

“Crazyghettosmart”: A case study in Latina identities

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Abstract:

Drawing from recent scholarship that examines schooling and the shifting terrain of youth identities, this study examines the identity constructions of Jessica, a Latina high school student. Our portrait of Jessica is part of a larger longitudinal study in which the middle and high school experiences of three Latinas, including Jessica, were examined. For this paper, we used data gathered from Jessica’s four years in high school, which included interviews from Jessica and her mother, and field observations from shadowing Jessica’s school days during her junior and senior years. Data analysis illustrated two broad themes: Jessica’s relationships with her academics and her social life, including the recent positioning of herself as a mother during her pregnancy in her senior year. Findings suggest that Jessica improvised her positions within various realms of school to both resist and reconfigure discourses that shaped her identities as a student and adolescent. This study argues for more research that examines and explores what youth have to say about their school experiences in order to illustrate the complex ways in which adolescents author themselves in school.

Keywords: identity and schooling | adolescence | case study

Article:

I think like when people got to know me, you know they go, ‘Yeah, she acts crazy sometimes or she acts funny. She’s crazy. She’s somewhat ghetto ...’ I think some people think I’m not smart like I’m not good in my classes, but I think when they see me in class and I ask a question or a teacher asks me what I think about it and I give this big old you know what I think about it like, everybody is like shocked. Like ‘Oh, my God, what was that’, you know, ‘coming out of Jessica?’ (Jessica, 22 July 2003)

In the summer between the 9th and 10th grades, Jessica suggested the contrasting identities that she inhabited as she navigated through the social, cultural, and academic currents of high school.

Defining herself as somewhat ‘crazy and ghetto’ and smart, she suggested how these identities accepted and pushed against the positionings of her peers and teachers (as implied in ‘everyone’), working to maintain both these affiliations. As part of a larger, longitudinal study in which three Latinas were interviewed and observed in middle and high school, Jessica’s story was chosen to provide a detailed account of one Latina student’s ‘ability to decode and recode [her] identity within discursive formations and cultural practices’ that she encountered in school (St. Pierre 2000, 504). Particularly, we are interested in how Jessica improvised positions within school settings to resist and reconfigure the powerful discourses that shape the student and youth identities that she might have performed. Jessica’s story broadens the traditionally narrow views of adolescents, their identity constructions, and their possibilities for self-authoring within schools.

Making ‘Crazyghetto’ smart: the creative navigations of youth identities in school

Our work rests on recent scholarship that examines schooling and the shifting terrain of youth identities, by exploring how youth are subject to competing and conflicting discourses that have influenced their identities. For this study, we draw on three theoretical perspectives: youth identities, positioning theory, and schooling and the formation of identities.

Redefining youth

Students in middle and high school have historically been identified as ‘adolescents’. Early research by Hall (1904) described adolescence as a period of ‘storm and stress’ or hormonal mood swings (Finders 1998/1999, 255). Known as the father of adolescence, he argued that the emotional life of an adolescent vacillated between conflicting urges such as selfishness and idealistic altruism. Anna Freud and Erik Erikson further argued that confusion and conflict, caused by biological factors, were a normal state of being for adolescents (Finders 1997). In contrast, Coleman (1961) argued that the nonchalance of youth in regard to education was not solely related to biological factors and described an independent adolescent culture that focused on pop culture (i.e., music) rather than education. More research, however, suggests that youth educators need to consider the social, cultural, and economic contexts of youths’ lives (Lesko 2001; Vadaboncoeur 2005). Vadaboncoeur (2005) argues that our notions of adolescence arise from the ‘fictions’ emanating from both academics and society that engender specific assumptions about youth that ‘relegate them to ... marginalized positions’ by controlling their movements and their access to information (5).

Lesko’s (1996) examination of the socio-historical construction of adolescence in England and the USA also problematizes traditional, commonsense notions about teenagers, especially those from marginalized populations. She argues that adolescents have been consistently portrayed as unstable, emotional, and irresponsible. She describes a gap between what is expected of adolescents and what is expected of adults, putting youth in an ‘in between’ transitional phase or ‘border zone’ in which they are expected to act less like children and more like adults (Lesko 1996). Such views situate youth in a position to be protected and controlled by adults and lead institutions, such as secondary schools, to embody beliefs that aim to control students’ bodies and activities, suspending them in time as not-adults and not-children, and limiting their intellectual challenges or decision-making. Schools’ emphasis on cooperation and control has

also created school cultures that value ‘docility and deference’ and shy away from debate, dissent, and discussions of race, gender, and class (Finders 1997; Valenzuela 1999).

These scholars argue for a new conception of youth based on poststructural notions of subjectivities and positionality. Although we discuss positionality in relation to figured identities below, the reconception of adolescents and adolescence as identity markers requires, ‘a lens of schooling ... that is process-focused and recognitive of the embodied, fluid, and situated nature of peoples’ subjectivities’ (Patel Stevens 2005, 277). Through such a lens, youth may be seen not as fulfilling some pre-determined set of developmental stages but as individuals engaging dialogically with their social and cultural contexts. Furthermore, this understanding of youth underscores the importance of examining the multiple and contingent discourses that act upon students, especially insofar as race, class, and gender are concerned.

Positioning, positionality, and figured identities

To explore how one Latina high school student engaged her school contexts, we draw primarily on the work of Holland and her colleagues (1998) for our understanding of contextually bound notions of identities. This work, drawing from Bakhtin, Vygotsky, and Bourdieu, offers a fluid sense of dialogism, identity formation, and a greater potential for agency. The work of poststructuralists also adds strength to Holland et al.’s understanding of positioning and the production of identities. We define positionality as the places or perspectives from which individuals shape their actions, including individuals’ perspectives on broad social categories such as race, class, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality. As Davies and Harre (1990) explain, individuals assume positions through a, ‘discursive process whereby selves are located in conversations as observably and subjectively coherent participants in jointly produced storylines’ (89). Individuals have access to multiple positions, some of which may be imposed on them. Some of the positions that individuals take up are made available through generic conceptions, called up by specific story lines, such as teacher or student. In the course of social interactions, individuals assume what Holland et al. (1998) call ‘figured’ identities, that is, identities that individuals construe from prior experience and in relation to the discourses available to them. These figured identities position individuals in socially recognizable and conventional ways (e.g., student).

Identities arise from the particular local contexts that constitute individuals’ lives and are shaped not only by such particularity but also by the broader social and cultural discourses that structure the meanings we derive from our worlds. Although these discourses exert powerful influence over how persons enact their identities, poststructuralism provides an explanation of how they may also be resisted or contested (as Jessica does in the opening quotation). Butler (1990/2004) argued that performativity, the effect of social discourses and cultural practices in producing persons, reveals the constructed nature of identity categories such as gender by virtue of the difference between one’s actions and the discursive formations they perform. Such categories can be parodied or rejected, suggesting other possibilities than those signifying practices permitted by dominant discourses. These possibilities constitute, as Ortnor (1998) suggests, ‘the little cracks and openings that constantly appear as a result of the complex and constantly changing dynamics of practice’ (14). These cracks and openings allow positionings not typically recognized by social and cultural discourses (Bettie 2003). They provide an agentic space by

which, in their ongoing interactions, that is, social and cultural interactions, people can act in ways that position them differently.

