

# Dude, You're a Fag

*Masculinity and Sexuality  
in High School*

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at River High repeatedly enforced definitions of masculinity that included male control of female bodies through symbolic or physical violence.

As a feminist researcher I was saddened and quite frankly surprised to discover the extent to which this type of sexual harassment constituted an average school day for youth at River High. Though much of the media and many cultural critics repeatedly claim that we have entered a postfeminist age, these scenes at River High indicate that this age has not yet arrived. In fact gender practices at the school—boys' control of girls' bodies, almost constant sexual harassment, and continual derogatory remarks about girls—show a desperate need for some sort of sexual harassment education and policy enforcement in schools.

Just as in the square dance that Henley described, girls' bodies at River High provided boys the opportunity to demonstrate mastery and dominance. These practices of compulsive heterosexuality indicate that control over women's bodies and their sexuality is, sadly, still central to definitions of masculinity, or at least adolescent masculinity. By dominating girls' bodies boys defended against the fag position, increased their social status, and forged bonds of solidarity with other boys. However, none of this is to say that these boys were unrepentant sexists. Rather, for the most part, these behaviors were social behaviors. Individually boys were much more likely to talk empathetically and respectfully of girls. Even when they behaved this way in groups, boys probably saw their behavior as joking and in fun (Owens, Shute, and Slee 2005). Maintaining masculinity, though, demands the interactional repudiation of this sort of empathy in order to stave off the abject fag position. It is precisely the joking and sexual quality of these interactions that makes them so hard to see as rituals of dominance. These interactional rituals maintain the "cruel power of men over women by turning it into just sex" (Jeffreys 1998, 75). The data presented in this chapter make gender equality seem a long way off. The next chapter shows how several groups of girls, much like the boys in the drama performances, provide alternative models of gender practices in adolescence, emphasizing play, irony, and equality rather than dominance and submission.

## CHAPTER FIVE

# Look at My Masculinity!

## *Girls Who Act Like Boys*

"Girls can be masculine too, you know," Genevieve pointed out to me when I told her I was writing a book on teenage boys and masculinity. Indeed, Genevieve had a point: girls *can* be masculine. At River High several girls identified themselves and were named by other students (both girls and boys) as masculine or as "girls who act like guys." They dressed, talked, and carried themselves in many ways "like guys." None of their peers identified them as actual boys. In other words, these girls weren't trying to "pass" as male, nor did students refer to them as "tomboys," the common way we think of boylike girls. None of the girls thought of themselves as boys trapped in girls' bodies or identified as transgendered.<sup>1</sup> Several of them, although not all, identified themselves as lesbian.

Most, though not all, of the girls were members of two social groups. I call these two groups the Basketball Girls and the Gay/Straight Alliance (GSA) Girls.<sup>2</sup> The Basketball Girls, athletic, loud, popular, and well liked, were commonly identified by other students as "like boys." The GSA Girls, as their name indicates, were all members of the school's GSA, a club formed to support gay students on campus. They were socially marginalized and less well known and were more likely to describe themselves than to be described by others as masculine. In addition to these two groups of girls, one other girl at River was commonly identi-

fied by students as masculine—Jessie Chau. She was not a member of either group and was a senior when the GSA Girls and the Basketball Girls were mostly first-years and sophomores. Like the Basketball Girls she dressed like a boy, was an athlete, and was incredibly popular—serving as both class president and homecoming queen.

By looking at these girls this chapter examines what it means to define masculinity as a set of practices associated with women as well as men. By moving in and out of masculine identifications these girls engaged in what Schippers (2002) calls “gender maneuvering.” *Gender maneuvering* refers to the way groups act to manipulate the relations between masculinity and femininity as others commonly understand them. By engaging in public practices that students associated with masculinity (certain clothing styles, certain sexual practices, and interactional dominance), these girls called into question the easy association of masculinity with male bodies. Their gender maneuvering challenges both commonsense and academic understandings of masculinity as the sole domain of men.

These girls engaged in non-normative gender practices in a variety of ways. In their daily interactional practices they engaged in gender resistance, acting in ways most people don’t associate with teenage girls. However engaging in non-normative gender practices doesn’t always and consistently challenge the gender order. Doing gender in this way opens up issues of gender resistance and reconstruction, illustrating that gender resistance can, but doesn’t always, challenge sexism (Gagne and Tewksbury 1998). Like boys who “inhabit and construct non-hegemonic masculinities,” thereby both subverting and reinforcing normative gender relations (Renold 2004, 247), these masculine girls both challenged and reinscribed gender norms. This chapter concludes with thoughts about how to discuss female masculinity and implications for how scholars study both male and female masculinity.<sup>3</sup> While all the girls’ practices of gender maneuvering had the potential for challenging the interactional gender order, the GSA Girls’ gender practices, with their clear political project, contained the most potential.

## TOMBOY PASTS

Acting like a boy was not unique to the Basketball Girls, Jessie, and the GSA Girls, nor is it something that occurs only at River High. Many girls and women claim that they were tomboys as children. In *Gender Play*, Barrie Thorne (1993) talks about female students in her college classes who proudly shared stories of childhoods in which they considered themselves tomboys. Similarly, when he asked his undergraduates, “Who was a tomboy as a child?” Michael Messner (2004b) noted that women raised their hands more often than men did when he asked, “Who was a sissy?” In fact, Lyn Mikel Brown (2003) argues that the story of the tomboy girl triumphant over the sissy feminine girl is a common one. Instead of redefining girlhood as tough and powerful, these tomboy stories belittle normative femininity and celebrate masculinity. The girls at River High, both those who were normatively gendered and those who identified as masculine, spoke with pride about tomboy childhoods. Identifying as a tomboy aligns a girl with a romanticized history of masculine identification before she encountered a more restricting femininity.

