

1 “I Want to Be Able to Be English When I Want to Be”

Identities as Sites of Contestation

I used to find a certain kind of *Englishness* engaging. I don't anymore.

Pat Barker, *The Eye in the Door*

I don't want to change the world
I'm not looking for a new England . . .

Billy Bragg, *A New England*

ENGLISH IDENTITIES

“I WANT TO BE able to be English when *I* want to be.” So remarked Ken,¹ who clearly views his national identity as negotiable. His parents were both English; he had been educated at an English “public” school;² he thought of England as home; but he had spent the previous six years in the U.S. His status as an English person in the U.S. seemed to give him the sense that he could repudiate or exaggerate his national identity at will. Speaking from a position of relative privilege, this young white man had a sense of control over the degree of Englishness he felt. National identity, for him, was dynamic and contestable.

This book explores the issue of identity construction, using English immigrants in the U.S. as a case study. By interviewing a sample of white English people living on the East Coast of the U.S., I examine how they experience and understand their national, racial, class, and gender identities in a foreign context. My interest is in how individuals contest, reject, or affirm their identities in everyday interactions using particular cultural practices. Because they operate within a context of American Anglophilia, I am also able to analyze the relatively privileged position of English people in the U.S.

Although my focus is on the English in the U.S., the people I spoke to came from a context in which English identity was in a state of flux.

Many of them had moved to the U.S. because of the lack of employment in England, often as part of the so-called brain drain,³ whereas others had left England because they despised the government and policies of Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. When I conducted the interviews in the mid-1990s, England seemed to many to be on a road to nowhere—still recovering from the skyrocketing unemployment of the 1970s and 1980s, with a per capita gross domestic product somewhere between Italy's and Greece's;⁴ bruised by the handover of its empire; dependent on the U.S. for financial and military aid;⁵ warily eyeing the expanding mandate of the European Union; and facing the possibility of the *Break-up of Britain*, the title of Tom Nairn's famous book on the subject,⁶ as Scottish, Welsh, and Northern Irish nationalists grew ever more vocal.

Today, with continued concerns about the European Union and the new legislative assemblies in Edinburgh, Cardiff, and Belfast, the English seem to be confronting a new identity crisis, and a growing number of books and articles on England and Britain address this concern.⁷ The phenomenon of "Cool Britannia" and the seeming loss of the "stiff-upper-lip" mentality following the death of Princess Diana have added to the debates.⁸ The English people I interviewed discussed many of these issues, showing the interest everyday English people have in defining identity. In the chapters that follow, I show how the interviewees attempted to redefine national identity for themselves, rejecting a "Little England"⁹ mentality, the image of a stiff upper lip, the heritage industry, the emphasis on the monarchy, and the colonial mind-set. However, although some of the people I spoke with had repudiated England by moving to the U.S., they often seemed to view England through the misty eyes of nostalgia. This book therefore taps into a number of unresolved issues about English national identity.

WHY ENGLISH NATIONAL IDENTITY?

I chose to study English, rather than British, national identity for a number of reasons. Although the formal name of the nation-state is the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, this includes four different nations: Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland, and England. Much has been written about regional nationalisms in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland, prompted by fears about, or pleas for, a (Dis)United Kingdom.¹⁰ Because each nation within Britain has its own

relationship to the whole, there are potentially many different kinds of British national identity. A study of British national identity would have to address the complexities of all the nationalisms within Britain or run the risk of overgeneralization. Although focusing exclusively on England marginalizes the other three nations, by choosing white, upper-middle-class English people, I decided to study members of the most privileged national grouping in Britain.¹¹

It is particularly important to investigate this privileged position of England, because England is so often conflated with "Britain"—in the minds of some English people, anyway.¹² While conducting the interviews, I quickly realized that the people I was talking to often disagreed with me about the appropriate terminology to describe the national identity we were discussing. For example, when I asked a question about *England* or *English* culture, many interviewees answered in terms of *Britain* or *British* culture. In most cases, this slippage seemed unconscious, as they used "England" and "Britain" interchangeably. Indeed, some openly admitted that they saw the two as basically the same. Others, however, wished to draw a distinction between the two terms. Some argued strongly that they were English, while others were just as forceful about the fact that they were British. Proponents of the term "English" explained that it was preferable to be specific; and proponents of the term "British" argued that it was better to be inclusive of people from Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland, who were also part of the nation. In terms of my own language in this book, I refer to the people I interviewed as "English," and I usually refer to "England" rather than "Britain." However, in cases where the context suggests "British" as a more accurate description (for instance, in discussing statistics about Britain, British imperialism, or the British government), I use "Britain," the more inclusive term.