Despite the differences in poststructural and anthropological constructions of positioning and the production of identities, scholars in both fields maintain that identities (or subjects) are formed through repetition and learning. Butler (1990/2004) argues, for example, that gendered identity: 'requires a performance that is repeated. This repetition is at once a reenactment and reexperiencing of a set of meanings already socially established; and it is the mundane and ritualized form of their legitimation' (114). In this way, identities become 'natural'. Similarly, Holland et al. (1998) noted that individuals develop positional identities over time through social interaction, whereby they acquire 'a sense of their relative social position' (132). Their notion of positional identity, proposed from a sociocultural position: 'happens through day-to-day encounters and is built, again and again, by means of artifacts, or indices of positioning, that newcomers [to a figured world] gradually learn to identify and then possibly to identify themselves with – either positively or negatively, through either acceptance or rejection' (133). In both configurations, identities are embedded in the discourses and practices of daily life, are formed most often without awareness, and shape who we are in our social worlds.

These worlds are themselves a complex of settings, each with its own rules for behavior, its own practices, and its own values by which individuals' identities are performed. Holland et al. (1998) have construed these settings as figured worlds to describe the myriad intersecting forces that characterize social interactions in specific contexts, the activities that transpire within them, and their relationship with individuals' identity performances. According to Holland et al., figured worlds have four aspects related to interactions between self and world: (1) they are 'historical phenomena, to which we are recruited or into which we enter, which themselves develop through the works of their participants'; (2) they 'proceed and are socially instanced and located in times and places, not in the "everywhere" that seems to encompass cultural worlds as they are usually conceived'; (3) they are 'socially organized and reproduced'; they 'divide and relate participants (almost as roles), and they depend upon the interaction and the intersubjectivity for perpetuation'; and (4) they 'distribute "us", not only by relating actors to landscapes of action (as personae) and spreading our sense of self across many different fields of activity, but also by giving the landscape human voice and tone' (41).

Schooling, and the formation of figured youth identities

'Human voice and tone' are imprinted everywhere with cultural reference; in institutional settings, how voices are valued too often rests on who is speaking with what discourses and for what purposes. School structures tend to ensure that white middle-class students occupy places of privilege, marginalizing working-class and poor students, and students of color. The silencing of culturally responsive talk in schools has had its most deleterious effects on girls and students of color by limiting the availability of counter-discourses that acknowledge and validate the knowledge, skills, and other tools these students possess. With respect to gender, teachers often encourage girls to take on positional identities that emphasize nurturing (i.e., mother or teacher), and although these positions may provide girls with increased power in some classroom relations, they also deny girls' access to other roles. Girls who do not fit into the position of a nurturer might be viewed as non-feminine or 'selfish' because they challenge the authority of the

teacher (Walkerdine 1990, 78). Social class and gender also interact, shaping girls' identities in material and historical ways by positioning girls, or allowing them to position themselves, within or apart from specific groups (e.g., social queens, smart cookies, good/bad girls) (Enciso 1998; Finders 1997). The role of school in the alienation of students on the basis of race and ethnicity, also known as 'subtractive schooling' (Valenzuela 1999), has eroded African-American, Latino, and Asian students' belief in their abilities, provided substandard schooling, and undervalued their funds of knowledge because of its prevailing white, middle-class norms of school (Oakes 1985; Valencia 1991). As a mechanism in the reproduction of social values, schools have tended to reinforce these positional identities rather than to provide students a means of exploring or resisting them.

Yet, students do resist these forces and find ways to create spaces that give rise to cultural and discursive hybridity as a form of resistance to domination, with or without the help of adults. Hybrid spaces are 'polycontextual, multivoiced, and multiscripted' (Gutierrez, Baquedano-López, and Tejada 1999, 287) and offer opportunities for the students to construct 'third spaces' where normative discourses may be transformed. As Bhabha (1994) explains, discursive interactions are simultaneously indicative of speakers' voices and the discourses from which they emerge, creating an 'ambivalent', or third space, between them. Within the third space, the possibility to change or even usurp dominant discourses exists: 'even the same signs [used in dominant discourses] can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized and read anew' (Bhabha 1994, 55). In this way, students may occupy in-between spaces to contest or revise discourses aimed at controlling their bodies and minds. To do so, youth must find ways to position themselves to profit from the kinds of cultural capital that school can provide by resisting those forces that push them away from school. This is no easy task, and students have little power to change the dominant discourses of their schooling. As Solsken, Willett, and Wilson-Keenan (2000) note, students may rely on hybrid discourses to learn and to appropriate discourses for their own purposes, but these discourses may not alter the power relations that govern school. Yet, students do find ways to navigate the discourses of schooling, some with more success than others, limiting the impact on the positional identities they have learned in other contexts.

Students can do this through self-authoring. Holland et al. (1998) describe a space of authoring as a place where people write themselves into the world in individual ways. In this space, one arranges, 'identifiable social discourses/practices that are one's resources (which Bakhtin glossed as "voices") in order to craft a response in a time and space defined by others' standpoints in activity' (272). Sola and Bennet (1991) found that the students wrote themselves in school by creating a voice that mixed school and home discourses and responded 'to the conditions they found themselves in' (53). Similarly, Blackburn (2003) found that self-authoring provided opportunities for students to write themselves and others in powerful ways.

Within the figured world of school, these theoretical concepts help explain how students become the students they become and their relationships with the various other social actors they encounter in their everyday lives at school. Specifically, this study followed Jessica, a Latina youth, who appeared to become increasingly proficient at negotiating 'in-between' spaces for herself throughout her high school experiences, as a means of maintaining both her status as a good student and a schooled identity consistent with her sense of herself.

Methods

Data for this research come from a larger ethnographic study that followed the development of four girls through their three years of middle school. After middle school, the study continued with three of the girls into high school. For this paper, we focused on the high school experience of one participant, Jessica, to illustrate how she negotiated spaces for herself in response to the expectations of others, her school, and her sense of self. Specifically, we focus our analysis on how she both performed and resisted the normative constructions of both ‘crazyghetto’ and ‘smart’, finding in-between spaces – Ortner’s (1998) ‘little cracks and openings’ – for self-authoring and hybrid performances.

Jessica: a brief introduction

Jessica lived in a working-class neighborhood of a large, southwest city and first attended Avery High School as a transfer student. At the beginning of her sophomore year, she was involved in a fight and her transfer was revoked. For the remainder of high school, she attended Taylor High School, an inner-city school that drew from surrounding working-class neighborhoods. Most of the students at Taylor were Latinos (81%), while the rest of the population was African-American (11%), White (8%), Asian (1%), and Native American (1%). Seventy-one percent of the population was economically disadvantaged, and 20% of the students spoke limited English. Her mother, Mrs Garza, was a single, working mother of three children. Her father, whom she visited frequently, lived in the same city. We focused on Jessica because she was reflective about herself and her experiences in school, and we were intrigued by how she accommodated and resisted positionings in order to write herself within the world of school.