Several girls who, at the time I spoke with them, identified as normatively feminine shared stories about how they had acted more masculine when they were younger. They illustrate the trajectories of gender identity, in which gender non-normativity may be considered cute in childhood but problematic in adolescence or adulthood. Jenna and Sarah, energetic, thin, attractive white cheerleaders who wore their straight blonde hair up in high bouncy ponytails and frequently pulled out compacts to apply or freshen up already perfectly crafted makeup, rehearsed their lines for an upcoming play as they sat outside drama class. Their talk turned to River High’s football team. Sarah announced, “I wanted to play football when I was little! I love football! And my dad totally wanted me to play. But my mom didn’t, and I think that’s why I didn’t get to play. So I became a cheerleader.” It seemed as if, in her mind, being a cheerleader was as close to becoming an actual football player as she could get.

While certainly cheerleaders and football players inhabit the same playing field, the gendered meanings of the two roles are worlds apart, with cheerleaders working as football players' perky heterosexual helpmates (Adams and Bettis 2003). Like Sarah, other girls often told stories about mothers encouraging them to give up "acting like a boy" as they grew older. During Hoop Skills (the basketball class), Latasha, a petite African American sophomore, said with pride and a bit of regret, "I used to dress like a boy. But I fixed up this year. My ma didn't like it." Her appearance underscored her claim. She now sported large gold hoops, gold jewelry, tight pants, and a tight shirt, with makeup and a gold heart painted on her cheek.

Boys also commented on girls' increasing feminization as they grew older. As Allen and I talked about "girls who act like guys," he said, "You can't see too many of them at the high school level, it seems to me, as I did when I was younger in the middle school." When I asked him "Why do you think that is?" he responded, "At the age of high school I guess people want to be the same. When you're younger . . . you are a kid. You are wide open. You're not really sure. You just do what you want." Allen attributed girls' changing gendered practices to social pressure, which, in the case of the girls who identified as tomboys when they were younger, seemed to be true. Mothers, and most likely other adults, began to discipline girls to assume more typically feminine dispositions. The change from tomboyism to femininity discussed by Latasha, Sarah, and Allen reflected the representational transformation in the yearbook in which both girls and boys moved from a variety of clothing options to strictly gendered uniforms in their senior photos. The public face of the tomboy belongs to childhood. This sort of female masculinity in childhood is not only accepted but celebrated (Halberstam 1998). However, this same masculinity in adulthood threatens to destabilize the gender order.

Interestingly, I never heard these sorts of childhood stories from boys. None of them told me they were or knew of boys who used to act more feminine when they were younger. Nor did any of them express sadness about experiences they had missed out on, such as playing with Barbies

or dressing up in skirts and heels. The fact that I didn't hear these stories doesn't mean they don't exist. When teaching college classes about masculinity, I've heard stories from my male students about being ruthlessly teased and eventually giving up playing with dolls and Barbies because of this gendered torment. Instead of pride, their stories are tinged with shame. We don't have a cultural narrative, such as that of the tomboy, with which to frame and understand these experiences, so they may be more likely to be silenced.

In high school, female masculinity, once understood as a tomboy identity, translates into a sexual identity. Much as they did with boys, youth at River High associated girls' gender non-normativity with same-sex desire. When I explained to them that I was "writing a chapter on girls who do guy things," Sarah (the aforementioned cheerleader) asked, "Oh, you mean lesbians?" However, the loathing many boys expressed for male same-sex desire didn't appear when boys (or girls) talked about either tomboys or lesbians. James said, "I haven't really heard anybody tease them [lesbians]." In explaining the differential treatment of gay boys and lesbians, students repeatedly asserted that because boys thought that same-sex activity between women was "hot," lesbians were desired, not shunned. When I asked James about this, he told me, "Guys like it for girls. Guys will see two lesbians and they'll be like 'Yeah!' Then when guys see two guys they're like—'Ughh!'" Marco also drew on a discourse of eroticization: "Girls are pretty. They have soft skin, you know? Guys don't. They're hairy. They stink. I can see where a girl would be a lesbian." Ray told me that most guys fantasized about lesbian relationships: "[To] see two hot chicks banging bodies in a bed, that's like every guy's fantasy right there. It's the truth. I've heard it so many times: 'Give me two chicks banging bodies.'" So-called "lesbian" sex is a trope frequently deployed in heterosexual pornography that, far from legitimizing same-sex relationships, titillates and arouses male readers (Jenefsky and Miller 1998). Eroticizing women's same-sex relationships renders them harmless and nonthreatening to the gender order (Rich 1986).

In general, girls who transgress gendered and sexualized expectations

don't need to do the same sort of interactional work boys do when they are permanently or temporarily labeled as fags. Unlike gender and sexual non-normativity for boys, which decrease a boy's social status, gender and sexual non-normativity for girls can actually increase their social status. In certain circumstances, such as those in which girls' non-normative gender practices mirror the boys' masculinity processes that I've discussed thus far, such non-normativity can result in popularity. However, as the GSA Girls' gender practices indicate, challenging gender norms, especially when the challenge is framed as a political one in direct opposition to sexism and homophobia, doesn't necessarily result in increased social status for girls.

#### REBECA AND THE BASKETBALL GIRLS

Not surprisingly, more often than not the Basketball Girls could be found on the basketball court. While in total there were about ten to fifteen of them, Rebeca, Michelle, Tanya, and Tanya's little sister, Sheila, were the girls students talked about when I asked them if they know any "girls who act like guys." They were a racially diverse group (as was the larger crowd)—Rebeca was Latina, Tanya and Sheila were white, Michelle was Filipina. They were all sophomores during the first year of my research, with the exception of Sheila, who was a freshman. The Basketball Girls acted like boys in a variety of ways. Their athleticism and involvement with a male sport instantly aligned them with masculinity (Messner 2002; Theberge 2000). They spat, walked in a limping "gangsta" style, wore boys' clothing, ditched class, and listened to loud hip-hop music, dancing and purposefully singing only the "naughty" lyrics. They performed special handshakes and made fun of me when I didn't execute them correctly. Their energy was never-ending. At the homecoming football game, which they all attended, I grew dizzy watching them run up and down the bleachers, screaming, laughing, and pulling each others' long ponytails. They continually shoved each other and wrestled on the top bleachers, every once in a while falling into me, at which point they'd laughingly reprimand each

other and profusely apologize to me because I was, in their words, a "grown-up."