THE INTERVIEWEES

In order to explore the phenomenon of English national identity abroad, I interviewed thirty-four English people living in the Northeastern U.S. I saw this group as sociological "strangers"¹³ in an unfamiliar cultural context, whose experiences of negotiating their "alien" status in the U.S. would yield rich data about their multiple identities. As Stuart Hall (1993) asserts, "You only know who you are when you go somewhere

else." This suggests that the English abroad are an appropriate group to examine when analyzing the forms that English national identity can take. In particular, English people's interactions with Americans offer ways for them to talk about their understandings of being English in a context in which English culture is generally valued.

I conducted the interviews from March to October 1995 and traveled up and down the U.S. East Coast to meet with the interviewees. I found these English people using "snowball" sampling, which involves tapping into networks and letting the first interviewees act as guides to the next set of interviewees. For some of my sample, I approached people who worked in international organizations or who attended international groups; I also relied on networks at my university. I was particularly interested in interviewing white, predominantly middle- and upper-class people in order to analyze the effect of privilege on identity construction. I tried to find diversity in terms of age, region of origin in England, number of years lived in the U.S., immigrant status, and reasons for moving to the U.S. I interviewed equal numbers of women and men to explore whether gender had an effect on national identity. I describe the people I talked to in more detail in the appendix at the end of the book.¹⁴

During the one- to four-hour interviews, I asked people to discuss how they understood what it meant to be English. My questions covered the conditions under which they experienced their identities, the times they downplayed or emphasized them, and the different identity-constructing devices they used. I obtained a mixture of personal revelation and individual anecdotes about being English in the U.S. and reflections on the meanings that different aspects of their identities had for them. I taped all of the interviews, then transcribed and coded them using a computer program before beginning the analysis.¹⁵

My own identity as an English person living in the U.S. improved my chances of gaining access to the interviewees and may have changed the dynamics of the interviews themselves. The rapport I achieved with the respondents was due partly to our shared identity, at least according to some of the interviewees. (I actually have dual-nationality, but, as I discuss in Chapter 4, I have a fairly un-Americanized English accent.¹⁶) One respondent, Frances, for instance, claimed, "If you were American, . . . I'd probably be answering the questions differently. [I] wouldn't be so relaxed. [You ask] straightforward questions. There are always nuances

to what [Americans] ask you." Her words imply that she thought of me as very different from an American interviewer and that she trusted me in ways that she would not trust an American. Another interviewee, Octavia, commented on the fact that she had curled up on the couch in the den to talk to me: "I don't think I'd be sitting here talking like this if you were American, meeting you for the first time."

Most of the interviews were informal. I was lucky enough to interview many people in their homes, and we usually sat around the kitchen table or made ourselves comfortable in the living room. As I interviewed some people, their children ran in and out. Others invited me to stay for dinner or to return on other occasions (which I did). Some sent me relevant newspapers or books after the interview, or we kept in touch via e-mail. All were extremely willing to let me into their lives and seemed very eager to talk about their experiences.

This comfort level affected the interviews in various ways. The interviewees usually commented on my Englishness and asked where I was from or what I thought of what they had said. At first, these moments made me uncomfortable because I worried that the questions would disrupt the flow of the interview. However, as I interviewed more people, I saw these moments as instances in which the respondents were building a connection and developing a sense of trust in me. I grew less afraid of answering their questions, although I sometimes found myself in difficult positions when I did not agree with their analyses. As feminist researchers have argued, one-sided interviews can be exploitative, and I tried to abide by the principle that an interviewer should give as well as take from the interviewees.¹⁷ Some seemed to find the interview cathartic: A few people said they felt as though they were talking to a therapist, while others obviously relished the memories the questions aroused. The interviews did, however, make some respondents feel homesick and sad.

