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978-0-521-18203-4 - Fitting In, Standing Out: Navigating the Social Challenges of High School to Get an Education

Robert Crosnoe

Frontmatter

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FITTING IN, STANDING OUT

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.

Robert Crosnoe is a professor in the Department of Sociology and (by courtesy) the Department of Psychology as well as a faculty research associate at the Population Research Center at the University of Texas at Austin. His research focuses on the ways in which the educational pathways of children and adolescents are connected to their general health, development, and personal relationships and how these connections can be leveraged to explain demographic inequalities in educational and socioeconomic attainment. This research has been funded by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development and by young scholar awards from the William T. Grant Foundation and the Foundation for Child Development. Dr. Crosnoe has published more than 70 books and articles in journals such as *Developmental Psychology*, *Child Development*, *American Educational Research Journal*, and *American Sociological Review*. He has also won awards for early career research contributions from the Society for Research in Child Development, the Society for the Study of Human Development, and the Children and Youth Section of the American Sociological Association.

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HIGH SCHOOL TO GET AN EDUCATION

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University of Texas at Austin



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*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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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

When I started this project, I did not really know what I was getting into or how long it would take. In fact, I did not even know I was starting it, as it grew out of a series of seemingly unrelated activities in which I slowly began to see a pattern that needed more focused attention. I eventually worked on the data collection and analysis and then the writing for years, facing a great number of challenges and disappointments along the way. It became the endeavor that defined the early part of my career, how I figured out just what I wanted to do, and I am glad that I kept going. Over the course of this project, I also grew up a great deal, settled into a very happy marriage, and became a father twice over. There was a lot going on, and I do not think that I could have put all of this together without a lot of support.

The work that went into this book was generously funded by grants from the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development and the William T. Grant Foundation. Practically speaking, I could not have done anything without the financial resources these grants afforded me, but all of the money in the world would not have made any difference if not for the amazing intellectual support I received at the same time. First, Chris Bachrach at NICHD helped me flesh out the ideas for my study in an early grant proposal and then allowed me to change course in the middle of the funded project when I decided that I needed to move beyond statistics and go back to high school. Second, the William T. Grant Scholars program funded the rest of the project as I saw it to the end. Being a part of this program was, without

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a doubt, the most important experience of my professional career and, more generally, my intellectual development. The insights and wisdom of the people at the foundation, my fellow scholars, and our advisors/consultants are all over this book. I could not feel any more love and gratitude. Third, I wrote the bulk of this book while in residence at the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences, back at my old stomping grounds on the Farm at Stanford University. It was an amazing year that gave me time to think and the stimulation and camaraderie to think more deeply and richly than I would have otherwise.

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