Before this group physically appeared, one could almost always hear them coming because of their hollers, screams, and laughter. Michelle described their "loudness" to me at length:

They're fun to be around. They loud. They not quiet people . . . When I'm by myself I don't really be yelling and stuff, but when I'm with my friends, yeah, I be like that . . . When I'm around my friends I can't be quiet. We [are] just always loud. That's how it is. When we go around school, everybody already knows. We're always together, and we always act loud. Everybody's like, "If you guys were ever in class together I feel sorry for that teacher." That's how we was in sixth period. We were hecka loud in that class.

Other students also described the Basketball Girls as loud. Jason observed, "They are sometimes a little rowdy and loud. Like after school they hang out sometimes and they're running around yelling and stuff, but you just overlook it. I think they're cool."

The Basketball Girls were instantly recognizable because their attire set them apart from other female students. They wore long hair, typically slicked back into tightly held ponytails that hung long down their backs. They dressed in baggy hip-hop clothes generally indistinguishable from boys' hip-hop clothing: oversize shirts, baggy pants precariously balanced low on their hips and held up with a belt, immaculately clean athletic shoes unlaced with socks rolled up under the tongues so that they stuck out, and large jewelry. One day Michelle came to school dressed entirely in white—white cargo pants, a white baggy T-shirt, and a white sweatshirt with one arm in the sleeve and the other sleeve hiked up over her shoulder (a typically "boy" way to wear it), and white tennis shoes. While hip-hop culture is often derided for its rampant misogyny, girls and women find ways to appropriate the culture and style in order to express independence and agency (Emerson 2002). This is what the Basketball Girls did in their interactional style, clothing choices, and musical tastes.

None of the Basketball Girls said they self-consciously dressed like boys; instead they said they dressed in baggy clothes for comfort. Michelle said she liked to dress in baggy clothes "cause it's comfortable. I don't like wearing tight stuff." She told me that other girls dressed in fitted clothing "cause they want to look cute for people. I really don't care what people think about me, or whatever." She did say other people commented on her unusual clothing choices: "Yeah, they'll always be like, why I dress like this? I'm comfortable. That's what I like."

Rebeca told me that she had dressed this way "my whole life practically." When I asked her why she didn't dress like her girlfriend, Annie, a perky white cheerleader who wore typically feminine, low-slung, tight pants and fitted shirts, Rebeca told me, "It doesn't go right with me. I don't feel the vibe there. I don't like it." She said that her friends "dress fine. I mean, I don't care how they dress. I mean, I like the way they dress and everything. I just like the way I dress." I asked her if anyone ever commented on the fact that she didn't wear tight clothing. Rebeca told me, "I get that a lot." Her friends (not all members of the Basketball Girls) often teased Rebeca about her masculine self-presentation. On Halloween Rebeca was hanging out at basketball practice with Latasha and Shelly talking about whether they planned to go trick-or-treating that evening. Latasha teased Rebeca, "Are you going as a girl?" They all laughed. Shelley jumped in, saying, "Yeah, I wanna see you in a dress!" Latasha modified this by saying, "No, just tight pants and a tight shirt!" All three continued to laugh at the idea of Rebeca in "female drag."

The Basketball Girls sometimes joked about dressing like other girls at River. One morning Tanya, Rebeca, and Sheila skipped class to sit on top of tables in the school's central quad and listen to rap music. They discussed what they were planning on wearing to the "Back to School Dance" the upcoming Friday. Rebeca asked Tanya, "You goin' to the dance?" Tanya answered, "Yeah, I'm gonna wear a skirt." Rebeca's mouth dropped open: "For real?" Sheila, Tanya's little sister chimed in, "Yeah, I'm wearin' a dress, some makeup, and my hair all down." Rebeca, flabbergasted at this point, asked, "FOR REAL?" Both Tanya and Sheila

laughed loudly, "NAH!" All three of them cracked up in laughter. Such laughter was both a celebration of their gender transgressions and possibly a way to manage anxiety about it.

The Basketball Girls constantly disrupted whatever environment they were in with their never-ending (but very entertaining) energy. None of them had cars or licenses, so they ate lunch in the cafeteria. More than once they got into a food fight in the cafeteria at lunchtime. During one particularly entertaining round, they hollered at one another as their food fight turned into an impromptu soccer game. They kicked empty water bottles back and forth across the cafeteria, yelling "Goal!" every time they shot a bottle between table legs. Another time they incited a food fight by continually throwing candy eggs at the heads of a group of girls in the cafeteria, laughing raucously each time an egg pelted its target. They continued this behavior down the hallway, laughing hysterically as they hit these girls with the eggs.

The Basketball Girls' high-energy antics and proclivity to fights often brought them into conflict with the school's disciplinary rules. Rebeca, for instance, said of her disruptiveness in the basketball class, "I don't like the varsity coach 'cause she's my teacher. She hates me, I hate her. She just mugs me. I mug her back." I asked Rebeca, "What's mugging?" She answered,

Like givin' me a dirty-ass look. I'm just like, whatever. I be hella loud in that class . . . I'm seriously jumping up on the bleachers. Throwing balls all over the place, just shooting wherever I want to. Not even listening to the teacher. And she just, like, sits there, like [soft voice], "I hate you. Hate you." No, she doesn't say that, but I know she's sayin' it. She doesn't like me.