The interviewees were extremely open and usually answered questions without hesitation. As I explore in Chapter 7, they sometimes thought of Englishness as emerging naturally during their interactions with other English people. Hence, they often seemed to assume that I shared their experiences and feelings about Americans and so did not feel that they had to tailor their responses to fit what they thought I wanted to hear. The disadvantage to this is that their perceptions of my Englishness may have encouraged them to express biases and prejudices

against Americans more forcefully than they would have if I had been noticeably American. They seemed to find the experience positive: Some argued that they could get to “deeper issues” quickly with me because I shared their cultural references. However, the flip side is that they may have assumed that I would understand them to such an extent that they did not need to offer much explanation. An interviewer who was not so noticeably English undoubtedly would have obtained a different kind of interview. And as in any interview, I faced moments in which I was conscious of how much we had not talked about—that my incursion into their lives was just the “tip-of-the-iceberg” (Frankenberg 1993: 41). The respondents’ perceptions of my Englishness may have exacerbated this. Like all social-scientific work, this study has its biases, and these issues should be borne in mind when reading my analyses.¹⁸

THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF IDENTITY

Rather than assuming that people unquestioningly possess a national identity passed on to them from the top down, I use a “bottom-up” approach in this book, asking how that identity is experienced and understood by individuals and focusing on the words they use to describe it.¹⁹ Identity, after all, provides an answer to the perennial human question, “Who am I?”²⁰ Because nations and identities are social constructions,²¹ empirically examining the role that individuals play in constructing national identity makes sense.

Individuals, however, are likely to experience the concepts on which they base their identities as “real,” existing “out there.” Hence, they tend to see their identities as essential, natural, and unchangeable rather than as constructed by individuals and society.²² This “natural attitude”²³ obscures the work that individuals do during interactions to “create . . . and sustain [their] reality” (Kessler and McKenna 1978: 5).²⁴ Therefore, they come to assume that all holders of their identity share essential traits and characteristics.²⁵ By analyzing how individuals consciously and unconsciously infuse with national symbolism such daily activities as telling jokes and watching television, we learn how national identity is enacted rather than take it for granted. Thus, I explore how national identity is manifested, maintained, rejected, or renewed in individuals’ daily lives.

Drawing on insights from ethnomethodology, symbolic interactionism, feminist theories, and analyses of race and ethnicity, I argue that

national identities are a product of routine interactions and practices.²⁶ This scholarship focuses on the ways that individuals participate in the construction of both the social world and their own selves as they interact with others. Presenting themselves almost as if they were actors in a play, individuals hold one another accountable for their behavior; this is how meaning is created in everyday life.²⁷ Identities emerge as we interact with others through the meanings we create—what we say, what we wear, how we act, and how others interpret our actions.²⁸ Just as some argue that we “do” gender in our daily lives,²⁹ I point to the ways in which individuals do work to construct their national identities. “Identity,” therefore, can almost be seen more as a verb than as a noun. Indeed, my research shows how we use cultural practices in our daily interactions to negotiate our identities. In the same way that wearing certain clothes or using separate bathrooms reproduces gender identity, so watching particular films or speaking with a particular accent can reproduce national identity.

Focusing on the everyday aspects of identity shows the agency individuals have in constructing and responding to their identities. It also illustrates the situationally specific nature of identities, which wax and wane as individuals assert or downplay them.³⁰ Identities appear to be dynamic and contested, contingent and provisional, as individuals create, re-create, and challenge them as they live their lives. This quality of dynamism means that individuals have some degree of choice over when to affirm and when to reject their identities, as Ken suggested when he said, “I want to be able to be English when *I* want to be.”³¹ Identities are not omnirelevant, and people do not have to “do” their identity all the time. In fact, identities vary in salience depending on the person, the interaction, the practice, and the situation. However, identities are usually latent and have the *potential* to be relevant.³²

In addition, individuals “do” their identities within particular contexts. The work they do on their identities is constrained or facilitated by forces outside their control. These forces—power structures and discourses—consist of economic, political, and social processes experienced as customs, ideals, languages, norms, institutions, and ideologies.³³ However, these structures, in turn, are the result of daily practices that have themselves become routinized and institutionalized over time.³⁴ Indeed, structures and practices are linked together in a dialectical relationship. While structures constrain or enable individuals’ practices,

those structures are also composed of practices. Thus, the potential always exists for new structures or new discourses to be formed from practices.³⁵

Identities, then, are not free-floating. Rather, they are subject to structural constraints and enablements. Although people may negotiate the meaning of their identities as they act and interact, and may assert or reject parts of their identities at different moments, their actions ultimately are limited by the broader sociohistorical and structural locations within which they operate. Thus, the processes of identity construction are always responsive to cultural and structural factors.

