# 1. CULTURAL REPRODUCTION THEORIES AND THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SCHOOL AND WORK

IN 1985, 48 PERCENT OF graduating high school seniors in the United States did not go on to college the following fall or to any other formal, institutionally based training program (U.S. Department of Education 1986). In addition, not all who entered college remained there. Current patterns suggest that by their junior year, approximately 13 percent of students who begin college will have forsaken higher education; only 25 percent of those who entered as freshmen will complete their senior year four years later (U.S. Department of Education 1986).

In a nation that emphasizes the importance of education beyond high school, it may be difficult to comprehend data illustrating persistent, widespread patterns of movement to work from high school or before completion of college. Such immediate movement into a work setting with limited opportunities for a good salary or advancement in the firm seems especially incomprehensible because family financial difficulties, as indicated by the absence of a parent or by the heavy demands on family resources created by a large number of children, do not by themselves constrain enrollment in higher education (Borus and Carpenter 1984). The important point here is that three-quarters of those in a given cohort of high school graduates have not completed college four years after graduation; for the most part they have found jobs in the regular labor force.

This book examines the alternative routes to their occupational futures taken by those who leave school for work. Most members of this group enter the workplace to assume jobs in the service sector of the labor market, a point we will examine fully in chapter 2. This chapter is concerned with theoretical and research perspectives on the relationship between school and work in American society, particularly as it affects individuals during an important phase of the life course—the transition from school to work.

Over the years researchers, policymakers, and others have taken a variety of theoretical positions to understand the impact of work on the lives of young workers and the relationship of work to other social institutions, particularly school. The most recent theory that attempts to explain the transition from school to work was influenced heavily by Paul Willis and other so-called reproduction theorists, who argued that schools, as sorting mechanisms, perpetuate social, racial, and gender inequalities (Griffin 1985; Valli 1986; Willis 1977). According to reproduction theorists, successive generations of manual laborers are "reproduced" in school classrooms and on the shop floors of workplaces through their experiences as subordinates in a capitalist system that both denigrates manual (as opposed to mental) labor and keeps particular groups (women, African-Americans, and the working class) marginalized and cut off from access to the most desirable, best paying, least dirty work. While I believe that much can be learned from the cultural reproduction perspective, particularly from its concern with the marginalization of women and of racial, ethnic, and other social groups, a major problem with the theory is that it fails to take into account current labor market conditions governing workplace social relations and occupational trajectories.

The cultural reproduction theories to be reviewed in this chapter attempt to explain how the family, the school, the workplace, and other major societal institutions mold social relations in a capitalist economy. These theories hold (1) that social characteristics, including values, attitudes, and beliefs, are transmitted from one generation to the next; (2) that major social institutions, especially the family, the school, and the workplace, are the sites for social reproduction; and (3) that the "products" of social reproduction are members of a society deeply divided from one another in their access to material and nonmaterial rewards, relative power, and authority. Cultural reproduction theorists analyze the often hidden factors that shape decisions to remain in school or to leave school to seek employment. They argue that social relationships in

these theories are not only fabricated, much like steel or like cars on an assembly line; they are also perpetuated and reproduced in the next generation. This aspect of social reproduction theory, despite the archaic quality of the central metaphor in the current era of service-sector growth, is perhaps the most compelling argument put forward by these theorists.

In chapters 3 through 5 we will see how a group of young workers in their first real jobs experienced, in factories, banks, insurance companies, and retail stores, social relationships that for the most part appeared to limit their opportunities dramatically. Among the twenty-five youths in this study who left high school in 1983 to enter the workplace rather than to attend college, the great majority were working-class children of working-class parents. By moving directly into the workplace, these individuals were at least in some form perpetuating or reproducing the social order "inherited" from their parents. Moreover, the best-paying jobs (in manufacturing) went to the young white male workers in this study; while the worst-paying positions with little or no opportunity for advancement, went to young women, particularly African-Americans.

Unfortunately, the metaphor for cultural reproduction is based on a manufacturing model of the economy, which emphasizes production of goods. This metaphor is ironic in a period when jobs in the service sector, which emphasize human relations and emotion work, are ascendant and when industrial jobs in the goods-producing sector are disappearing in the U.S. economy (Stanback and Noyelle 1982). We could view this model as a manifestation of a "Marxist hangover," because cultural reproduction theories are indebted most deeply to Karl Marx, who developed his political ideology when industrialism was on the rise in Western capitalist economies.

With respect to the labor market, cultural reproduction theories assume, first, that differentially valued sets of skills are required in different types of jobs in the labor market; second, that manual labor skills are denigrated most and rewarded least with material benefits and social prestige; and third, that verbal skills in social relations, mentoring, and persuading are highly prized, are rewarded handsomely, and are required only in jobs held by high-level managers.