Data collection

Data sources included extensive observations, field notes, and interviews with Jessica and her mother. Our field notes were based on observations that we collected by shadowing Jessica four times during her junior year and nine times during her senior year. When we shadowed Jessica, we met her at the front of the school before classes started and followed her throughout her school day. We attended all classes, hanging out in the hallway between classes and eating lunch on and off campus. While in the class, we sat behind or adjacent to Jessica in order to write detailed notes about her behaviors. Outside of the class, we engaged in conversations with Jessica and her friends and wrote notes about these out-of-class experiences later that day. During classes, her friends and classmates typically asked her why we were there and why we wrote down everything that she said and did. Over time, Jessica became more comfortable with her explanation by answering students with, ‘One day there will be a book about me, and it will be used to make teachers better’ (October 2005). Once her classmates realized that we were not there to judge their behavior or academic performance, they relaxed into what seemed like typical classroom behavior. Because we were interested in Jessica’s experiences, we did not spend time with teachers or share information about Jessica with teachers or administrators. However, on our first day, we spoke with the principal and with each teacher to explain our research goals. We reassured teachers that our observations were based on Jessica’s behaviors and not on their teaching methods, but we did take notes about Jessica’s interactions with her

teachers to better understand her positionings. All of the teachers welcomed us into the classroom and seemed to conduct class as usual. Three formal interviews, all transcribed, were conducted in each year of high school. These interviews typically occurred at Jessica's home and were video and audio-taped. During the interviews, we asked Jessica about a variety of information in order to gain insight about the relationship between her identity and her school experiences. Interviews with Jessica's mother were conducted once every high school year and typically occurred at her home. These interviews enabled us to gather another viewpoint of Jessica, which, as Anzaldúa (1999) suggests, is imperative when trying to grasp the multiple identities of a person.

Data analysis

Our data analysis aimed to create an interpretive case study focusing on Jessica's positional identities during high school. We examined the data for the specific ways in which Jessica positioned herself with respect to her school experiences as well as how others positioned her. During the initial stages of analysis, we chunked interview data and field observations by topic or event and independently coded how Jessica constructed figured identities (Holland et al. 1998) as a Latina high school student and how her mother and school experiences constructed her in similar or different ways. Later, we organized data to illustrate the multiple ways in which she authored herself within school. We used a triangulation of methods (field notes, interviews, and informal conversations) and sources (Jessica, Mrs Garza, teachers, friends/classmates) to highlight positionings that had similar patterns across the data and to acknowledge instances when data were contradictory. We focused on Jessica's shifting identities to illustrate how she negotiated 'in-between' spaces so that they worked in her favor in school. On the basis of these shifting positions, we worked on the following two broad themes to illustrate these 'in-between' spaces: Jessica's relationship with academics and Jessica's relationship with her social world. We returned to the data and created a chart that included two or three examples from each data source that best illustrated how Jessica negotiated her relationships with her academics and social worlds. We added to our analysis a section on Jessica's developing identities related to motherhood after learning of her pregnancy during her senior year. Although only collected early in her pregnancy, we examine excerpts of data from one interview and notes from field observations to explore how Jessica reshaped her sense of self to include the new identity of mother.

Our relationship with Jessica influenced our data collection and analysis. As researchers from the university, we were viewed as outsiders rather than as teachers or administrators. Because our focus was on Jessica's experiences in school, we rarely spent time talking to faculty and instead listened, watched, and explored Jessica's school experiences. While interviewing and shadowing Jessica, we discussed the purpose of the study and provided opportunities for her to ask us questions. By conducting interviews with Jessica at her home, we had occasions to meet her siblings, nephew, mother, and boyfriend. Although we came to the interviews with specific questions, Jessica also constructed these conversations by directing the interview in specific ways. For example, in February 2003, the interview centered on her recent break-up with her boyfriend, Arturo. This topic was launched with the question of 'How's it been going?' and became a refrain that shaped our discussion of her school experiences during the rest of the interview.

Our analysis was also shaped by our white, female, middle/upper class backgrounds. We struggled with the complexities of representing the school experience of a working-class Latina from our particular lens. To examine these issues, we asked Jessica whether it was possible for people who are white and older to understand what life is like for her. She replied:

I don't think that race has anything to do with understanding somebody else's life. ... our time is different, like the way that you all went to school and learned is different from the way I go to school and learn. But I think ya'll could both understand and I can understand you all's point of view of going to school. (16 February 2005)

Despite her suggestion that race does not matter, we recognize and acknowledge that race along with age, gender, and class played a part in our comprehension of her experiences. We worried about representing someone who was socially and culturally located in a different place than us. Although our purpose in this study was to better understand Jessica as a Latina youth in an urban high school, we did not want to perpetuate a homogenized view of all Latina youth. Despite this goal, issues of representation are still a point of tension because we cannot take our social, cultural, and economic status out of the interpretation or claim to have an objective account of Jessica's experience (Appleman 2003; Larson 2003; Weis and Fine 2000). Instead, we offer a 'partial view' of one Latina's experience in high school (Haraway 1988).

This partial view is supported by longitudinal research, the triangulation of sources and methods, and the inclusion of transcripts. First, in this longitudinal study, we interviewed Jessica for seven years and her mother for four years, shadowed her for two years, and observed her in language arts for one year. The length of the study allowed us to 'uncover pathways' followed by Jessica and to better understand the gradual ways in which her interactions across social worlds influenced how she authored herself in school (Sternglass 2003, 108). Second, we triangulated methods and sources by drawing on a variety of data, allowing us to make interpretations based on numerous perspectives. Finally, we include several excerpts of Jessica's comments from interviews and observations throughout the paper to 'show rather than tell' her perspective and school experiences (Appleman 2003, 83). We believe that by including transcripts of the interviews, Jessica's perspective was better represented in our interpretations. These transcripts also add to the little research that emphasizes what adolescents say about themselves and their schooled lives. Although the organization of data always imposes constraints, we focused on tensions within categories that pushed against the desire to represent Jessica in neat or tidy ways. Because of the sheer amount of data (approximately 500 pages of transcripts), we chose to include some data in a compressed form but tried to represent the breadth of her responses. Overall, we used these methods to broaden our understanding and analysis of how Jessica authored herself in multiple ways within the figured world of school.

'Crazyghettosmart': Jessica's shifting identities

We identified the following two broad themes that characterized Jessica's shifting positions during high school: Jessica's relationship with academics and Jessica's relationship with her social world. Discussion of these themes is followed by an analysis of Jessica's navigation into motherhood during her senior year. Our findings indicate how Jessica authored herself within

various realms of school to both resist and restructure the discourses that shaped her identities. Specifically, we discuss how she continually refigured what it meant to be ‘crazyghetto’ and ‘smart’ in the local contexts of various classrooms. This process of authorship was illustrated in ‘little openings and cracks’ or moments of agency in which she declined to follow the practices of her peers and asserted herself into the academic life of the classroom.

