. To confirm her self-assessment, she was voted “most likely to be heard 10 miles away” during class awards, as well as “looks best in a hard hat.” Hard work makes her feel accomplished with her crew. She says, “In the rain, in the snow, whatever, we work. Mainly rain. Okay, the 10 miles of trail we did in [New Mexico]. That was awesome! I loved it. And then working for the youth corps, we reconstructed like a little creek and I was covered from head to toe in mud when we got finished with that. . . . So we don’t always get them done. But I still leave feeling good, but finishing makes us feel even better.”

Amelia was 18 years old at the time of her first interview in February of 2000. She moved shortly afterwards. When I tracked her down a year later for a follow-up interview, she was 19 years old. At five feet six inches, she is skinny with broad shoulders. She had an active Individualized Education Plan for a learning disability while attending Conservation High.¹¹ Amelia said that she went to Flats High for two days the second semester of her freshman year of high school. She said, instead of attending school, she partied. After encouragement from her boyfriend, Cody, and his grandparents, she asked for an alternative school and was sent to Conservation High in January of what would be her sophomore year. Amelia’s boyfriend, Cody, recommended she attend Conservation High; however, it took the Flats High School counselor to give the “go ahead” by legitimating her “dropout” status and completing the referral to Conservation

¹¹ Yet no personnel from her referring school ever contacted Conservation High regarding its implementation, which they were ultimately responsible for. I did request a copy of it.

High. She considers herself “white trash” as a Jewish, Blackfoot, Irish, Cherokee, and Gypsy descendent, because, she says, “I live in a trailer park.” Amelia received free or reduced-cost lunches in school. At home she helped take care of three younger siblings. She says, “When I was younger [my home life affected my school life] because I bounced around from house to house a lot when I was younger. I didn’t go to fourth grade—only like two or three months. And I pretty much raised my younger brother.”

Anáwaké (pseudonym)

Anáwaké describes her first days at Conservation High as ones where she “was really quiet and I observed the whole thing. I just kind of sat back and watched everybody.” At first, “I didn’t hate it but I didn’t really like it. I was unsure about it especially for the first couple of weeks.” Prior to Conservation High she had been home-schooled since the fourth grade, for a total of four years. She had gone to private alternative elementary school before then. At first Anáwaké felt out of place at Conservation High because “I had been out of school for so long.” Anáwaké seriously considered leaving because “some people were kind of obnoxious and I had not made friends yet really.” Then “I got laughed at in this situation. I think it really (pause) I just started to get used to it and more comfortable and reaching out to people more. And they reached out to me.” She adds, “I also learned a lot about team work and just like holding the team together. We were kind of like a family because . . . there was just as much arguments and just as much bonding, you know.” In her own words, she describes the impact of her crew leaders, of physical work and learning about creating and achieving goals at Conservation High.

Anáwaké is a slight, five feet three, classically beautiful young woman with a kind presence. At first, I believed her to be shy, but increasingly willing to use a strong

voice when she wanted to be heard. She was voted “friendliest” and “most likely to get a yellow top” when she graduated in January of 2001. She completed her first interview during that month at 16 years old and another a few months later. She also participated in a focus group with Fern. Anáwaké identifies as biracial—as Chickasaw, Cherokee (Native American), and Irish (Caucasian). Like Helen and Lily, she grew up with her parent of color, although they did not live with that parent during high school. Anáwaké identifies as an Indian and biracial young woman. When choosing socioeconomic classes to identify herself, she chose “low.”

Autumn Moon (pseudonym)

When describing her public high school exit, Autumn Moon says, “I was kicked out [of Hills High] for not going to class. I got called out of Spanish class with Jorge. The vice principal said we had an option to do better or get out. I was doing my best. I felt that I had slipped through the cracks. I was really discouraged because I knew I was really smart, but I questioned my own intelligence [in public high school], which I was taught my whole life not to do.” Autumn Moon graduated from Conservation High in June of 1999. At CHS, she was voted hardest worker of her class as well as “most likely to become the newest member of 90210.” We rescheduled her first interview a few times. The second interview with Autumn Moon occurred six months later. She is a young woman who grew up in a very liberal, perhaps self-identified “hippie,” household with an Irish mother and step-father. She has an older half-sister and brother from the relationship between her mother and Polish step-father. She stands about five feet four, often wears jeans, makeup, and a low-cut lace blouse. She has a very outgoing personality and primarily uses verbal ways of expressing it. She is a creative and critical thinker. Autumn

Moon is half Guamanian and half Irish-Polish American and identifies as biracial.