As we will see, the reward system, job responsibilities, and opportunities for interaction with others and for initiative on the job have been altered dramatically by the new service economy. Thus cultural reproduction theory is flawed because of its lack of attention to current conditions governing the workplace, particularly in the new service economy jobs. For young workers in today's

labor market, "bust ass" jobs in manufacturing are rewarded most highly by material benefits, while jobs in the service sector requiring human relations skills are far more demanding and financially less well-paying. Among the twenty-five young workers who participated in the study, the best-paid employee, a white male, worked as a material handler in a large factory that produced industrial staples. He earned almost $10 per hour in 1984, while the study was under way. The least well-paid workers were African-American and white women who held a variety of jobs, including gas station attendant, bank clerk, and food service worker, all of which paid the minimum wage. In addition, these young women were far more vulnerable than the other youth workers to the pressures that workers experience in performing jobs charged with "emotion work," a characteristic of occupations in the service sector. Hochschild's (1983) study of Delta Airlines workers reveals the high cost of "emotion work" to flight attendants, who constantly must mask their own affective responses to cater to demanding and frequently uncivil male passengers.

Of the three assumptions on which reproduction theories are built, at least two seem flawed. Recall that these theories support the claims that different jobs require different skills, that manual labor skills are least valued and least well paid, and conversely, that verbal skills are most highly valued and most handsomely paid. Although it is true that differentially valued skills are inherent in different forms of work across labor market sectors, it appears that manual skills command the greatest material rewards in today's youth labor market, though perhaps they are accorded lower social prestige. This point is open to empirical investigation. In contrast, the verbal skills required in retail and consumer-oriented enterprises are often accompanied by degraded emotion work and are rewarded by payment of the minimum wage.

Cultural reproduction theories explaining the relationship between school and work vary in the extent to which they emphasize economic determinism over individual action in molding outcomes. These outcomes range from the worker's personality characteristics and values to his or her labor market location in adulthood. The strongly deterministic models emphasize demands in society for a differentiated work force. In this variation of the cultural reproduction perspective, jobs are arrayed in pyramidal style paralleling the socioeconomic structure of society. The relatively scarce, prestigious positions in the highly rewarded professions are allocated to an elite corps drawn from the most economically favored groups,

who possess the appropriate cultural capital and skills. (Cultural capital is the set of skills, such as knowledge of the computer, and of tastes, such as valuing gourmet cuisine, that families impart and that other institutions, such as the school, reinforce for particular groups.) In contrast, more individualistic theories emphasize the role of individual agency, emotions, temperament, and experiences in determining occupational outcomes. Theories in the middle range argue that culture, which is rooted in individual action, values, ideology, and material conditions, is reflected in social relations, which broadly influence individual outcomes.

In the next sections of this chapter I will analyze four strands of cultural reproduction theory: the determinist, the cultural capital, the subcultural, and the individual perspectives. My critique of the individual perspective concludes with a feminist analysis of the prevailing images that have dominated this frequently sexist theoretical position. Notwithstanding the contributions to our understanding of the connections among family, school, and work, I argue that cultural reproduction theories are not only subverted by an anachronistic emphasis on the production line as the modal work station in society; they are also weakened by a failure to critique the thinly veiled sexism that dominates the individual perspective in particular. Finally, in concluding the discussion of the relationship between school and work, I examine the encounters of youth with school-based and community-based school-to-work programs.

## THE DETERMINIST PERSPECTIVE

In sociology of education, the determinist position has been articulated by researchers and theorists in structural analyses of the process of status allocation. This process refers to the influence of parental socioeconomic status (usually measured by father's occupation) on the child's (usually the son's) educational and occupational outcomes. The status attainment or status allocation process as it affects individuals over time is the most frequently examined process in contemporary American sociology. Factors influencing the process early in the life course include individual attitudes, skills, and personality as well as major institutional factors, particularly the family's material and nonmaterial resources and the school's organizational and structural arrangements. These arrangements include curricular tracking, which sorts students into academic, vocational, or general-studies "tracks."

One can argue that the most influential early study of social mobility was the work of Blau and Duncan (1967), which established the variables and measures that came to dominate this kind of research. In this and later studies, results suggested that although education and association with peers in school and in the neighborhood play a role in the status allocation process, the most important and most lasting influence is the family's position in the socioeconomic structure, presumably because of the access to education, cultural capital, and social skills that families may or may not provide. Current scholars in this camp hold a considerable range of positions. I will examine four: the economic, the gatekeeping, the tournament, and the cooling-out models.