All during Hoop Skills class, not one of the Basketball Girls stopped moving. While some of the other students tired out and wilted in the corner, these girls constantly made drum noises by pounding the bleachers rhythmically, ran up and down the court, jumped on each other, and shot baskets. In fact, one day, Tanya was so disruptive the coach asked her to

leave class. Upon exiting the gym, she started to jump up and down outside, making faces in the window at the rest of the class as they laughed at her clowning.

One day at lunch I sat with the Basketball Girls as we watched Tanya's father escort her off the school campus. Casey, a middle-aged blonde security guard, walked up to the Basketball Girls' lunch table, shaking her head and saying, "She's back for a day and then she's suspended again." Tanya had shown up late for a class in which the teacher had locked the door to prevent disruptions. Frustrated at being locked out, Tanya started to kick the door loudly and repeatedly. The teacher called security and she was suspended. The rest of the girls were no strangers to fights. At football games their shoving matches were frequently interrupted with pronouncements of which girls they planned to fight, followed by furtive and intense discussions involving mediators between them and groups of girls from a rival school.

Their aggressiveness frequently inspired fear in other students. Ricky said of them, "They're tough! Oh, they're tough! Every time I see them they're like [deep voice], 'Yo man, whatsup!' I'm like [makes a scared face]. I'm used to 'Oh, hi!' [high-pitched female voice]." I asked Ricky if other students gave the girls a hard time. He told me, "I can't imagine that they do, because they're so tough. They have the ambition and the attitude to kick some ass. They [other students] know that if they say anything they're gonna get their ass kicked. So they don't say anything." He was right, I never saw other students fight back against the Basketball Girls, nor did I hear disparaging comments made about them.

None of them had boyfriends. With the exception of Rebeca, who identified as a lesbian, it was unclear whether the others identified as straight or gay. However, they make it clear that boys were not high on their priority list. Michelle said, as we talked on a metal bench outside the locker rooms one afternoon, "I don't really have no time for boyfriends. When I did have one it wasn't fun. I like hanging out with my friends all the time, doing stuff with them. When you're with a boy you don't re-

ally have time for them. I don't have time to be with a boy." Regardless, the prevailing view among the student body was that the Basketball Girls were gay. Calvin described them as a "hecka loud" group of girls who "all look like boys, all dress like boys," and are "all gay."

Little five-foot-high Rebeca was, in one student's words, "the leader of the pack." Jose described her by saying, "She kind of looks like a guy but it's a girl." She was well known, well liked, and almost always within earshot. She was a darling girl with a vivacious smile and tangible energy, and she made friends easily. At a football game when I said I was writing "a book on boys," one of her (non-Basketball Girl) friends squealed that "you should interview her! She dresses like a boy and she's a lesbian! She turns straight girls gay!" Indeed, both straight boys and straight girls at River High commented on her attractiveness. Her current girlfriend, Annie, had been straight until she met Rebeca, thus adding to the impression that Rebeca possessed mystical attraction.

Rebeca's lesbianism and masculine sense of self often became a joke with her friends who were outside the Basketball Girls. As I interviewed Rebeca on the lunch tables in front of the school, Lisa, one of Rebeca's non-Basketball Girl friends, approached, asking, "What are you guys recording?" She wanted to know if I was writing about Rebeca, and I said, "Sort of." Laughing, she asked what my research was about—"lesbians?" Rebeca and her friends, including me, all laughed at this. Rebeca, retorted, "You're gay, Lisa!" Ana yelled back, "Lisa's not gay, Lisa's straight!" Rebeca teased, "You sure about that?" Ana yelled, "I'M POSITIVE!" They both laughed as Rebeca concluded, "I love doing that to her!" and they laughed some more. This good-natured teasing permeated discussions of Rebeca's sexuality and her gender practices. Her friends teased her, not when she acted like a boy, but when she acted like a girl. For instance, when Rebeca spoke about her recent heartbreak, Ana teased her. "She cried, she was so emotional," Ana mocked, making crying sounds, while Rebeca faked indignation.

Rebeca prided herself on being an "out" lesbian. She told me that she came out at a very young age:

I came out in seventh grade. I dated a lot of boys so I tried to hide it. I told everyone in ninth grade because I started dating this senior girl. I hate guys. Guys are gross to me. Eww. I mean when I was in middle school I went out with a lot of guys. I kissed 'em and everything. I didn't feel anything. I was just like, ugh, this is so gross.

Even though she was quite comfortably and publicly "out," Rebeca didn't align herself with the visible group of gay kids at the school, the kids who were active in the GSA. She told me, "I went to it a couple times, but it didn't do anything [for me]. So I really didn't care." Rebeca's experience with the GSA sums up the relations between the Basketball Girls and the GSA Girls. Neither was fully comfortable in the other's social territory. Part of Rebeca's discomfort probably stemmed from the fact that the Basketball Girls resisted politics in general. In high school, it is profoundly uncool to care deeply about most things (save for sports and dating). For instance, the Basketball Girls made light of National Coming Out Day, which fell on the same day as the homecoming football game. As they ran up and down on the bleachers, Annie, Rebeca's cheerleader girlfriend, ran up to Rebeca and yelled, teasing her, "It's National Coming Out Day!" All the girls laughed, including Rebeca, and went on with their roughhousing. This was the only time I heard the girls refer to larger political or social aspects of sexuality.

Rebeca credited her lesbianism with making her more popular. When I asked her if people treated her differently because she dated girls, she said, "I get a lot of nice comments. Like, 'You're a pimp, you have all the girls!' I get a lot of that." I responded, surprised, "So everyone's totally cool with it?" "Yeah, they're like, 'Hey hook me up with some of your girls!'" Rebeca immediately posited boys as her audience, as those who would approve or disapprove of her sexuality. It seems that, as with boys' potential same-sex desire, boys were the ultimate arbiters of what was acceptable and not acceptable at River High. Michelle also told me Rebeca didn't experience homophobia from her classmates. Rather, she told me that both boys and girls were attracted to Rebeca.

