In American high schools, teenagers must navigate complex youth cultures that often prize being “real” while punishing difference. Adults may view such social turbulence as a timeless, ultimately harmless rite of passage, but changes in American society are intensifying this rite and allowing its effects to cascade into adulthood. Integrating national statistics with interviews and observations from a single school, this book explores this phenomenon. It makes the case that recent macrolevel trends, such as economic restructuring and technological change, mean that the social dynamics of high school can disrupt educational trajectories after high school; it looks at teenagers who do not fit in socially at school – including many who are obese or gay – to illustrate this phenomenon; and it crafts recommendations for parents, teachers, and policy makers about how to protect teenagers in trouble. The end result is a story of adolescence that hits home with anyone who remembers high school.

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Fitting In, Standing Out

NAVIGATING THE SOCIAL CHALLENGES OF HIGH SCHOOL TO GET AN EDUCATION

Robert Crosnoe

University of Texas at Austin
To high school students past, present, and future,
especially Joseph and Caroline

To my teachers, especially Merrill, Sandy, and Glen

To the members of the Old High Class of 1990, especially
the one who is now my sister
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