### *The Economic Model*

The most strongly determinist position of the four is represented in the work of Bowles and Gintis (1974), whose economic theory of social reproduction in school is intertwined graphically with an image of the industrial workplace in capitalist society. Specifically, Bowles and Gintis point to five parallel dimensions under current capitalist arrangements that strongly influence individual outcomes: (1) structural constraints governing relationships in schools and at workplaces, particularly in power and authority roles, (2) extrinsic systems of rewards and incentives (grades and wages), (3) lack of control over the contents of the curriculum and the contents of work tasks, (4) the competitive nature of work in school and at jobs, and (5) subject matter specialization in school and task fragmentation on the job. According to Bowles and Gintis's analysis, an almost perfect symmetry exists between socialization at school and accommodation to work.

One of the criticisms leveled at Bowles and Gintis is that their work is not based on strong empirical evidence. For example, Valli (1986), in her study of the schooling of future female clerical workers, demonstrates that much more individual choice in curricular programs governs course selection than Bowles and Gintis's position allows. Another criticism is that this formulation, like the traditional functionalist analyses challenged by Bowles and Gintis, is static; it does not allow for the dynamics of technological change in either the academic or the work sphere. Rather, in this strongly determinist view, economic laws of supply and demand govern a world of schooling and working dominated by the image of a goods-producing, assembly-line technology. Because most jobs in the U.S.

economy today are not in manufacturing, this conception is anachronistic. Less ironclad determinists have examined more closely the actual workings of the status attainment process in schools and have speculated about the parallels to a wider range of workplaces than those prevailing in the fading American industrial goods-producing economy. These theorists offer three alternatives to a rigidly deterministic correspondence model: the gatekeeping model, the tournament model, and the cooling-out model (Valli 1986).

*The Gatekeeping Model*

Among the three alternative models, the gatekeeping model explains most accurately the system of curricular placement that exists in virtually all American secondary schools. Curricular placement or tracking is the process by which students are sorted into one of two or three options: (1) the academic or college preparation track, which includes advanced mathematics and science courses and "accelerated" English and social studies coursework; (2) vocational studies, the "applied" course that includes a focus on one of several general areas such as clerical and retail work, construction and the manual trades, or child care and other "pinkcollar" skills; and (3) a general studies track, which provides students with a smattering of coursework across a wide range of academic and nonacademic studies, preparing them poorly either for higher education or for work after high school.

Variations in curricular placement by socioeconomic status and race or ethnicity have been documented widely. For example, in an extensive examination of secondary school tracking systems, Oakes noted that "poor and minority students are most likely to be placed at the lowest levels of the schools' sorting system" (Oakes 1985, 67). Moreover, rather than providing these groups with the increasing access to opportunities inherent in the academic track, the national system appears to be providing increasingly less opportunity. In their comparison of trends in enrollment in the three curricular tracks from 1972 to 1982, Eckstrom, Goertz, and Rock (1989) report the following:

> In 1972 more than two-thirds of high SES [socio-economic status] students were in the academic track but only about one-quarter of low SES students were in this curriculum. By 1982, both high and low SES groups had fewer students in the aca-

demic curriculum but high SES students were *four times* as likely to be in this curriculum track as low SES students (58).

School-based gatekeepers, particularly teachers and guidance counselors, often use inappropriate information, such as a student's suspension record, to inform track placement decisions, particularly whether a student is enrolled in an academic, a vocational, or a general course of studies. Students whose attendance rates are likely to be poorest are those with the most demands on their time outside school. Such students come overwhelmingly from economically disadvantaged families and are likely to be Hispanic, African-American, and white inhabitants of the central city attending the weakest schools (Wehlage and Lipman, 1988). Most student dropouts and unemployed young job-seekers are enrolled in general studies while in high school. In Cincinnati, which has a fairly typical central-city school system, 1987 failure rates were highest for students in the general track: 30 to 35 percent of all enrolled students failed classes as compared to 15 to 23 percent of students enrolled in academic-track classes. Further, the average general-track student took 5-1/2 years to complete 4 years of high school because of retention in grade.

According to the gatekeeping analysis of tracking, high school guidance personnel are preeminently important in the process of placing students as mentioned previously. Their primary source of information about students is the informal lore of the school, particularly teachers' opinions. Students' interests, their "objectively" assessed performance on tests, and their parental background fade in importance by comparison to their reputation, according to Cicourel and Kitsuse (1963) and others who hold to the gatekeeping model of curricular track placement. Empirical support for the gatekeeping model in explaining racial differences in track placement was offered recently by Eckstrom (1985) in her analysis of 1982 national High School and Beyond Survey data. Eckstrom determined from students' responses to a series of questionnaire items that 52 percent of African-American high school students reported being *assigned* to a track, whereas 58 percent of her white respondents had *chosen* their track.