They know she's gay, so they don't really have anything to say. Everybody knows her as *the pimp*, cause everybody be jackin' her real hard, they really do. Not boys. Girls. Well, boys be jackin' her too. When she dresses like a girl, she's *hecka* pretty. When she dresses like a boy all the girls will be jackin' her. But she don't like the boys, so . . .

Michelle used the word *jackin'* to indicate a level of attraction. She explained that depending on Rebeca's gendered presentation of self, either boys or girls were drawn to her. Like Chad, Rebeca had the ability to inspire intense desire in others. And, as with Chad, this sexual desire increased her social status, conferring upon her the high-status identity of "pimp."

At River High when a boy dated a lot or had sex with a lot of girls, he was admirably called a "pimp." It was a term of honor and respect. At River High, if a girl dated a lot of boys, then she was called a "slut" or a "ho," never a "pimp." Rebeca often recast herself as a "pimp" rather than a "ho." I teased Rebeca at one point by asking her if her nickname was "pimp." She replied defensively and with a smile, "I am pimp!" What follows is an interesting interchange between Rebeca and Ana (one of her non-Basketball Girl friends) on the definitions of *pimp* versus *ho*:

ANA: You aren't a pimp. Who are you pimpin'?

REBECA: I'm not a pimp? I'm pimpin' every single girl here. Including you!

ANA: Oh yeah, right! Including me! Uh uh! Uh uh! No! You ain't pimpin' no one! You think you're pimp. You're a pimp last year. 'Cause you played *hecka* girls last year. Over the summer. You know how many girls you played over the summer?

REBECA: Now, that was kind of funny.

ANA: That was kind of mean! You're an H-O!

REBECA: No, I can't be a ho. Go look up definition of *ho* in the dictionary.

ANA: It's gonna tell me it's a gardening tool! (laughs)

C. J.: Wait, why can't you be a ho?



- REBECA: 'Cause I *can't* be!  
 ANA: You're not a pimp 'cause you're not.  
 REBECA: Okay, Ana.  
 (Ana walks away)  
 REBECA: I hate her! (smiling and shaking her head)

Rebeca here engaged in a discursive contest over what it meant to be a pimp. She refused a feminized interpretation of her actions in which she had to be a girl; instead she claimed a masculine position as a pimp in sexualized interactions with other girls. She wasn't chasing them. They were chasing her, because she had the virility to incite that sort of desire. Ana, good-naturedly, tried to keep Rebeca in a feminine, penetrated position.

Other Basketball Girls also repositioned themselves as masculine by invoking a "pimp" identity. Michelle, for example, told me about her plans to attend Winter Ball the previous year: "I was going to be like a pimp, and I had like four girls goin' with me." She said she had "rented a zoot suit and it was really cool." Michelle, however, ended up not attending Winter Ball, seemingly because of lack of funds.

In addition to reframing her sexual and romantic practices as "pimp," Rebeca consistently made discursive moves reframing her body as a male one. She posited herself as the center of female desire, saying, "I can't help it if I have girls on my jock!" *Jock* is a slang term for "penis." In a separate incident at lunch Rebeca and her girlfriend, Annie, were playfully shoving each other. Annie put her hands on Rebeca's chest and shoved her back, laughing. Rebeca yelled, "Stop punching my muscle!" and grabbed at her own chest defensively. All the girls laughed. Once again playing the straight person to Rebeca's gender-bending humor, Ana asked, shaking her head, "Why does she call her boobs her muscle?" Rebeca responded, pointing to Annie, "You have boobs. *I* have muscle." In both these instances Rebeca not only aligned herself with masculinity but refashioned her body as a male one, rejecting breasts and replacing them with muscle, rejecting a vagina and replacing it with a "jock." She flirted, in these instances, with embodying maleness by claiming male body

parts. In a way she drew on popular understandings of masculinity in which masculinity has to line up with a male body. In the end, though, she never expressed desire to actually be a boy.

Rebeca also participated in a masculinizing process when she engaged in sex talk and rituals of "getting girls." Rebeca's interactions with girls outside her social circle often looked similar to the way masculine boys behaved around girls they found attractive. One day Rebeca stood outside the girls' locker room talking to a couple of boys. A thin, attractive girl walked past wearing snug, low-waisted jeans, a white tank top, and a lacy brown shawl tied tightly around her waist. Rebeca yelled to her, "LET ME SEE YOUR SHAWL!" Rebeca then turned to the boys and said, "I saw a girl wearing one of those the other day, and I thought it was for, like, . . ." She completed the sentence by reaching out as if to grab each side of the sash and pull it toward her, laughing and thrusting her hips as if imitating sex. Both of the boys laughed, as one of them said, "I *bet* you did!" As the girl walked past hesitatingly, Rebeca continued talking, "You look *good* in that shawl." Lyn Mikel Brown (1998) calls this sort of language "ventriloquation" to refer to the ways in which girls adopt boys' points of view. In this instance, Rebeca engaged in masculinizing practices that objectified other girls and thereby enhanced her own social standing with boys. She engaged in ventriloquation in order to appropriate the social power that accompanied masculine identities.

Though she daily enacted these sorts of masculinity processes, Rebeca occasionally participated in feminizing processes. She surprised me by telling me, at length, about her experience wearing both a formal dress and makeup to the Winter Ball:

I had makeup on and everything. I went with two people. I went with a guy and a girl. I walked in with them. They were like, "Who's that? Is she new?" I heard whispers and everything. Somebody went up to me and was like, "Are you new?" I was like, "No, I'm Rebeca." She was like, "ARE YOU SERIOUS? GUYS, GUYS, COME HERE—IT'S REBECA!" Everybody, like, came around me, they were like, "Oh my God! You are so beautiful!" I was like, "Thanks" [she was shrugging

her shoulders and looking embarrassed here]. Everybody took pictures of me. I had, like, the camera on me the whole night.