Autumn Moon agrees that it is hard on her not knowing her father, and therefore her father's culture, very well. She says, "There is this whole other culture and community I am related to that I don't know. That I want to know. They are related to *me!*" Yet clearly Autumn Moon is seen as a biracial person or a person of color due to her medium-toned skin and phenotype. She now has two children and lives in California.

Becka (pseudonym)

Becka says she did not have goals in public high school and "slept on her desk most of the time." She says this is because of her older brothers: "They never graduated high school. They are not going on to college. Then, like I came here and I realized. . . . I came here with a 0.79 [GPA] and now I have a 4. And I realized that I could do it. Then I started making goals for myself. I [have graduated] high school. I am going to go to college. I am going to graduate college." Becka was identified as having a learning disability and spent time in special education classes. About that experience she said she "was the only Hispanic person in her small special education class and I was constantly either in trouble or not being helped." One day this experience came to a head with Becka and she got up and told the teacher that she thought it was racism. The teacher apparently denied it at first. And then Becka gave her example after example of when she was in trouble and other weren't, when she was criticized constantly, or ignored. Eventually her teacher cried. This teacher was supportive of her transition to CHS. However, Becka's transition to CHS was the result of a "zero tolerance policy" where Becka joked with a school safety guard, who was also a family friend, about her being a killer. Even though it was a joke, this reference was considered evidence that she should be expelled. Of this

incident she says, “They didn’t know if I would bring a gun to school and shoot her. I have never even held a gun. I never want to, you know. I’ve never, you know, I told them too. They seriously thought that I would do that. I go, you guys the only gun that I have ever used is a water gun.” And later, “They were going to expel me.” “I didn’t really want to come to [CHS], but [Flats High] made me. I had to. But I am really glad I did.”

Becka graduated from CHS in January of 2000. I completed two interviews with Becka before losing touch with her. The first was in March of 2000 and the second in January of 2001. She is half Mexican and half Dutch-American and lives in a Dutch-American household. She stands at about five feet six, with a talkative and smiley, self-described “goofy” presentation. She is a talkative young person with a great sense of humor and a warm presence. She is the first person in her family to earn a high school diploma. After I first interviewed Becka about her interest in Conservation High, I drove to her home because her mother and step-father could not come to the school for a meeting with me. Her step-father was in a wheel chair and her mother was also disabled.

Carmen (pseudonym)

I interviewed Carmen for the first time just 18 days after her graduation in January of 2001 when she was 17 years old. We were to have three additional interviews. She has a warm oval face the tone of a brown paper bag and a kind smile. She stands about five feet three with a muscular build. She was voted in her graduating class “most likely to become president” and “friendliest.” She is a very strong young woman. I have always admired her willingness to say it how she sees it. She has grown in this way since I have known her. She wore comfortable clothes, jeans, and sneakers to her interviews. Her father is from Mexico and her mother is white. She has struggled to make sense of her

father's suicide when she was three years old. This event has had significant effects on her life. She grew up the eldest of three children with her single mom. Carmen experienced many incidents that contributed to her dropping out of high school. She felt that no matter what she did, students like her—whether they be girls, poor students, nonfavorites, or students of color—were not noticed for their achievements. Carmen is now going to community college. She has spent time woofing in Hawaii and lives in the Pacific Northwest. She is now a mother of a beautiful daughter and living in Two Cities.

China (pseudonym)

China graduated from Conservation High in June of 2000. China is the sole child of first-generation Russian immigrants. She is the only bilingual student in this study, fluent in Russian and English. She is the first in her family to earn a high school diploma. I completed two interviews with China within a year of her graduation. She commuted the longest daily distance of any other or staff member, about 45 minutes each way.