GENDER, RACE, CLASS, AND NATIONAL IDENTITY

Scholars of gender, race, and class have noted the ways in which these kinds of identity intertwine to produce new and compounded forms of experience.³⁶ Indeed, examining the intersections of different forms of identity enables us to overcome simplistic assumptions about the uniformity and universality of identities. Precisely because identities are constituted at the level of practice, as well as at the level of structure, gender, race, and class will be more or less relevant in different situations and will intersect with one another to produce diverse sets of experience.³⁷ To these intersections, I add national identity, arguing that forms of nationality are predicated on certain definitions of gender, race, and class.³⁸

In the case of people from England, the relationship between whiteness and national identity has a long history.³⁹ England's colonial expansion (in Wales, Scotland, and Ireland, as well as farther afield) constructed the peoples with whom the English came into contact as "others." Thus, at particular

historical moments, certain "others" became central to public definitions of Englishness. . . . The Irish labouring man, the South Pacific "savage," the prostitute or the redeemed negro might dominate the hierarchies of English "otherness," either with a fearful demonology or in the spirit of a civilising dream. (C. Hall 1993: 216)

The combined force of the "demonology" and "civilising dream" was partially justified by beliefs in Social Darwinism,⁴⁰ which argued that blacks⁴¹ were inferior to whites and hence needed to be civilized. Colonialism thus provided an "other" with which colonizers could contrast

themselves.⁴² Often this contrast involved projecting devalued traits onto these "others" while constructing oneself as the epitome of all that was civilized and good.⁴³ However, the discourses used to construct white hegemony in colonies were also used to keep white working-class and female colonials in line.⁴⁴ White, male, and upper-middle class identity thus depended on "its others to shore up its sense of security, to reflect back the disowned parts of itself as inferior, contemptible, dependent, frightened or threatening."⁴⁵ As they asserted white European hegemony, meanwhile, the colonizers constructed innocent and utopian images of themselves.⁴⁶

As current work in racial and ethnic studies shows, the spirit of the empire lives on, as whiteness is still constructed in opposition to racial and ethnic others.⁴⁷ Indeed, the immigration to England of people from formerly colonized countries has thrown the racist discourses embedded in Englishness into sharper relief.⁴⁸ The legacy of empire has contributed to the definition of whiteness as the normative, taken-for-granted category in Englishness, as I discuss in detail in Chapters 5 and 6. In addition, because the state and the rights and responsibilities of citizenship are not gender-neutral,⁴⁹ it is perhaps unsurprising that women are usually seen as reproducers of the nation and its values and as symbolic markers of boundaries between nations.⁵⁰ Indeed, feminist deconstructions of immigration legislation have shown the ways in which gender and race function together to define women immigrants only in terms of their capacity to marry and reproduce rather than as independent entities.⁵¹ Thus, definitions of national identity in England are gendered as well as raced.

IMMIGRANTS OR EXPATRIATES?

There are very few contemporary studies of white English people living the U.S. (Pauline Greenhill studied English immigrants in Canada but was not specific about their race.⁵²) There are, however, many historical treatments of immigration from the British Isles to the U.S.⁵³ The presence of English people in the U.S. has been noted in the media and popular culture (as I show in Chapter 3). In 1995, the year in which I conducted my interviews, 673,832 people who were born in England were living in the U.S.⁵⁴ Of these people, 85.98 percent were white,⁵⁵ 54 percent were women, and 72.32 percent worked in managerial, professional, technical, sales, or

support positions.⁵⁶ A large percentage of these English people lived in California (20.83%); however, the percentage was also large (24.53%) in the Northeast, where I did my interviewing (4.86% in Massachusetts; 7.54% in New York; 6.91% in New Jersey; 2.42% in Pennsylvania; 2.46% in Maryland; and 0.34% in the District of Columbia). Other pockets of English people were living in Illinois (6.08%) and Florida (7.52%).