When I asked Rebeca how this attention for a feminized appearance made her feel, she replied, "I was like, damn! Oh my God, I'm famous! [laughs]. I was like, wow. 'Cause everybody's like, 'Are you gonna wear a dress?' I'm like, 'No, I'm gonna wear a tux.' They're like, 'Are you serious?' I'm like, 'Yup.' And I surprised 'em by coming." However, when I interviewed Rebeca after Winter Ball she told me she had wanted to wear a tux and not a dress to the formal dance. When I asked her, "So why'd you decide to wear a dress instead of a tux?" Rebeca displaced the responsibility onto her mother, saying, "My mom wouldn't have let me step out of the house wearin' a tux." Like other girls I spoke with at River High, Rebeca blamed her mother for restricting her desired masculine gender expression. There was something unconvincing about her explanation, given her daily "boy" attire. While her mother may have been part of the reason she conceded to wear a dress, school ritual brought to bear its own set of power relations on Rebeca's decision to enact normative femininity.

Rebeca blamed the makeup on her sister: "My sister talked me into it. She was like 'You'll be hella pretty.' I'm like 'Okay. I guess.'" Rebeca laughed, saying, "It was gross! It was hecka nasty. I did not like it. It felt like blah! I did not like it! I was like sweating and I go like this [rubbing her eye] and I see my finger is black! I was like, 'Oh my God, this is not working.' Makeup's hecka nasty. I *hate* makeup." However, when I asked Rebeca what she was going to wear to the next Winter Ball, she said she was going to wear a dress and makeup again even though "it's gonna be a pain." Indeed, at the Winter Ball itself Rebeca complained to me about how she couldn't wait to get out of her dress and into a pair of pants. I asked her why she didn't bring any with her, and she said that because none of her friends wanted to, she didn't.

Rebeca's ability to remain in gender flux certainly added to her popularity. Her capacity for revealing either her presumed core femininity, thus exposing her masculinity as drag, or revealing her femininity as drag and her

masculinity as real was equally intriguing. It was as if she were endowed with some sort of power that the rest of the students didn't have. Thus she became an object of intense fascination as a liminal figure who demonstrated an ability to move between the worlds of masculinity and femininity. As such, she seemed to have some sort of power, not available to most teenagers, to inhabit multiple identities. In her study of proms at a variety of high schools, Amy Best (2004) notes a similar phenomenon in which girls "demonstrate their skills at assembling a range of signs and symbols upon their bodies in a way that transformed who they were in school" (199). Occasionally girls who refused dresses and frilly clothes in their daily lives donned these feminine symbols at proms, much as Rebeca did. As Best notes, "Part of the pleasure of prom is to be someone different from who you are at school" (199). For Rebeca, playing with gender in this way was both pleasurable, in that she received even more attention from her peers, and uncomfortable, in that the clothes and makeup were restricting and awkward.

To my surprise, Rebeca experienced the school administration as supportive of her sexuality and her relationships. She told me that even during her public and dramatic breakup with her previous girlfriend, Jana, the school administrators had helped them out. Rebeca told me that she and Jana "went out for ever. We were engaged. That's how strong our relationship was. We were engaged." Rebeca continued to tell me of her heartbreak when she found out that Jana was cheating on her with a guy. She said that her heartbreak was so severe that

we argued in the hallway and we almost got in a fistfight. Then the principals broke us up because everybody at this school, all the teachers, everybody knew we were together, knew we were a couple, a couple like married. Everybody at this school was like, "Congratulations!" The principals brought us in the office and we sat down and they started talking to us. They were like our counselors. He [Mr. Hobert, the principal] sat me down and [I was] just crying. I told my principal, "She's really messed up for what she did!" My principal was like, "What do you want to do?" He asked Jana, "Do you want to be with her?" She was like, "No. No. No. I don't love her no more." I was like, "Are you serious?!" She was like, "I don't wanna be with her. I don't wanna be with her." I was like,

"No! This cannot happen! You have to be with me! I gave you everything! We're married!" I ran out of that office so fast and I started crying.

Even in this midst of her heartbreak, Rebeca didn't find the school homophobic; rather, her lesbianism translated into popularity and extra support and counseling from the administration (in a school so large that most students never speak to the principal or other administrators). In some sense the administrators, much like the other students at River High, were charmed by Rebeca. Her non-normative gender practices were couched in a way that was simultaneously charming and disruptive. But without a political critique of gender norms or heterosexuality at River High, these gender transgressions were, in the end, nonthreatening to the existing gender and sexual order.

In a sense, however, speaking of the Basketball Girls as masculine or feminine doesn't get at all the aspects of their gendered portrayal. The way they "did gender" also involved racialized meanings. Much like African American boys who identify with hip-hop culture, the Basketball Girls struck a "cool pose" (Majors 2001). Their interactional style, choice of sports, and favorite music and clothing all drew upon those present in hip-hop culture. Like boys identified with hip-hop, they were vaulted to popularity. However, they did not embody the threat of African American maleness. While African American boys in school were seen as threatening to the social order, the Basketball Girls were more likely to be seen as rascals, even though they self-consciously identified as not-white. Michelle explained this to me by saying that "sometimes white girls act quieter . . . Most white girls are quiet . . . I don't know why that is." She qualified this statement with "But some of the white girls I hang around with, they act loud too, so I don't know." So while she and the rest of the Basketball Girls identified as a variety of races and ethnicities, they did consciously see themselves as different from most white girls.