### *The Tournament Model*

The tournament model has been offered to explain how curricular track placement is contested ground, in which students vie for scarce positions at the top of the tracking system in secondary school. In

addition, once students are placed in a curricular track, regardless of their prior performance on achievement tests, their classroom performance and their test scores begin to mirror the expectations governing outcomes for that particular track (Oakes 1985; Rosenbaum 1976). For instance, students who may have performed well in the past frequently suffer a decline in achievement as a result of placement in a low-achieving track. As we have seen, track placement can be capricious, based on a distorted analysis of students' most recent attendance records rather than on skills or interests. Thus although these students may be as intellectually capable as their academic-track peers, they find themselves in low-status, low-achieving vocational or general-track courses because they failed to measure up in their previous year's academic work. Furthermore, the tournament system that prevails in secondary schools typically offers only one opportunity: once a student is placed in a lower track, he or she very rarely moves up from that level.

*The Cooling-Out Model*

Finally, the cooling-out model emphasizes the functional importance to society of hierarchical track arrangements in reserving scarce and well-paying jobs for the few persons assigned to high-powered academic classes. The "heated-up" aspirations of those who have not been placed consistently in high-track or honors courses during their school careers must be cooled down in order to preserve the orderly flow of workers into lower-status jobs. Like the economic and the tournament models, the cooling-out perspective emphasizes the significance of curricular track placement in predicting occupational futures after school. This model, however, is unique in employing the metaphor of the holding pen. Attending school, especially while enrolled in courses in the general track, restrains students who are potentially rebellious or who are a threat to the job status of adults, particularly those who have families to support. Students' rebelliousness and job aspirations are cooled out for a period of years until youths are considered to be of suitable age to enter the labor market.

Although these four models vary, the determinist position overall emphasizes the close correspondence between social relations and rewards in school and at work through the allocation of a few highly favored slots in the academic track and in the occupational structure. Moreover, the process of allocating scarce and highly prized slots is relentlessly mechanistic; it reflects a general societal bias against poor, and Hispanic, and African-American stu-

dents. The system contains very little room for "play"; students move in lockstep from their studies in school to prescribed positions in the world of work. Thus although the determinist position is useful in identifying *structures*, such as tracking arrangements in high school, it is not helpful in analyzing the *processes* by which individuals are sorted into particular curricular trenches and subsequently into particular occupations.

## THE CULTURAL CAPITAL PERSPECTIVE

In contrast to the various determinist positions, the cultural capital perspective underscores the benefits to the elite and the costs to the nonelite of cultural baggage distributed in the family and the school rather than emphasizing the mechanistic workings of status allocation. However, Pierre Bourdieu and others who have made empirical tests of Bourdieu's theoretical work stress the importance of the status-attainment processes lurking behind visible cultural forms. Bourdieu's notion of "cultural capital" is strongly tied to social class and to the hierarchical ordering of knowledge-based systems in schools.

From our consideration of the process of status allocation in school, we know that students receive differential access to academic studies and consequently acquire different types and amounts of cultural equipment. In Bourdieu's formulations, cultural capital refers to socially ratified instrumental knowledge, "gifts," and skills safeguarded and nurtured by the upper and upper-middle classes and used by them to maintain their hegemony in society (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977). In the language of those who adopt the strongly deterministic structural approaches, these skills and this knowledge would explain the percentage of variance unaccounted for in models of status mobility. Although nonelite social classes obviously also have a rich store of cultural patterns, such as language and musical tastes, they are not prized in a Eurocentric, racist, and sexist society such as ours (Lareau 1989). This arrangement carries an obvious payoff for the social class groups who are able to corner the cultural capital market and to preserve it for the benefit of their children. The establishment of elite schools, the mastery of particular forms of knowledge, and the adoption of new technologies are strategies used by the upper classes to perpetuate the social order (DiMaggio 1982; Persell and Cookson 1987).

Bourdieu emphasizes the importance of maintaining a

monopoly on cultural capital through a shared system of "internalized structures, schemes of perception, conception, and action common to all members of the same group or class" (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977, 86). This notion is summarized in the concept of "habitus," which refers to the social world of shared values, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors of a particular class, although Bourdieu is concerned primarily with the cultural capital sanctioned by the elite, whose values and goals set the social standard. Thus our national system of schooling, based on a Eurocentric model, is grounded in the high value attached to the worldview of privileged groups in society. This view emphasizes academic education and makes school experience profoundly alienating to out-groups, particularly working class and nonwhite students. According to MacLeod (1987),

> the structure of schooling with its high regard for the cultural capital of the upper classes promotes a belief among working-class students that they are unlikely to achieve academic success. Thus, there is a correlation between objective probabilities and subjective aspirations, between institutional structures and cultural practices (3).