My study investigates the intersections of nation, race, class, and gender at a particular nexus. By interviewing middle- and upper-middle-class white English immigrants, I explore the national identities of those with relative privilege. I focus exclusively on whites to emphasize that whiteness is a racial category that can be analyzed using concepts similar to those used to study other racial categories.⁵⁷ The burgeoning literature on whiteness suggests that researchers should interrogate the ways white people experience their racial identities, how whiteness has been constructed historically as a category,⁵⁸ and how it is negotiated by whites on a day-to-day basis as it confers “unearned advantage” and “conferred dominance” on its members.⁵⁹

Skin color gives white immigrants in the U.S. privileges that they might otherwise be denied, given their immigrant status. However, the white English people I talked to often did not see themselves as immigrants. As I discuss in detail in Chapter 3, they were apt to distance themselves from immigrants who were not white and not middle class, suggesting the racialized and classed nature of the term “immigrant.” For instance, some argued that bureaucratic restrictions that might apply to immigrants from the “Third World” should not apply to them because they were white English professionals. Especially in the U.S., the dominant discourse about immigration is a discourse about particular kinds of immigrants. Although the anti-immigrant legislation of the 1990s applied to white and non-white immigrants alike, anti-immigrant sentiment is usually directed toward people of color, whom Americans seem to see as more “un-American” than white immigrants.⁶⁰ “Immigrant” also is often a coded way to refer to people of color. As some of my interviewees pointed out, Americans do not usually see white English people as immigrants. As the scholarship on whiteness suggests, the underlying understandings of the U.S. as a white nation run deep indeed.⁶¹

Yet there were other reasons that many of the people I spoke to rejected the term “immigrant.” Like the Iranian exiles Hamid Naficy (1993: 16) examined in Los Angeles, they

are not "native" to either their home or to the host society. They are no longer legally "foreigners," neither are they *bona-fide* "citizens." They are neither openly, nor secretly, nor dually "marginal." They are not merely "strangers" or simply cultural "tourists," and they cannot strictly speaking be considered members of an established "ethnic group." Finally, they cannot be entirely characterized as "sojourners," "refugees," or "homeless." [They are] none of the above entirely but all of them partially.

The people I talked to were "liminal" in that they lived in one country but dreamed of their eventual return to another. Only one had definite plans to return to England, and only two had definite plans to remain in the U.S. Sixteen of the others had vague plans to go back, and fourteen had vague plans to stay. However, these "plans" were unstable enough to vary within the course of an interview.⁶² In addition, just under half of the interviewees (sixteen) were British citizens but held green cards that allowed them to work in the U.S.; twelve had British citizenship but no green card: They were waiting for their green cards or held student visas or other kinds of special visas issued for short-term work; and six interviewees were dual-nationals, with British and American citizenship (four of these had obtained U.S. citizenship since arriving in the U.S.).⁶³

If, as Naficy argues, exiles by definition dream longingly of their homeland, then these people were exiles, as their nostalgia for England shows.⁶⁴ However, they did not define themselves as such. They were more likely to define themselves as "expatriates" (although others wished to distance themselves from the expatriate label), and only a few saw themselves as "immigrants" (as I discuss in Chapter 3). When I began this project, I assumed that "expatriate" referred to people who planned to go "home" one day, while immigrants were those who planned to stay. However, these plans seemed to have little or no correlation with whether people described themselves as immigrants or expatriates.

The term "expatriate," with its affectionate shortened form "expat," suggests more positive connotations than "immigrant." Bearing in mind the status of the U.S. as a former British colony, choosing "expatriate" rather than "immigrant" to describe oneself draws on a legacy of colonizing expatriates traveling the world, perhaps retaining the option of returning "home." However, several of the people I talked to made fun of the expatriate label, situating it within a colonizing context that they found inappropriate to their own experiences. Mike, for instance, chuckled about a program he had heard on the BBC World

Service in which “strange British . . . expats in [places like] Burma” write in to request “jingly-jangly, American, awful popular songs” from the 1950s that the host retrieved from the BBC archive for them. “It’s just all a bit weird,” he concluded, explicitly distancing himself from the poor souls for whom the BBC archive was a lifeline. Alex was more self-reflective about how the term “expatriate” might actually apply to her: She saw herself as a “ridiculous . . . Brit abroad” because she and her husband belonged to a British group that celebrated Guy Fawkes Night,⁶⁵ ate British snacks, and took quizzes about the London Underground, among other things. She laughingly suggested that she felt like “these ladies on the northwest frontier of India . . . in the heat partaking in tea . . . , and I suppose this is the modern-day equivalent.”