‘I passed with flying colors – the whole rainbow’: relationship with academics

Jessica’s dilemma with academics was about maintaining and negotiating positions to gain status in both her academic and social worlds. Oftentimes, we observed Jessica take on both ‘smart’ and ‘crazyghetto’ positions. These positions did not always fit nicely together in the classroom, and they sometimes caused contentiousness as she authored herself within these local spaces. Holland et al. (1998) used the term ‘space of authoring’ to make sense of the ‘continuing dialogic inner speech where active identities are ever forming’ (169). We ‘author’ ourselves and the world around us, but because we are not a ‘freewheeling agent’, we position ourselves like bricoleurs who build ‘with preexisting materials’ (170). Thus, we draw upon the words of others, defining authorship by the ‘interrelationship of differentiated vocal perspectives on the social world’ (173). Although human agency is a large part of this ‘art of improvisation’ (271), Holland et al. argue that agency ‘may be frail, especially among those with little power’ (5). Below, we examined Jessica’s various positions and acts of agency within her academic world to better understand how she authored herself within school and her classrooms.

There were many factors that shaped Jessica’s relationship with academics. In this section, we focus on two, peer and race relationships, because we consistently saw how they shaped her relationship with the academic world. With respect to the intersection of peer relations and academics, Jessica’s allegiance to her friends and her commitment to school entailed a constant balancing act, requiring that she negotiates these aspects of school life in creative ways. In a 10th-grade interview, for example, Jessica admitted that she and her friends ‘don’t really talk about school stuff’ (22 July 2003). Because academics were not an important part of her social life, it was not always beneficial for her to position herself as ‘smart’, and she frequently talked and joked around with friends in class rather than focusing on her assignments. When asked how she thought her teachers might describe her, Jessica responded, ‘I bring life into a class. I bring laughter and all that good stuff’. By contrast, she also asserted, ‘I ask, sometimes I ask good questions to where my teachers don’t have an answer for me and like it tells me, you know, I can work with this, you know. I can, I’m smart or when I answer a question ... a right statement. It makes me feel good’. For Jessica, these practices indicated that she was ‘smart’. She acknowledged, however, that positioning herself as smart sometimes surprised her peers: ‘Everybody is like shocked. Like, “Oh, my God, what was that”, you know, “coming out of Jessica”’. Her drive to be successful in school was also seen in her actions. She passed all sections of the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) test, took the Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT), and posted her Spanish test on the refrigerator after earning a 90%. Jessica believed that her teachers would describe her as ‘crazy’ or ‘ghetto’, recognizing that a ‘crazyghetto’ position might benefit her socially. However, she resisted this identity in some classes to position herself as ‘smart’ even in front of her friends.

Mrs Garza also positioned Jessica as confident, commenting, 'I've never really heard her say that she can't do something' (10 November 2002). Although she had confidence in her capabilities, Jessica oftentimes resisted the positioning of a 'schoolgirl' by behaving defiantly in classes. This position was taken up more frequently in classes with her friends and indicated a dilemma for Jessica because of the varying expectations of the classroom and her social peers. As observed in her honors astronomy class, when her peers were taken out of the local context, Jessica performed more like a 'schoolgirl' by remaining quiet and spoke up only when participating in an academic discussion. The honors class seemed to provide the opportunity for Jessica to position herself as a different type of student. She noted that her astronomy course had different expectations than her other courses, stating, 'So it was kind of hard for me. I didn't think I was going to do good but I've been doing good' (5 November 2005). Thus, Jessica discovered new ways of performing as a student, and her resistance to the pressure of performing the 'crazyghetto' identity imposed by her friends illustrated how she stood firm to the identities that would benefit her in some academic situations.

As Jessica gained more experience and knowledge about the figured world of school, she positioned herself more frequently in ways that illustrated her negotiation of seemingly contradictory identities. For example, she used humor in the classroom not only to maintain her identity as 'crazyghetto' with her friends but also to maintain popularity and respect with teachers. Jessica joked with her algebra teacher and classmates while reviewing homework by saying, 'I *know* I am smart, but I wanted to check my answers'. In economics class, she told the teacher and students, 'I passed with *flying* colors – the *whole* rainbow' (10 October 2005). These statements typically made her classmates and teachers chuckle because they were said in a humorous and boastful tone for the entire class to hear. Jessica also used her sense of humor as a counter-discourse in opposition to the teacher script of the formal language of the classroom (Erickson 2004; Goffman 1974). These counter-discourses in the form of humor helped her to maintain her popularity, resist the norms of being a 'schoolgirl', and negotiate her classroom success (Erickson 2004; Goffman 1974). In other words, humor provided her the opportunity to be 'inside and outside the ritual order simultaneously' of school. This ability to position herself as both 'crazyghetto' and smart illustrated how she improvised with resources (i.e., her humor) that were available to her to meet her goals for being a student and a part of her peer culture. Jessica's agency lies within these improvisations created in response to her particular situations (Holland et al. 1998) and allowed her to author a space for herself, uniquely, by bringing life to it.

'White, White, and White. Oh Jesus Christ, that's crazy!': making sense of race in school

Jessica also struggled to understand how identities, such as race, might define her relationship with academics. We asked Jessica whether she ever experienced racism or prejudice in school. She answered 'no', but when she learned how another student in the study had a teacher who treated white students differently than students of color, Jessica responded with the story below:

That tells me oh, she thinks that Mexicans and black people can't, they're not smart enough to get an education, that White people can get an education so she's just going to help them because she knows all of them are going to get a good education. I don't know but there's just crazy White people out in the world. (22 October 2003)

In this segment, Jessica recognized that a teacher could position her as ‘incapable’ merely because of her race and resisted assumptions that Latino and African-American students were not capable of getting a good education. When asked whether all of her teachers were white, Jessica went through the list of her teachers: ‘I think my second period teacher is half, half Mexican, I’m not sure. He knows Spanish so and my third period is Hispanic because he’s my Spanish teacher. White, fourth, fifth period, P.E., White, White, and White. Oh Jesus Christ, that’s crazy!’ (22 October 2003). Although Jessica did not recall a time when she experienced prejudice from a teacher, she recognized that the predominance of white teachers in her school was the norm. This realization resonates with the experience of native-born ethnic majority, ethnic minority, and immigrant children in our schools today who experience discrimination based on the fact that they are taught by a majority of white middle-class, female teachers (Banks 2000; Cooper 2007).

We also observed Jessica verbally resist stereotypes of Latinos by voicing her opinions and personal experiences. During a discussion in her film class about *Real Women Have Curves* and *Stand and Deliver*, Jessica commented that not all Latinos are in gangs, and that many Latino parents support their children for attending college. She offered her teacher and peers a counter-narrative, an act of agency that reflected a more positive view of Latinos and their families. Jessica also resisted assumptions that teachers might have about her academic abilities by frequently asking for help and explicitly stating what she needed from teachers, especially those who did not give her the help she required. This assertiveness, potentially regarded as an inappropriate behavior by some teachers, was a performance in which she attempted to author herself as a smart *Latina* student who was capable and motivated. These performances, as well as her reflexivity during interviews, suggested that Jessica was aware of the social and cultural issues that positioned her in school and which she resisted through counter-narratives.