The Basketball Girls were a high-energy, popular, and engaging group of girls. On the one hand these girls rejected prescriptions of

normative femininity, resisting, for instance, heterosexuality, makeup, and dresses. They didn't engage in appropriately feminine sports such as cheerleading, dance, or even soccer. Instead they not only played but were passionate about basketball, a sport associated with men and masculinity (Shakib 2003). In this way it seems that the Basketball Girls were reconstructing what it meant to be a girl. They also engaged in practices that looked a lot like "compulsive heterosexuality." Like sexist and athletic boys, they were at the top of the school social hierarchy, instilling both fear and respect in other students (Connell 1996; Eckert 1989; Eder, Evans, and Parker 1995; D. Epstein 1997; Kehily and Nayak 1997; Martino 1999; Parker 1996). In this sense, their "gender maneuvering" both challenged the gender order and reinscribed it. They challenged the gender order by acting and dressing like boys. They reinscribed the gender order by engaging in many of the dominance practices that constitute adolescent masculinity, such as taking up space, teasing girls, and positioning themselves as sexually powerful.

#### THE HOMECOMING QUEEN: JESSIE CHAU

Clad in wind pants, a T-shirt, and a baseball cap, Jessie Chau sat in Mrs. Mac's advanced placement government class like a boy—positioned sideways, her legs spread wide and her arms splayed across both her desk and the desk behind her. Jessie, a confident, attractive, Chinese American athlete and out lesbian, was River High's homecoming queen and president of the senior class. She was a senior when the Basketball Girls were sophomores, so she might be regarded as a sort of trailblazer for this type of gender maneuvering at River High. She didn't have a group with which to engage in non-normative gender practices but rather did so on her own—innovating and compromising gender practices at different points in her high school career. Like the Basketball Girls she was popular and well liked. Girls wanted to be her friend, boys wanted to date her. Like the Basketball Girls she dressed in "boy

clothes," played sports, and, like Rebeca, identified as a lesbian. Jessie, however, lived these gender and sexual transgressions on her own, without the benefit of a like peer group to support her. Several years older than the Basketball Girls, she had forged this alternative set of gender practices solo.

Boys expressed a combination of confusion and admiration for Jessie. Richard, a conservative white senior, told me,

She dresses like a man. . . . It's kind of weird. She has always been popular since she was in middle school. It's inevitable for her to be number one. . . . Jessie is a great girl. She's really nice. She's really cool. I just think it's kind of weird that she dresses like a man. She's a softball player and she's hella good. She's a tomboy.

This was one of the few times I heard the word *tomboy* used to describe a girl who acted like a boy at River. Jace explained her popularity by saying, "Most people at River, I mean, guys are going to be like, 'Hey that's cool!' and she's friends with tons of girls." Like the Basketball Girls Jessie benefited from sexist male fantasies about lesbian sexuality, as Jace indicated with his "Hey, that's cool!" comment. Similarly, because same-sex desire did not threaten girls' gender identity in the way it did boys', Jessie's sexuality and gender transgressions had little effect on her friendships. For instance, when Cathy talked to me about Jessie's sexuality, she said,

She had a boyfriend her junior year and they broke up. Then people could kind of tell. Because she was real jocky and stuff. People were just like, "I wonder if she is?" She was always with this girl, Sandra. She told me one day, "Cathy, I want to tell you something and I don't want you to think differently of me." I was like, "I'm cool with it, I don't care." Some people are a little homophobic. She would sit behind me and play with my hair . . . I don't think it was weird at all that she won. She was the nicest one out there. Being gay had nothing to do with it.

Cathy talked fondly of Jessie and of being touched by Jessie. This fondness couldn't be more different from the at best guarded way straight boys talked about gay boys. While, as Cathy highlighted, Jessie's sexual-

ity certainly made for juicy gossip, such tales did not seem to affect her popularity or likability. If anything, her non-normative gender practices and sexual identity bolstered her popularity among many students.

Jessie self-consciously dressed differently from other girls at River High. Her clothing reflected contemporary "lesbian" styles, mixing both feminine and masculine signs such as baggy pants and fitted shirts (Esterberg 1996). This aesthetic marked her as different from most girls at River High though not necessarily as masculine. She did not share this style with a peer group as the Basketball Girls did. She told me that her friends actively encouraged her to dress more like other girls.

It's kinda like my friends try to push it on me, 'How come you don't dress more like a lady?' and all that stuff. I don't know if you've seen me on a regular day, but I don't wear tight jeans. I don't have one pair of tight jeans in my closet. I don't have one skirt in my closet. I have dresses in my closet, but they go in a separate closet [laughs]. I don't wear the baby tees and stuff like that. On a good day I'll throw on a shirt and a pair of pants and just go.

In response to her friends' urgings, Jessie had developed a critique of typical girls' attire. She argued that other girls at River dressed in ways that emphasized their heterosexual availability.

There's girls at the school who wear shirts that are too provocative. It screams attention. It's just like, what are you trying to get at, you know? I don't want to sit there and try to talk to somebody when their boobs are hanging out at me and I'm just, okay [both of us laugh]. I mean, it's hard not to look when someone's wearing something like that! I mean it's hard to concentrate.

Jessie was most likely both distracted by and critical of such apparel choices. Given that she both was attracted to other girls and was a girl herself, she had a unique criticism of typical girls' clothing. She did not want to be looked at in the same way as these girls, so she specifically bought boys' clothing: "It's just like I don't try to impress anybody. I dress in like a turtleneck and a pair of khakis. And it doesn't look bad. But it

doesn't look like I'm dressing like a girl. I don't, most of the clothes I buy aren't girls' clothes. They're boys' clothes. I mean, I'm not ashamed of it." In part Jessie claimed that dressing this way was a function of her priorities. She wanted to be comfortable and spend a small amount of time on her appearance. Neither of these things were typical priorities for girls at River. She didn't understand why girls would dress in clothing that seemed so at odds with the functions of daily life:

Girls will dress in skirts and stuff for school and it's like, how can you sit in a desk for, like, seven hours and wear a skirt! Gimme a break! You can't! You can't! You just can't do it! It's like, why you gonna get up an hour earlier when you can sleep in an hour later, you know? [laughs] I mean, my hair used to be down to my butt. I cut it to here because my day would go so much quicker if I just didn't have to deal with it.