One of the most interesting empirical applications of Bourdieu's conceptions of cultural capital and habitus occurred in a recent study of computer use among students attending elite American boarding schools (Persell and Cookson 1987). In research conducted in field visits to forty-eight private secondary boarding schools and through surveys of 2,475 students, Persell and Cookson analyzed the extent to which schools had developed computer facilities on campus, the frequency with which students used computers, and the characteristics of frequent users. Not surprisingly, in view of Bourdieu's theory, the researchers found that computer facilities in these schools were housed in elaborate structures; many were built as separate wings or as adjacent buildings. Computers formed the centerpiece of the school curriculum; computer skills were regarded as critical for students who aspired to attend Ivy League schools.

At the time of the Persell and Cookson study, computer literacy was being established in elite colleges and universities as a requirement for admission to the freshman class; thus computer skills were becoming important cultural capital. Students who used computers frequently were more likely to see themselves as

majoring in high-status science-related and technical fields in college. In addition, male students and Asian students were likely to use computers more often than white female students. In view of our society's premium on the development of technical skills among males, it is not surprising that facilities were more extensive in all-male schools and that more male students reported having computers at home. The habitus of upper-class males in American society, as Bourdieu's theory would predict, is more likely to foster high aspirations and strong ambitions in areas generally valued and rewarded by society, in this case sophisticated knowledge and skills in computer use.

Although the cultural capital perspective explores the shared values, norms, and behaviors of a particular class, actual social relationships among individuals in a specific milieu or habitus are more hinted at than described. Moreover, it is difficult to see the links among the major institutions that propel the individual from school to work. Finally, the cultural capital perspective emphasizes the value of a Eurocentric scheme of skills and tastes. It does not acknowledge that nonelite families possess cultural *resources* that constitute a rich store of experience virtually unrecognized by teachers and others (Lareau 1989).

## THE SUBCULTURE PERSPECTIVE

In contrast to the vague picture painted by both cultural reproduction and cultural capital theories, the notion of "linguistic subculture" is useful in illustrating exactly how family, school, and work form a tightly linked chain that depends on socially shared knowledge rather than exclusively on cultural capital. According to this perspective, subcultures develop among individuals who are connected socially and who interact with one another regularly. Subcultural groups develop in families, classrooms, and workplaces. The interaction over time within subcultural groups leads to a commonly held system of values, patterns of thinking and acting, and particular forms of language, which together constitute socially shared knowledge.

Basil Bernstein (1975, 1977) has examined the formation of linguistic codes that distinguish different social class groups. Although we must be cautious not to equate subcultural groups with social class groups, our society values an elite core of cultural knowledge that incorporates a particular linguistic code. As an

additional cautionary note let us keep in mind that Bernstein carried out his research in Britain, which is more highly stratified by class than is the United States. In essence, Bernstein's theory holds that working-class children develop highly context-dependent language patterns in their families. These children and their parents rely on the immediate setting to provide cues, and therefore produce a more restricted, more context-bound language code than do their middle-class counterparts. In contrast, middle-class parents use what Bernstein terms "an elaborated code" with a highly abstract set of meanings and (some scholars believe) a highly inflated syntax to accompany these meanings.

Although Melvin Kohn and his associates (1978, 1982, 1983) have not examined linguistic codes in the same manner as Bernstein has, they also are concerned with the way in which a worker's participation in a specific job-related subculture is linked to child-raising practices and subsequently to the child's orientation to school. In a series of studies Kohn determined that although working-class parents did not dampen their children's occupational ambitions, they tended to be more concerned with their children's outward appearance, "appropriate" sex role behavior, good manners, and conformance to parental authority. In contrast, middle-class parents tended to value their children's innovativeness, experimentation, and flexibility. Kohn has linked these different patterns of parental child-rearing values to the system of authority and the nature of work in jobs typically held by working-class and middle-class males. Working-class men experience authoritarian relations with bosses at work. Moreover, their jobs in industrial settings give a fragmented view of work and of the labor process. This view leads to their alienation from the workplace, a "gift" that they pass along to their children. In contrast, middle-class managers and professional workers enjoy considerably more autonomy on the job, tend to have more control over the work process, and generally are engaged with work that they consider meaningful. Subsequently they incorporate these values into their child-rearing strategies.