‘I just want to hurry up ... like ooh wee, can’t wait’: planning for the future

In this sense, Jessica’s reflexivity made it possible for her to identify ‘small cracks and openings’ in the world of school and to exploit them for her own agentic purposes. Holland et al. (1998) refer to two types of agency. The first, improvisation, occurs as individuals respond in the moment to their circumstances, using their past experiences in similar settings, the knowledge of the figured worlds in which they were located, and the resources they have to act in unexpected ways in these worlds (e.g., when Jessica used humor to position herself favorably in the classroom). The second they call ‘agency through self-directed symbolizations’ (277). Drawing on Vygotsky’s understanding of the generative power of language and symbolic play, these authors suggest that we: ‘attend to people’s collective ability to imagine themselves in worlds that may yet be scarcely realized, and to the modest ability of humans to manage their own behavior through signs directed at themselves’ (281). Jessica’s sense of herself and the reflexivity she acquired seemed to be connected to this second form of agency and allowed her to refigure both herself and her worlds. For example, Jessica reflected on her future and shifted behavior and discourse to help reach her goals. In 2002, Jessica said that she was interested in a career with: ‘EMS, autopsies, or forensics. I’m going more toward autopsies, but I’m not sure or like working at a chapel or something helping people get the, the people that pass away, the

makeup'. These careers required that Jessica take science, so she enrolled in advanced placement (AP) science courses.

Jessica also realized that she did not want to go to school for four more years and actively sought information about jobs in this area that only required two years of school. After taking a tour at the morgue, the tour guide informed her that, 'he only had to go to college for two years and he gets paid pretty good'. She was confident that she did not want a career that required more than two years of college.

I'm not very sure if I can be able to stay in college for like four years. I don't think I can do that because I'm not really a school person. I just want to hurry up and start doing that, like ooh wee, can't wait. I want to hurry. (20 May 2004)

In this interview, Jessica positioned herself as someone who planned for her future but was hesitant about committing to college for four years. Similar to Valenzuela's (1999) findings, Jessica had a clear understanding of what she needed to do in order to go to college, such as taking the SAT, passing TAKS, taking advanced science classes, and applying to the community college. However, college still seemed to be 'an emotionally and experientially remote notion' (257), one that conflicted with her identity as 'not a school person'. In the following interview, Jessica related her hesitancy to commit to college with issues of money and family:

I know she [her mother] wants me to [go to college], but that's my decision to make. I know my dad wants me to go. He told me if I go and I graduate from college, he'll buy me a brand new car. So, I think that's pretty cool, but I'm not going to just go to get a car ... And I think another thing is that I don't want to be away from my family. It's the money thing and me being away from my family a lot. (16 February 2005)

Jessica's concerns about college illustrated conflicting identities related to family, class, and academics, a challenge for Jessica that she hoped to resolve by attending a two-year college close to her home. Jessica voiced the obstacles that working-class students encounter with respect to college enrollment, as well as taking on adult responsibilities earlier than their middle-class peers (Bettie 2003). Thus, she created a future world that guided the choices she was making about classes, maintained her relationships with family, and attended to her economic resources.

'Not the type of person to be pushed around': relationship with her social world

Jessica's relationship with her academic world was interrelated with her social world. As described in the above section, Jessica negotiated the contradictory position of 'crazyghettosmart' in order to benefit her in both her social and academic worlds. Jessica struggled with acceptance from her teachers, but her peers seemed to be more tolerant of Jessica's performances as 'crazyghettosmart', suggesting that she had more power and perhaps more agency within her social world. She had many friends and a boyfriend, attended football games, and frequented parties. Students voted her as a homecoming princess during her sophomore year. Jessica appreciated her friends and went out of her way to support them: 'But yeah, I know now that you know we should have a like a lot of respect for your friends and that you should be there for them when things aren't going so good' (22 July 2003). Jessica tended to

author herself as someone who was popular, social, and caring within her social world. She always had someone to talk to in classes, and during breaks, she met with her group of friends and chatted about the weekend or other topics ranging from teen pregnancy to family arguments.

However, the construction of her identities did not depend solely on her friendships. She listened to her own counsel and took pride in being an independent person, working on the weekends, paying for her car and insurance, and never hesitating to express her opinions. For example, she told us about her decision not to skip school with her friends:

I tell them, 'Are you going to pay my bills when I get out of high school? And you want me to skip with you ... If you're going to pay my bills and pay my car insurance and then I'll skip with you. Until then, no. I'm staying at school and getting my education while you're going to Jack in the Box'. (22 October 2003)

In a similar vein, we asked her and her boyfriend why they did not eat with their friends at lunch. They replied that most of their friends were skipping school and getting 'stoned' at home. She and her boyfriend resisted those peer activities that conflicted with their academic goals. Jessica talked about how she made choices that differed from those of her friends:

I'm way different than most of my friends. ... most of them are into drugs or like skipping school ... Me, they're my friends, but like I choose differently than what they do. Like, I don't go do drugs. I don't do drugs, period. (16 February 2005)

Jessica's resistance to some of her friends' practices illustrates how she positioned herself, one might say in quite adult ways, as an independent person who was capable of following her own path in her social world. Such agency also suggests how Jessica's experience pushed against stereotypical notions of adolescents and urban youth especially.

Jessica's independence was typically supported by a companion. Her choice in boyfriends seemed to be a means by which she positioned and re-positioned herself in her social and academic worlds. In other words, she typically chose boyfriends who helped her to become who she wanted to be. For example, her first boyfriend, Arturo, helped her establish herself with the 'ghetto' group at Taylor when she transferred there, whereas her current boyfriend shared the same goal of graduation and hoped to attend college, especially after being offered a college scholarship. Her boyfriends also helped her move through the social world of school, so that she became part of a group that was more involved in school functions such as football games. Jessica encouraged her boyfriend to do well in school and reminded him of overdue assignments. However, in contrast to Valenzuela's (1999) findings about performances of gender and romance, we never saw Jessica putting her own achievement at risk for her boyfriend.