Compared to other students her age, she is short, and has short curly black hair and eyebrows that frame her oval face. She is quick to smile and care about others' feelings. In her former school, she was identified as "learning disabled" and "emotionally and behaviorally disordered" by a school psychologist. However, this label does not represent her behavior at Conservation High. While she struggled relationally, those struggles were minor in comparison to those of other CHS students who did not carry that label. In her graduating class, China was voted "mostly likely to become a CHS crew leader and hardest worker." To me, she is the student who was seen by staff as having made the largest change in her life. China clearly developed leadership skills and self-acceptance.

Crystal (pseudonym)

Crystal graduated from Conservation High School in June of 2000, yet her initial interview was in January of the following year. In almost every picture, Crystal has her tongue out. She has a silly and resistant sense of humor. She has blonde shoulder-length hair and is very skinny. She often sports a bandana around her head and low-cut jeans. Even though she is very slim, she keeps up with others in the field. Upon graduation, she was voted “mostly likely to become a CHS crew leader and hardest worker.” Crystal has two older brothers. She is the first person in her family to graduate with a high school diploma (versus a GED). Her parents, who were Spanish, Italian, and Jewish, adopted her. She does not know her ethnicity. She identifies as white. Of her dropping out of high school and her transition to Conservation High, she says that a teacher told her she would not make it in high school; this broke her spirit, so she quit. Upon completing CHS, she said, “Everybody likes this school [CHS] so that helped me to complete it. Some days I would wake up all happy, “Yeah, I get to go to school” and it would be a Saturday. I would be all sad. I would miss school. . . . It really helped me finish it. If we didn’t have this school, I don’t think I would have finished high school. There is a picture in the yearbook of Crystal posing for the camera. She is smiling, waist high in muddy water, with mud almost covering her entirely, fixing a drain pipe.

Deirdre (pseudonym)

Deirdre was the first former student I interviewed in June of 1999, when she was 19 years old. She has a warm personality with a biting sense of humor. She is shy and reserved until she knows someone better. She has a calm demeanor and takes the time to observe people and situations. Deirdre is Irish-American and identifies as white. She has high cheekbones and very long brown hair. She lived with her boyfriend for the two years that

she attended Conservation High. Deirdre's dropout story includes leaving school to be away from some of the peers that were in her school. She says she realized that "I needed my education more than anything. So I wasn't going to let them stand in the way of it [anymore], because I would just sometimes avoid them." Of her experience in high school, Deirdre says, "I was at risk of throwing my life away. My life was going down the drain and I needed to become something and do something. I was just throwing it all away. My other school didn't seem like they picked up on it. . . . It was like [at CHS, you were all saying], *"I don't need to throw my life away."* A year ago, I bumped into Deirdre at a local organization. She is married and is one of few women supervisors at a local mill.

Fern (pseudonym)

Fern graduated in January of 2001, and our first interview was less than a month later. She also participated in one focus group with Anáwaké. Fern has one older sister and grew up with both of her Italian parents until their divorce around the time of her graduation from Conservation High. Fern was voted "looks best in a hard hat" and "mostly likely to try to take over the universe" by her classmates. She is average height, skinny, and often shows up in school with creative haircuts and colors. I especially remember her bright red hair. Fern was also identified at special education and had an Individualized Education Plan; however, no personnel from her school district ever contacted me about implementing it. Fern is willing to challenge authority when she believes that something is unfair. She has a strong sense of justice and is outgoing and interested in talking about injustices. Fern was transferred to alternative schools in middle school after an incident where she hit a teacher for handling her. Then she says she was

kicked out for nonattendance. Of this experience she says, “I wasn’t doing good in public schools, I couldn’t handle it. Too many people, too many, not differences but like different mind sets really. People like I don’t know. Everyone was just like mean to each other. They hated each other. It was really stupid. Too many people. You don’t learn nearly as much when there is like 50 kids in the classroom instead of like ten.”