Thus language codes and accompanying child-rearing practices are rooted in the division of labor and can be observed in the patterns of authority and social control that exist in workplaces and in families. These patterns also exist in schools. The capacity to reason abstractly, the ability to express ideas in complex written and oral language, and the desire to innovate and experiment are all valued highly in school. These qualities are linked to curricular track placement in high school; academic-track students generally

are perceived as possessing them. The relationship between social class and track placement is by no means cast in stone. Institutional career structures, however, are linked strongly to the social construction of ability in ways that favor middle-and upper-middle-class students in American schools (Rosenbaum 1986). Therefore, although the subcultural perspective is useful in explaining the school careers of particular groups of people, it fails to illustrate how some individuals are able to resist the seemingly inexorable influence of particular patterns of socialization experienced in the family and/or at school. This is principally because data representing middle-class or working-class orientations are considered in the aggregate. Individual cases grounded in a close examination of school-based or workplace behavior are not considered, limiting the extent to which linkages between culture and social structure can be examined (Epstein, 1990).

## THE INDIVIDUAL PERSPECTIVE

In recent years a new way of understanding individual agency has been developed by cultural reproduction theorists. "Individual agency" refers to the individual's capacity to resist, conform, or take a compromising stance in relation to social structure. In a model of status attainment, these individual actions would be seen as intervening variables, "variously described as 'passive obedience and loyalty' learned in school" (Bowles and Gintis 1976) or as coping strategies that individuals use to confront problems encountered routinely in organizations, such as "retreatism, ritualistic conformity, innovation and rebellion" (Corwin and Namboodiri 1989). In a recent ethnography of schooling that examined coping strategies, Claus (1986) noted that reluctant students in a vocational education class could resist authority by inducing their classmates and the teacher to complete their class projects, thus demonstrating their considerable skill in manipulating the system.

Individual agency should not be equated with isolated, autonomous behavior, especially in the case of peer-oriented youths in the context of school classrooms. Such youths are likely to act in concert with others who occupy similar cultural and social positions such as the students in the vocational class described by Claus. The useful aspect of a focus on individual agency seems to be the emphasis on the conscious realization that individuals do have choices. The limiting aspect seems to be that in the case of the

vocational students in Claus's research and in the other examples to be reviewed here, choices are made from among culturally and socially established options. Individuals may alter or change these options, but they do so primarily in stylistic rather than substantive terms (Hammack 1988).

Sociologists in the old functionalist days regarded students' resistance behaviors as acts of deviance. Now, rather romantically, the student rebel or the nonconformist young worker is seen by such theorists as Willis (1977), Giroux (1981), and others (but generally not by teachers or employers) as a Robin Hood or a Luke Skywalker, heroically confronting the evil sheriffs and Darth Vaders of authoritarianism and class domination.

In both earlier and more recent formulations of the individual perspective, the cultural milieu is viewed as the mediating influence on individual behavior; in turn, social class structures are the dominating force affecting the cultural milieu. The most widely discussed and most influential research in this tradition is Paul Willis's (1977) ethnography of "the lads," a particularly alienated but (according to Willis) politically astute group of working-class youths attending a British comprehensive high school. Willis's account argues consistently against a determinist or reductionist view of the lads' behaviors, values, and beliefs. The lads are portrayed as "constructing their own world in a way which is recognizably human and not theoretically reductive" (Willis 1977, 171). Moreover, as a conscious act of rebellion they elect to "have a laff" rather than to accept passively the school culture. Their resistance to the culture of the passive "ear'oles" develops as a result of their "partial penetrations" into the structures of economic domination.

Unfortunately, the lads' "insights" into the structures of class oppression are limited by their unalloyed racist and sexist attitudes and behaviors. The lads value manual labor in shop-floor jobs both because they see these jobs as allowing time to "have a laff" and because they view mental work as feminized. It is difficult to accept Willis's position that the lads possess sufficient insight into the nature of capitalist structures, with their overlays of paternalism and racism, to function as catalysts for a coming social revolution.

Nonetheless, Willis's research has had powerfully persuasive effects on theories and research on the relationship between school and work among those who emphasize individual agency. For example, Peter McLaren's (1986) study of working-class Anglo and Portuguese students attending a Canadian parochial school celebrates the significance of individual agency in the context of repres-

sive school practices. Like Willis's study, McLaren's research is important in showing that working-class schools do not produce docile, passive learners. Both Willis and McLaren demonstrate that class and cultural capital are hardly static concepts with little role in social relations and individual action. Yet, without a better understanding of the actual levels of intellectual and political awareness possessed by the students under study, it is premature to regard students' "acts of resistance" as sophisticated counterhegemonic strategies pregnant with political meaning (Giroux 1983).