Although Jessica's social life may be one of the main reasons she made it to school every day, her romantic relationships sometimes distracted her from academics. For example, she was distracted by a difficult break-up with Arturo that made it hard for her to concentrate in class. She explained the situation:

I was doing good in all my classes you know and then we broke up and then like I started not doing my work because I was so worried about that. I wasn't going to class and then I started losing weight but now I started eating again. I lost a lot, I lost like I didn't eat for the whole week ... It was real bad and I was all crying, my eyes were all swollen, I was all, stomach sick and [unintelligible]. (19 February 2003)

This excerpt illustrates the impact that her social life could have on her relationship with academics, despite her tendency to author herself as independent. Similarly, Jessica's mother also positioned Jessica as distractible:

I know when she was younger the teacher would notice like she was out here somewhere, and I don't know where she's at but sometimes she gets a little emotional you know. I guess we are at one point when ... you don't know what to do or how to you know handle a situation or whatever, you know, just getting scared. (10 November 2002)

Both Jessica and her mother described how some aspects of Jessica's social life influenced others, specifically how her romantic relationships preoccupied her and influenced her performance in school. Lutrell (2003) found that issues of romance were often places of anxiety or tension for young women; they were often places in which young women, like Jessica, learned how to deal with complicated emotions. Similarly, Holland et al. (1998) explained that the more competent she became in a figured world, the more emotionally involved she became. Because Jessica had been in heterosexual relationships for most of her high school years, she increasingly became emotionally involved within her figured world of romance. She may have generally authored herself as independent, but her relationships with boyfriends influenced how she wrote herself within the social world of school, sometimes causing her to fall behind academically.

Jessica, however, learned to use particular resources to manage distractions from her social life. In the ninth grade, Jessica described a time when she did not do her work and let down her group because she was upset about breaking up with her boyfriend:

I told her [Spanish teacher] that I did it [research for group assignment] and that I was going to talk, that I needed to tell the class something ... I apologized to them and told them that I was sorry for always being off-task and always walking in class late and that they all probably know that the reason why because I had a boyfriend, now I don't ... she wrote me a letter saying that that was real brave of me and everything. I saw the grade sheet that she gave me a 70 ... I thanked her for doing that. (19 February 2003)

Later, in the interview, Jessica said, 'All the girls were saying that I almost made them cry and all this stuff'. After Jessica realized that her social world intruded on the kind of student she wanted to become, she improvised a response that helped her restore her position as a good student.

In this example, Jessica re-positioned herself within her academic world by integrating a personal event within the public space of school. She used her academic world to help her figure out difficult issues, such as break-ups, and found the courage to talk about these issues in front of her classmates, an agentic act that benefited her. Jessica's use of counter-discourses developed

more in classrooms that fostered the opportunity to integrate the personal into the academic world, such as her media and Spanish classes, and she had to learn how to re-mediate and re-create her positions within and between her academic and social worlds.

Another fairly consistent positioning and area of re-mediation was her position as a 'tough' girl when confronted or challenged by other females. In the ninth grade, she was kicked out of Avery High School because she got into a fight with another student. Jessica engaged in another fight with a girl in her senior year over her boyfriend. She was suspended from school, and the courts required her to go to anger management classes and do community service. This type of incident showed how she positioned herself as 'tough' or, in her mom's words, 'not the type of person to be pushed around' (14 October 2003) and reinforced her reputation as 'crazyghetto' in school. Many children of working-class parents have been raised to develop a 'thick skin' and independence in order to deal with any hardships that may occur (Bettie 2003; Lutrell 2003). Jessica's 'tough' performance gained her status within her social world but diminished her position in her academic world because of the suspension and its academic consequences.

As described, issues of race, class, gender, and sexuality implicitly shaped Jessica's relationship with her social world; however, Jessica rarely discussed these issues explicitly. We took a note of those rare conversations to better understand the weight of their impact on her social world. In a 2004 interview, Jessica described how various social groups at school were divided on the basis of race. She was aware of the prejudices that different races of students encountered at school and was proud to be 'Hispanic' rather than 'white or black'. She also described the racism between immigrants and US-born Latino students that occurred at her school:

Author: And why do you say that the Mexicans aren't respected?

Jessica: Because everybody, they speak probably nothing but Spanish and people make fun of them. They call them wetbacks, and they scream out, 'Immigration' or 'La Migra', whatever that is, I don't know it's like kind of sad, but I mean at least it's not me. I mean I'm, I don't disrespect them ... but the ones that don't know English are probably the ones that get picked on the most. (20 May 2004)

After being asked whether language was the main factor that set these students apart from each other, she answered, 'Yeah. The language and just the way they look or the people that they hang around with or the way that they dress'. Language, friends, and appearance constituted a way for Jessica to explain the division and conflict that occurred among social groups at her school and shaped how she constructed herself as 'Hispanic'. Jessica commented, 'Yeah, they're just not my kind of people to hang around with. I never really hung around with those kind of people. I mean, why should I? I can't even talk to them 'cause I don't speak, you know, the kind of Spanish they talk'. Jessica also stated that various social practices, such as dating or association with gangs, divided immigrant, and US-born Latino students in her school, thus shaping her choice of friends. After being asked what defined her social groups more, age or culture, Jessica answered:

Culture, but then you got, but then like the Hispanics don't hang out with the Mexicans, the ones that speak Spanish ... I don't associate with none of them. I don't know. They're different from me. Some of them are too different. Like, they think they're all like gangs

and crips, and I don't like that. The girls are like that, too. They're all into that kind of stuff. They date like 20-year-old men, like that's how most of them are. They're some girls that go to my school and they're married, and like their family, their parents are like from Mexico and they date older men that are like 20, 26. I don't find that very attractive. It's kind of gross. (16 February 2005)

Although in an earlier example she had stated that she might be friends with immigrant students if the language barrier did not exist, this transcript revealed other barriers, such as the stereotypes, that she ascribed to groups that were not her own (US-born Mexican).

Differences in 'family values' were also noted by Jessica:

And the family. Most of those people, their parents don't even care what they do. That's why half of the girls there are pregnant and I came from a family that cares. Like, I think my family is more educated than their family ... I have a few friends that parents care but then you have the parents that just really don't care. Or it's that their child is way out of hand and they just do anything they want. 'Oh, I do anything I want. Leave'. You know. They're different reasons, but I think it's because my family is more stricter. (16 February 2005)

Jessica's comments belie the assumptions that she made about the family values of Mexican-born immigrants. She identified with US-born Mexicans whom she believed to have stricter family values. Issues of class shaped these statements. Jessica recognized that she was from a different neighborhood than most of the students in the school. Even with close friends, she still felt a division because she, 'came from a different part of town, south. They are more like south or east, the more ghetto part of town. That's why I think I'm so different than they are' (16 February 2005). Jessica associated the divisions of the city with divisions that exist in her high school. These divisions, related to issues of class and race, shaped the friendships that Jessica made and how she identified herself within the social hierarchy at school. Valenzuela (1999) also found that differences existed between immigrant and US-born Mexican youth in high schools. In contrast to Jessica's observations, Valenzuela found that immigrant Mexican youth assumed that US-born Mexican youth were associated with gangs and drugs. Despite the differences, both findings suggest that Jessica, at least in part, constructed her social and cultural identities in opposition to both Mexican immigrant students and her peers. Leander (2002) illustrated that identity artifacts, such as race, 'are projected against social spaces and interpreted in relation to them' (204). They 'are interpreted as more or less marked, more or less appropriate, more or less powerful' (Leander 2002). In positioning her values and behavior as 'more appropriate' than others, she also demonstrated the delicate balances she needed to maintain the multiple identities that she constructed in school.