Alex had obviously found a community of other people from Britain;⁶⁶ most, however, wanted to distance themselves from the idea of “expat communities,” English “ghettos,” and other “Brits abroad.”⁶⁷ Thus, Harry rejected the idea of “get[ting] too chummy” with other English people, and Ian had no desire to sit around and “eat pork pies” with “expats.” Even those who described themselves as having immigrated to the U.S., such as Frank, were likely to claim that they felt “stateless,” despite their residence or nationality in the U.S. Thus, neither “immigrant” nor “expatriate” stuck consistently. A set of terms that was popular among some interviewees included “travelers,” “citizens of the world,” “gypsies,” or “roving people” with “wanderlust.”⁶⁸ When they used these terms, they saw themselves as belonging nowhere, believing that they were definable by the excitement they found in travel.

These semantic debates about the meaning of their move to the U.S. highlight the contradictions under which these people operated. Although they were immigrants in the U.S., with the feelings of alienation and homesickness that this engendered, they were also there under conditions of relative privilege. This was not only because Americans usually did not see them as immigrants (because of their skin color or because of their Englishness), but also because they enjoyed the luxury of choosing whether or not to be immigrants at a time that anti-immigrant sentiment ran high. Immigrants are assumed not to speak English; these immigrants spoke English as their first language (and often believed that they spoke it better than Americans). They also lived under conditions of relative Anglophilia, as particular kinds of English culture appeared to garner social status on the U.S. East Coast.

PRIVILEGE AND ANGLOPHILIA:
MAKING USE OF ENGLISH CULTURE

The relationship between English and American culture lies at the heart of the experiences of the people I talked to. Their privileged position as white people is exacerbated by the approbation lavished on English people by Americans. Aside from the political "special relationship" between the two countries (resolidified since the Ronald Reagan–Margaret Thatcher days by Bill Clinton and Tony Blair), American culture itself is particularly Anglophilic. Again and again this phenomenon emerges: in the use of English accents on American television to sell high-quality products, the popularity of *Masterpiece Theatre* and similar British television programming, the influx of British films and actors in the U.S., the extensive interest in Princess Diana and the mourning that accompanied her death, and the fact that Britain is Americans' number-one travel destination in Europe.⁶⁹ The people I talked to also experienced Anglophilia from individual Americans in the Northeast in their daily lives, from positive comments about their accents to assumptions that they were intelligent and well educated. In general, they felt that Americans were complimentary about English people and English culture. This Anglophilia can be seen as form of cultural capital on which English people can draw.⁷⁰

The value placed on English culture in the U.S. suggests the incentives these individuals had to "do" their national identities.⁷¹ As individuals interact with others, they use culture to construct their own meanings and understandings of the world. Ann Swidler's conception of culture as a "tool kit," or a repertoire from which people draw as they decide how to act, shows that culture provides social actors with symbols, rituals, stories, habits, worldviews, and guides to action.⁷² They use these "material[s] of [their] daily lives, the bricks and mortar of [their] most commonplace understandings" (Willis 1979 [1977]: 184–5) to engage with the world and define it as they see fit. However, in implementing and drawing on these guides, they

extend and adapt these schemata and rules. Each application involves responding to circumstances which are, in some respects, new. . . . [This] is a creative process which often involves some degree of selection and judgement, and in which the rules and schemata may be modified and transformed in the very process of application. (Thompson 1990: 148–9)

Thus, culture constantly evolves and changes as people use it to live their lives. This dynamism allows for multiple meanings. As Floya Anthias and Nira Yuval Davies (1992: 33) write, "although at certain moments there might be a hegemonic construction of the collectivity's culture and history, its dynamic, evolving, historical nature continuously re-invents, reconstructs, reproduces the cultural inventory of various collectivities."