Moreover, blatant sexism surely must be explained rather than displayed as illustrative of students' resistance. Henry Giroux is a leading cultural reproduction theorist who has taken an individual perspective in his lively and powerful syntheses of empirical work by Willis, McLaren, and others. Yet, like the researchers whose work he obviously admires, Giroux appears to view male adolescents' raging ambivalence toward women as a manifestation of their political resistance to authority. He uses the following passage from McLaren's research to illustrate students' rebelliousness:

> Let's have art this afternoon, Mr. McLaren!
> Yah. We want art!
> Well, we've got some math to do this afternoon, perhaps after we've finished with that . . .
> We wanna naked model . . . one with really big tits that stick out to here! . . . and lots of fuzzy hair down here!
> You guys are sick! Is that all you think about?
> Shut up Sandra! All you think about is naked boys!
> Barry's a fag. He thinks about naked boys too! . . .
> Sir! Let's have floor hockey instead!
> I hates floor hockey!
> We don't want you girls! Hey, sir! Let the girls play skippin or somethin, but let us play floor hockey!
> There will be no playing anything until we finish our math.
> Kids should be allowed to choose sometimes. You said so!
> Yah! You never let us have fun—real fun!
> Okay, okay. What does "real fun" mean?
> If we wanna go somewheres, the creek or somethin, they say you should let us . . .
> . . . Open your books to the math review on page fifty-one.
> Wait a minute! I ain't gots no pencil!
> That's because you used it to jab that little kid at recess and the teacher took it off you!

Get lost . . .
Here you can use my pencil.
Thanks, sir! Hey look! I stole the teacher's pencil!
Can I turn on the radio during art?
Quietly, yes . . . quietly. But first, our math!
Hey Sandra, get up on the desk and take off your shirt!
Anybody who doesn't finish this test gets a note to take home and get signed.
Sir! Can I have a note, please! I love notes!
Me too! I wanna note saying I'm bad!
Everybody line up for bad notes!
. . . Hey! Gimme back my math book!
Cut the crap!
This is boring . . . (Giroux, p. 95–96)

This passage contains strongly phrased utterances of male rage directed toward the young women in the classroom. This rage remains unchallenged both by the teacher (McLaren) and by the researcher (Giroux), who quotes this passage in admiration of what he sees as political resistance.

To Giroux's credit, he is critical of theories of resistance in part because they fail to address gender issues adequately. His summary statement is clear on this point: "The failure to include women and minorities of color in such studies has resulted in a rather uncritical theoretical tendency to romanticize modes of resistance even when they contain reactionary views about women" (Giroux 1983, 105). Cultural reproduction theory focused on individual agency, however, must do more than wag a finger at gender bias.

In their favor, studies such as those of Willis and McLaren illuminate the complexity of social reproduction in schools and workplaces. These studies do not consider the status attainment process to be the outcome of secondary school and societal characteristics interacting with students' characteristics in a deterministic fashion, as in the structural determinist models. Instead they illustrate the roles played by students themselves in constructing a class- and gender-based culture and work identity. Most of these studies, however, have been weakened by their lack of attention to gender issues.

### *Feminist Perspectives*

More sobering, if less colorful, individual theories of social and cultural reproduction are emerging in the work of feminist schol-

ars. These observers are less eager than Willis, Giroux, McLaren, and others to celebrate the picaresque cultural worlds of rebellious male students or to view adolescents' racist and sexist acts as heroic strategies of resistance to economic oppression. Most research on the relationship between school and work has been based on men's experience. Women have been studied less both because male researchers are less interested in women and because women have been viewed as girlfriends, wives, and mothers rather than as serious participants in the work force (Gaskell 1986, 2).

Three notable exceptions are the ethnographies of Jane Gaskell (1986), Linda Valli (1986), and Christine Griffin (1985). Each of these scholars argues that gender issues must receive attention equal to that given to social class. Therefore each focuses explicitly on young women's experiences in training to take jobs as clerical workers, in the retail trades, and in pink-collar jobs. In addition, these accounts are particularly clear in their focus on young women's domestic commitments: they emphasize the important influences of romantic love and the family on females' transition from school to work (Holland and Eisenhart, 1990).