Jessica positioned herself in this way because it was not socially acceptable to do otherwise at her school. She realized that a social hierarchy existed in her school and chose not to identify with a social group whom she perceived to be mistreated by others at school and whose social and cultural norms situated them outside the boundaries of acceptability. This positioning extended to her friends when she perceived their goals and hers to be at odds. As Jessica became more experienced and knowledgeable about the figured world of school, she defined herself in

opposition to groups whose cultural practices were less valued than hers. Thus, Jessica learned how to re-mediate and re-create her positions within and between her academic and social worlds in order to maintain her relationship with the social realm.

‘I’m going to try my hardest’: entering the world of motherhood

Without question, learning she was pregnant in the spring of her senior year was the most significant event in Jessica’s life. As she said, ‘I feel everything. Happy, excited, scared’. Below, we examine how Jessica responded to and re-fashioned her sense of self to include the new identity of mother. We also situate Jessica’s pregnancy in current discussions of teen pregnancy that deconstruct media and policy accounts as both epidemic and tragic (Kelly 1997; Pillow 1997). Certainly, the range of emotions that Jessica reported suggest the challenges and possibilities her pregnancy posed. As we examine her immediate steps to accommodate her physical and social needs, we also want to highlight the ways in which these discourses entered her life in new and compelling ways.

As with any pregnancy, Jessica’s concept of her body shifted. When shadowing her, for example, she often made comments about her changing body such as ‘I don’t feel like myself’. She also commented about how she had a difficult time keeping up with its rapid changes and oftentimes packed food and water to keep up with its demands. As Lutrell (2003) noted in her study with pregnant teens, many females expressed their desire to ‘get their body back’ or return to the body they had before they became pregnant (57). Yet, Jessica did not mention concern to ‘get her body back’ just to keep up with it. Since our last interview with her occurred when she was in her first trimester, the physical changes brought on by the pregnancy may have been more relevant to her at the time.

Jessica also looked to other friends and classmates who were pregnant or already mothers. This new peer group offered support through conversation about the details of pregnancy and motherhood, and she planned to have a baby shower with these young women before the end of school. These interactions with other young mothers illustrated how she adapted to her new social identity as pregnant teen and how she sought support from others during her pregnancy. As Bettie (2003) noted, among the non-prep girls whom she studied, ‘pregnancy and babies became an extension of the girl culture’ (69), and Jessica seemed to draw on this culture to write herself into a new world as a future mother.

Dealing with her family was another matter. Her mother seemed supportive of Jessica and relieved that she would be finishing school before the baby was born. Her father, however, reacted angrily. When we asked what he said when he learned she was pregnant, she reported:

Just that I messed up my life ... he told me that I was a big f-up, and I wasn’t going to go to college. And for me not to ask him for anything. So I told him I wasn’t planning on asking him for anything. ... I asked him if he was still going to be a father to me. And he said, ‘Why should I? I already did my part, and there’s no reason for me to keep being a father to you. And, I, I guess I wasn’t a father, if this happened’. (3 June 2006)

The differences in her parents' responses may reside in both issues of gender and class. Mrs Garza, a young mother herself and a grandmother to her older daughter's two children, seemed to accept Jessica's pregnancy and to want to provide Jessica with the support she would need before and after the child's birth. Her father responded in a way consistent with his middle-class status, an achievement that Jessica admired and that was connected to her own concerns about money.

Jessica planned to be responsible for the baby both emotionally and financially. Even though the father of the baby was still a part of her life, they did not plan to marry, at least at the time of our last interview. She worked on the weekends at the local flea market and saved money by eating in the school cafeteria rather than eating off-campus and by selling chocolate strawberries at school for Valentine's Day. Jessica was not only aware of and concerned with finances because of her pregnancy but also because she watched her father struggle financially:

Yeah, there's a song that I have on my CD ... there's one part where says like, he remembers when he used to eat sardines for dinner. And I remember when I would live, when I was still with my dad, we would always eat sardines because my dad had no kind of money, like none whatsoever. ... and I see how my dad has gotten from where he used to be, and now he sells houses ... he's doing it. He's making money. (22 July 2003)

Mr Cole had moved into a more middle-class world, and his response seemed to echo the prevailing fears that: 'teen mothers differ from the larger population in countless and consequential ways – all of which would increase the chance of poor outcomes' (Geronimus 2003, 882). Such fears arise from white middle-class social and cultural aims to ensure their children's 'cultural competence' in mainstream society (Geronimus 2003, 888). Mr Cole's anger over Jessica's pregnancy seemed to stem from such concerns for his daughter's future.

Her father's concerns also had a significant impact on how she understood her new circumstances. When asked how she felt about her father's response, she stated:

It makes me feel like I messed up my whole life. ... but, when I don't think about it, I just think I can, I can do what I want to. Not like that, but like education. I want to go to [the community college] still, and I think me just having a baby makes me want it more. It's going to be hard, I know that, but it's just going to take time. (3 June 2006)

As indicated, Jessica intended to postpone the start of college for one semester but planned to attend a community college in the spring, after the baby was born, hoping to go to night classes so that her family could take care of the baby while she was in school. In her study of female adolescents in high school, Bettie (2003) found that this plan was typical of many working-class females who decided against postponing parenthood. Moreover, her response to her pregnancy was similar to those of the young mothers and pregnant teens Schultz (2001) studied who 'explained their success or persistence in school as due in part to their children'. 'These young women saw children as a larger, more complex picture, not the end of the story' (588). Jessica, early in her pregnancy, seemed to be working to see this larger picture and to compose her own story.

Interestingly, Jessica found a space to explore her story at school. In her media class, her group was expected to create a script for a film. Jessica took the lead and wrote a script about telling her boyfriend and family that she was pregnant. She improvised one scene with her group in class and told the class that the script was based on her life at this moment. In this way, Jessica bridged her home and school worlds in an attempt to meet the demands of school and her own needs and interests. Through the performance of her personal story, Jessica resisted the societal positioning that her pregnancy was a problem and instead portrayed herself and her pregnancy as much more complicated and dynamic. The performance seemed to help her figure out how pregnancy changed her figured identities in the present and future and provided an opportunity to create a powerful and positive position for herself as she took on a new identity of being a mother. She was not, however, naive about the challenges that motherhood presented her:

Colleen: What do you think it's going to be like being a mom?

Jessica: Hard.

Colleen: Hard?

Jessica: Yeah. I'm going to try my hardest though. That's the only thing I can do. (3 June 2006)

'I'm staying at school and getting my education while you are going to Jack-in-the-box': authoring the self in 'in-between' spaces

The importance of Jessica's story resides in the way it broadens traditionally narrow views of adolescents, their identity construction, and authorship within schools. Lesko (1996) argued that, 'Pedagogical knowledge for secondary educators begins with teachers' views of youth', but these conceptions 'remain unexamined' (1). Jessica's story highlights how she succumbed to, resisted, and re-figured the discourses that she encountered in school. She used tools such as reflexivity and humor to negotiate spaces in between crazyghetto and smart. She bridged her peer and home worlds with school when she was allowed to and re-figured herself as an expectant mother. In order for teachers to be supportive of these negotiations, Phelps and Weaver (1999) argued that teaching should be, 'acts of supporting and challenging learners' identities and providing spaces for learners to explore how their identities are hybrid and how hybridity can be stabilizing' (332). Although classroom practice is not the primary focus of this study, this study provides possible implications for ways in which educators might reconceive their practice based on this broader understanding of their students.