The English people I interviewed worked with culture to make sense of their various identities. Often they used hegemonic images of Englishness, especially those emanating from media, popular culture, or collective memories or myths. For instance, some used representations of England from films and television programs to argue that England was a beautiful, green, historical theme park. Others responded to questions of imperialism by drawing on hegemonic discourses of power-evasion⁷³ or by expressing guilt and shame. Still others rejected the representations of Englishness they saw around them, preferring to use their own memories or to avoid generalizing about England at all. In these cases, interviewees engaged in conceptual work as they responded to hegemonic definitions of Englishness, sometimes challenging them, sometimes accepting them unquestioningly, and sometimes reworking them for their own purposes.

In the chapters that follow, I discuss three other instances of identity work⁷⁴ that emerged from my interviews as individuals talked about using cultural practices to enhance or downplay their identities as English. I point to the unintentional or habitual ways that they used culture in their daily lives, especially as they negotiated their accents. I also examine the more intentional practices used by these interviewees, particularly those from which they gained material or psychological benefits. Thus, I show how they garnered privileges from acting in "English" ways, most notably by playing up aspects of themselves that others defined as English. Also, they were able to enhance their own self-esteem by distancing themselves from Americans, using forms of culture as diverse as humor, fashion, and accent. In addition, I find evidence of a degree of playfulness in their identity negotiation, as they parodied versions of Englishness, exaggerating their national identity in jest. These cultural practices, together with their interactions with Americans and other English people, suggest the ways in which their identities wax and wane on a routine basis as they live their lives in the U.S.

CHAPTER OVERVIEWS

In Chapter 2, I examine the interrelationships between nostalgia and national pride, showing the ways the people I talked to use discourses of naturalness to negotiate these extreme national sentiments. I show how they do conceptual work using representations of England from the media and popular culture to enhance their self-esteem; however, they also criticize the stereotypes of Englishness embedded in these images so they can retain control of the definition of that identity. Thus, I show how the nostalgia the interviewees felt for particular cultural practices and particular versions of Englishness contributes to the construction of their national identity, despite their oft-stated ambivalence about having a national identity.

The interviewees' understandings of themselves as privileged in the U.S. are the focus of Chapter 3. I examine their responses to their race and class privileges, particularly the extent to which they see themselves as different from other immigrants in the U.S. I also focus on their perceptions of Anglophilia, the love of English culture that they believe Americans have. I note the ways they hold Americans responsible for their Anglophilia, and I show how some critique it while others use it to their advantage. Woven throughout this chapter is the tension between discourses of identity as natural and identity as work. I use two examples of cultural practices—humor and fashion—to show the ways they do work to distinguish themselves from Americans, even though they might believe that there are natural differences between them and their hosts.

In Chapter 4, I further investigate the work that my informants put into their English identities, examining their use of linguistic practices in identity negotiation and construction. I focus on a particular instance in which superiority and privilege become relevant—the English accent. My interviews show how English accents are valued in the U.S. during interactions and the vested interest these English people have in maintaining their accents—and even emphasizing them. I suggest that this is so because they equate their accents with their English identities. I show the different kinds of practice embedded in their accent negotiation, arguing that they work at their accents to distance themselves from Americans or to gain privileges from them, and I use the relationship between accent and identity to refine the concept of practice.

My analysis shows the contradictory nature of identity—that individuals do work to construct something they already believe is core to their being. Again, I consider the tension between believing an identity to be natural and putting work into upholding that identity through practices.

Chapters 5 and 6 explore the intersections of race, gender, and nation in order to elucidate privilege from another angle. I examine the content of the interviewees' national identities, investigating how they do conceptual work to envision England and Englishness. Unsurprisingly, given hegemonic representations of England, they are most likely to imagine ideal-typical English people as white and male. However, in their responses to Britain's imperialist past, they sometimes challenge hegemonic ideals of Englishness. In other instances, I find that they use their national identities to bolster their sense of privilege, notably in their attempts to downplay racial difference in England in comparison to the more "raced" U.S. My work provides evidence for the ways in which racial, gender, and national identities function together, in this case to accentuate these interviewees' sense of themselves as superior.

In my conclusion, I discuss the various ways we have seen these English people doing identity work—that is, treating their identities as if they need to be upheld, maintained, emphasized, or downplayed. I show how the interviewees negotiate their national identities in their daily lives, using discourses of naturalness and culture, accountability (with both Americans and English people), and four different kinds of practices. My evidence refines the theory of identity as work, pointing to the way individuals may deconstruct as well as reconstruct their identities.