Helen (pseudonym)

Helen graduated in January of 2000. She is a Tlingit Tribal member and Irish-American. She identifies herself as an “Indian.” She participated in four interviews between March 2000 and March 2001. She received the “hardest worker” award in both the field and the classroom. Helen is an outgoing thoughtful young woman who learned early to have self-confidence and not to base her self-concept on how other people thought of her. About that she says, “I had powerful women examples that showed me that I could question and they were Native Women.” About struggles in her life, she says, “I don’t think I felt disadvantaged because all of my friends came from alcoholic families.” In terms of her dropping-out story, Helen says, “I just didn’t feel like it. I was so far behind. Like all the kids there. I usually felt so stupid compared to all of them.” Helen has a sense of social justice. For example, she says, “In poor neighborhoods students come with so many more stressors in their lives with no health care, drugs, poverty, lack of food, alcohol. Everything that comes with poverty. Then comparing them to students that come from good families, I mean I don’t mean good families, I don’t mean that they are inherently good just because they are rich. They have a good support system and their lives are geared towards school. Comparing the schools is unfair.” I asked Helen what she thought about the fact that many students at Conservation High had native ancestry but just a few

who identify as such. She said, “It also depends on how other people see them. If they also were raised traditionally, and then they look white, there is so many variations. They can still have a white way of thinking. A dark person can have a white way of thinking but it is even more a form of self-hatred.”

Lily (pseudonym)

Lily graduated in June of 2000. She was 18 years old at the time of her first interview in July 2000. She participated in four interviews. Lily is a Choctaw Indian and Irish and identifies as “Indian” and biracial. At graduation, Lily was voted “mostly likely to become president and most likely to get a yellow top.” Lily describes herself as initially shy; she also says that her experience at Conservation High helped her “open up” and “be herself.” I found her to be a particularly thoughtful and honest person, taking time to consider what she believed and what others needed. Lily has a big smile and a subtle lisp. She identifies as Native American and grew up with her mother. Lily is taller than most other participants at about five feet ten and broad shouldered. Her hair is somewhat wavy and she often dyes the light brown color to red. Her complexion suits this presentation. She is gregarious at times, and quiet and listening at others.

Lily came to CHS after her first year at the high school that has the best reputation. It is located in the middle- and upper-class hills of the largest of the Two Cities from which CHS drew students. Lily was extremely isolated there. While her grades were good, B’s and A’s, her interest in putting up with the social climate dwindled. She questioned the social costs of being dedicated to academics, yet was highly motivated to do well. She highly values education and is seen by other students as smart. Sometimes they sought Lily out to copy her paper. Lily describes her transition to

Conservation High: “Like when I came here it was a big turning point in my life because going to an alternative school is like a big step. I always followed the rules and taken the steps I needed to do to go through that and when I came here it just kind of shook everything, like throwing a stone into a pond. It was the total ripple effect. For example, kind of like that realization that I was poor and there was other poor people out there. Because over in my neighborhood and the people that I went to school with pretty much my whole life were pretty much upscale. They always had money. They had their own house, they had 2.5 kids and a dog. And then I came here and I was like put with people who were just like me that had, we could talk about similar incidences. Like there are so many similarities in poorer people. I could relate to them more.” Lily now works with adolescents labeled “high-risk” in residential treatment in a major city two hours away by car.

Marissa (pseudonym)

Marissa graduated in June of 1999. While she is Irish, Norwegian, and Native American, she says she does not identify ethnically or racially because “it doesn’t matter” and it “only matters to those who [see race as mattering].” She lives with her father who is a supervisor and she does not know her mother’s whereabouts. Marissa is described by herself and others in this study as very outgoing and encouraging. She is a good jokester and stands up for herself and others. Other participants, especially Lily and Amelia, describe how Marissa made a difference in their CHS experience by greeting them and showing them around. She was voted “friendliest” by her classmates upon graduation. Marissa is tall, with freckles and light brown wavy hair. She describes herself as a “big girl” and that she felt excluded in high school because of that. Marissa skipped 20 days in

a row at her former high school. About coming to CHS, she says, “I came here and the people were nice, that didn’t—you know—like they didn’t judge me for what I look like or how I dress. I dress a little off-beat for most people [at CHS], but it’s like, you know it’s like . . . I don’t get isolated because of it. It is because people are really opened-minded and that taught me a lot. Because of them I’ve been able to open up, like to my fullest extent because right now, I’m extremely who I want to be.”

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