When teachers connect instructional practices with the development of youths' identities by making connections to who they are and who they might become in the future, students are more likely to become invested in what they are learning. Similarly, from the interviews and field observations, it became apparent that in the few instances where it was invited, Jessica benefited from opportunities in which she was able to mix private and public discourses to the classroom. The 'construction and maintenance of the self is a constant struggle' (Lucey, Melody, and Walkerdine 2003, 288), but through the negotiation of these 'in-between' spaces, Jessica was able to construct multiple identities within the figured world of school that merged her home and school worlds (Bhabha 1994), as illustrated in the film she made about her pregnancy in her media course.

Although many have argued that school and home discourses need to be bridged in school, the prevailing norms and conventional practices of school erect barriers between home and school by virtue of the ways they construct adolescents' identities. Lesko (2001) and Vadaboncoeur (2005) state that traditional conceptions of adolescence have been surrounded by negative discourses that portray youth as a social problem. Lesko (2001) urges educators to broaden this narrow view of adolescents by exploring, 'the complex social settings within which young people construct space, shift identities, and engage in knowledge construction' (16). Although Jessica's experiences are not representative of all adolescents, her case study illustrates how her identities are multiple, fluid, contradictory, and socially situated. Jessica's school experiences portrayed the importance of helping students create spaces for themselves across their academic, social, and personal lives, simultaneously, without sacrificing one for the other. Her sometimes contentious negotiations of the discourses of academics, peers, and home also bring into relief the importance of current theoretical efforts to redefine adolescence.

Both Lesko (1996) and Vadaboncoeur (2005) have argued, for example, that adolescence is traditionally viewed as a time of 'becoming' in which youth prepare for who they will become as adults, minimizing their current identity constructions and the social and cultural discourses that shape them in the present. During her senior year, Jessica was already performing as an adult rather than as a teen by assuming financial and familial responsibilities. Performing as an adult rather than as a teen constitutes a subject position oftentimes in conflict with adults' conceptions of youth. Bettie (2003) asserted that race and class formations in high school repeatedly positioned working-class Latinas as less academically motivated than their white, middle-class peers, relegated them to vocational tracks that did not lead to economic security in the future, and pushed them to reject middle-class norms that delayed adulthood until after college. Lacking an understanding for what it was like to be working-class girls in school, teachers and administrators frequently judged young mothers, despite the courage and determination it took for them to take on the dual responsibilities of motherhood and student. Instead, teachers rewarded students for qualities such as attendance or compliance, characteristics that fit into their perception of 'good' and 'responsible' adolescents, and dismissed, whether subtly or not, those who did not fit into their definition of student. Although they were rare, Jessica seemed to benefit from teachers who recognized that she took on these 'adult' responsibilities and considered them when structuring curriculum.

Jessica's story also illustrated how authorship and identity construction are situated within issues of race and gender. Research found that many students of color believed school to be irrelevant or hostile to the development of their identities because it was a place that rejected and labeled them on the basis of race and class (Cohen 1994; Heath 1993). Similarly, Valenzuela (1999) found that regular-track students were 'vulnerable to burn-out, disaffection, and the temptation to withdraw mentally and physically from the process altogether' (257). Although Jessica did not explicitly resist school, how she authored herself into these worlds was influenced by these qualities of difference. As illustrated, her relationships with friends and academics were constructed from the identity resources available to her and reflected not only how Jessica was shaped by prevailing beliefs about race and gender (e.g., her stereotyping of both recent Mexican immigrants, in general, and Mexican origin girls, in particular) but also how she negotiated a

more prestigious position for herself through her association with specific types of males and friends.

Jessica's identities were also produced within the conflicting discourse of her peer relations and school's configurations of what good students should be. Jessica construed 'good students' in much the same way as the youth in Hatt's (2007) study defined 'being smart' – enrollment in honors courses, getting good grades, and being 'naturally' gifted. These descriptors, 'make smartness appear "real" and a something tangible or biologically based rather than as something socio-culturally produced' (151). Although Jessica did not reject outright her identity as 'smart', she consistently resisted the presumption that being smart required her to reject her identities as crazyghetto. Instead, she shifted her positions depending on the positions made available to her within the context of her school and classrooms. Following her across high school, it was apparent that as Jessica became more experienced and knowledgeable about the figured world of school, she re-mediated and re-created her positions depending on the classroom and classmates who surrounded her. Sometimes, she positioned herself as 'tough' or as 'crazyghetto', whereas at other times, it was more beneficial to position herself as 'smart' or as someone who is able to ask good questions and answer others insightfully.

Even as Jessica took an active part in authoring herself within the figured world of school, she was not able to change school and classroom discourses. Instead, Jessica changed how she was perceived in her classes by a sophisticated use of hybridity. Adolescents often 'occupy border zones' or are 'in-between' (Lesko 1996) students or are 'those who may have some of the values, interests, and norms of both Burnouts and Jocks, [and] end up having to adjust to a social landscape that is divided into two camps' (Eckert 1989, 177). The culture of schools sometimes pushes students 'toward inclusion on its terms or toward marginal cooperation and thereby a social linking with Burnouts' (177). Jessica occupied a space between her boyfriend, the football player, and other friends who stayed at home during lunch to smoke pot. She sometimes constructed identities in defiance of school in order to fit in, while at the same time she accommodated to concepts of what it meant to be a 'good student'. Jessica became better at balancing these relationships through hybridization or by bringing multiple worlds, such as personal and school worlds, in contact with each other. Thus, she authored herself within the limits of the figured world of school, reminding us that young people have some modicum of agency, but are simultaneously responding to the discourses that surround them.

In the poem *Iron Woman*, Diane Glancy wrote, 'It takes a while to walk on two feet/each one going the other way' in relation to her sometimes conflicting identities as Native American and white. This line reminded us of Jessica's struggles to manage multiple contradictory identities within her relationships with her academic, social, and personal worlds. Specifically, to perform as crazyghetto and smart, Jessica shifted positions across the contexts of school, created spaces for hybrid moments when she could, and was sometimes able to refigure her positioning in school through improvisations or self-directed symbolizations. Recognizing the multiplicity and complexity of youths' identity formation is one important way to reconceptualize the traditionally narrow view of the young people's experiences. We might never have been exposed to the complexity of Jessica's identities if we had not asked Jessica about herself and her school life. With more research that explores and examines what youth have to say about their experiences in school, educators may come to understand the complex ways in which

adolescents author themselves within various realms of school to both resist and restructure the discourses that shape the construction of their identities.

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