These studies produce several important conclusions about the role of individual agency in young women's lives. First, it is clear that vocational classrooms reproduce the workplace in significant ways. Despite employers' concerns about the inadequacy of vocational preparation in school, the students *are* exposed to skills required by the job markets they are likely to enter. Valli's detailed analysis of the clerical skills taught in schools demonstrates that these skills ranged from filing to word processing and accounting. (Students uniformly preferred jobs that required the most difficult skills.) Second, instructors and instruction are remote from the actual world of work because instructors must rely on their own (often distant) contact with the workplace, visits with employers, readings, and contact with former students (Gaskell 1986). Most of the students in Gaskell's study held extremely negative views of school, describing it as "boring and useless." Somewhat naively they believed that they had "chosen" not to strive in school and that they were not smart enough to go on in school. Virtually all were extremely enthusiastic about obtaining work, although subsequently they experienced dissatisfaction with jobs that exhibited the negative characteristics associated with employment in the youth labor market (e.g., low wages, low skill demands, high turnover). Conformance rather than rebellion appears to be the norm for young women whose individual agency is restricted

severely by structural inequities in job opportunities, wages, and mobility in their decisions about school and work.

One year after graduation, most of Gaskell's subjects regretted the decision to find work rather than continuing their education. Most reported that they would return to school if they could; that they wished they had performed better while in school and had been told about the consequences of the decision to leave school for work. Many subjects cited school-related factors as influencing their ill-informed choices. In this regard school counselors drew the heaviest criticism. They were blamed for not letting students take enough academic courses, particularly in science, and for not providing adequate information about work generally. On the positive side, these youths viewed work as contributing distinct material and social advantages, enhancing their financial well-being, and bringing them independence from parents.

Gaskell and Lazerson (1980–81) noted an array of gender differences related to attitudes toward work. Boys were more likely than girls to view their current employment situations as temporary: in this way they reduced the impact of their current jobs on their self-image. Boys also planned to move on to better jobs either by job shopping or by returning to school. Girls, on the other hand, were more satisfied with their decisions overall and saw work itself as temporary; they assumed that marriage soon would terminate their commitment to work. Gaskell and Lazerson fault society for its benign portrayal of the economic system and for perpetuating the myth that energetic job-seekers locate good jobs. In reality, job changes for working-class youths are typically horizontal, and young women, though they may leave work temporarily, return after childbirth. More important, Gaskell and Lazerson assert that the potentially most valuable feature of school is precisely what is missing from jobs. Literacy, critical awareness, and exposure to new ideas, which are what education ought to be about, are not what these young persons' jobs are about (Gaskell and Lazerson 1980, 94).

In her analysis of the reproduction of the clerical labor force, Valli determined that young women are both bound and liberated by particular "structural, ideological and cultural elements" (Valli 1986, 197). Valli's study took place over the course of a year at "Woodrow High School" in "Macomb," a midwestern city of approximately 200,000. Her analyses considered the methods by which students were selected into the Cooperative Office Education Program (COOP), the extent to which students themselves selected this course of study, the nature of the technical skills taught in the cur-

riculum, the characteristics of exchange, authority, and gender relations in the office work curriculum, and related workplace experiences for the young women enrolled in the program.

The results of Valli's study failed to confirm major assumptions of economic, gatekeeping, tournament, or cooling-out models to explain the allocation of students to the COOP program. First, virtually any student who applied to the program was accepted. Second, most students appeared to have stumbled on the program rather than having been recruited into it. Lack of information, a student-to-counselor ratio of 400 to 1, and the perception that women did not have to "settle" for positions as clerical workers in an era of expanded employment opportunities combined to limit enrollment to twenty-seven students during the year (1980–81) of the study. According to Valli, young women selected themselves into the COOP curriculum primarily because their commonsense notions both about their life course as wives and mothers and about the nature of "appropriate" women's work made office work the most attractive alternative. Even though some of the program participants had aspired to pursue college degrees in accounting, biology, and other fields, office work was perceived in the end as

> a sensible safeguard against unemployment or employment in even less desirable positions. Office preparation was a sensible accommodation to a work world that was limited either by views of what was appropriate or desirable for a woman or of what was possible for a woman (Valli 1986, 78).

Work tasks included in school-based training were not uniformly vacuous, low in skill requirements, or boring, although not all of the skills taught in the classroom were demanded at COOP work sites. During their course of study, students were taught filing, typing, photocopying, and record keeping; later they used these skills in their cooperative jobs. Their skill and knowledge levels, however, surpassed the demands of the work they carried out; as a result, they were "dissatisfied and unchallenged." The most satisfied workers were those whose job placements allowed them to use the more complex skills of advanced typing, editing, word processing, and accounting, and in which they were rotated routinely among various tasks, held a number of roles simultaneously, and frequently encountered the public or used a variety of skills (Valli 1986, 191–92).

Valli's study demonstrates the strength of social representations of gendered work in limiting girls' occupational choices.