Unlike other girls, she felt she didn't need to impress or draw attention with her body. Instead, it seemed that she saw her body as functional, active, and agentic, judging by her love of dancing and her passion for sports. Though she lacked a coherent political critique and instead held individual girls responsible for their clothing choices, her own choices left her empowered and confident in the face of a sexist and homophobic social world.

Like the Basketball Girls, Jessie was no stranger to fights. She and her friend Nel spoke fondly of the previous year's CAPA, during which there had been several fights. Jessie seemed to think they were great fun, talking about how she was cheering for Nel during one of the fights. Nel bragged about starting a fight, saying "it was cool" because she knew that "Jessie had my back." Jessie's on again/off again rival was Rebeca. For a while those two couldn't stand each other, in no small part because they were "talkin' to," or flirting with, the same girl, Jana, Rebeca's ex-girlfriend. Jessie explained, "Jana tried to get at me and Rebeca got pissed off." All three of them attended a dance early in the school year, soon after Jana tried to "get at" Jessie. Jessie told me, "I was just walking out and Rebeca said I was an ugly bitch or something. My friend hears her

and slaps her. I just like, 'Oh my God.'" The fight didn't escalate because, as Jessie explained, "You know, I could have beat her ass a long time ago. But I didn't, out of respect for [their] relationship. You're my friend and I don't want to start anything. I try my hardest to be nice to her." Jessie laughed at Rebeca's attempt to apologize later: "She knows I'd beat the shit out of her if anything happens. Honestly, she's up to my hip. She's really short and she looks like this little boy." Like the Basketball Girls Jessie saw herself as tough and ready to fight. She and Rebeca never did come to blows, but both spoke often about the possibility of a fight between the two of them.

One of the reasons Jessie didn't like Rebeca was that she saw Rebeca as "flaunting" her sexuality: "They flaunt it all the time at school. I don't need to flaunt my stuff to prove a point. I don't understand what their point is. They're in a relationship and they're together. I just think that they try to show it off too much." The vehemence with which she said this revealed some of Jessie's coping strategies around being gay in high school. While she dressed and acted in many ways like a boy, she balanced this with a sort of "don't ask, don't tell" approach to her sexuality. In large part, this approach reflected her own ambivalence about her non-normative gender practices and her lesbian identity. This said, she did acknowledge the "double standard" applied to heterosexual and gay relationships:

There's straight couples all over the place and they can just go anywhere and be together and it's okay. Then you have the gay couples that get together and people just gawk and stare at you like you are some alien. I think it's okay that they are open about their relationship. But sometimes I just think they are trying to prove a point.

Jessie was nervous enough about other students' stares that she attended the Homecoming Rally with her male friend Gary as her escort. She also attended dances with male friends, with the exception of her senior prom, when she finally took her girlfriend, Sasha. That said, Jessie also highlighted that she desired women in subtle, and possibly male-identified, ways. She was, for instance, a fan of the Playboy Bunny in-

signia. She designed an art project in which she crafted a "bunny" out of chipped glass, saying, "I just like it! I've got one on my backpack. I've got one on my car. I just like it. It's cool." Like Rebeca, she engaged in "ventriloquation" by adopting and displaying a symbol associated with pornographic representations of women.

During homecoming, which is, like many school rituals, a time of intensified gender and sexual norms, Jessie's non-normative gender and sexual identity caused quite a stir among the student body. When chosen as homecoming queen, Jessie told me that her clothing choices were a subject of gossip. Students saw her non-gender-normative clothing choices as contradicting the traditional requirements of homecoming queen.

The funny thing is that I get so much trash talked about me as far as homecoming goes: "Oh, like, she's gotta wear a dress." All girls that made it put on their little tight clothes. "I'm trying to get votes," you know? Me, I come in my pajamas, I don't care! I think the reason why I got votes is because I didn't fake it. I think that I was original and I was nice to people and I was myself. I'm a big, like, comedian person. I like to make people laugh. I like to talk and hang out and have a good time.

During the several weeks leading up to the Homecoming Rally and vote, Jessie almost got in several fights, for, while she was popular, there were students at River who opposed her election because she was gay:

They say they don't think I'd be a good enough person to represent their school. I almost dropped out of homecoming just because I didn't want all the trash talked about me. I'm not one to not stick up for myself. I almost got in two fights before homecoming day. I would have gotten everything taken away from me, though. Because I'm senior class president. So I would have been impeached and then homecoming and then my scholarship. I mean it's just too much to lose. If I didn't have anything to lose, then damn, I would have done it.

Clearly, Jesse did not drop out of the homecoming race. Winning homecoming queen floored her. She said that she actually cried when she won: "I was just like, I even cried! I was totally surprised. I never cry. I take

after my dad. My dad's just like a really hard, stern-faced man. I just broke down in tears, and I was like, 'Oh God! Oh God!' " She fluttered her hand at her face as she imitated herself, laughing. She said that many of the other students were equally surprised, saying, it "shocked everybody" because "throughout my whole life I've always hung out with boys." Some people were rude: "They were like, man, it's just like a dude."

While Jessie prided herself on her refusal to exploit her body to gain votes, she did cave to what she felt as strong pressure to conform to normative gender self-presentation during the formal homecoming rituals, in which she wore a dress. When I asked her why, she said, "Um, I dunno. I'm a person about pantsuits. I just sit back and relax [putting her arm over the chair at this point and spreading her legs out in front of her]. Do my own thing. They were just like, 'No, Jessie, you have to wear a dress.'" I asked her who "they" were, those people telling her she had to wear a dress. In her answer, Jessie aptly highlighted how social structures have a life of their own: "It's just, it's just policy. It's like nobody ever . . . I was like, uhh [groan], might as well keep tradition and wear a damn dress." There was not, as far as I could find, an official policy requiring that homecoming queens wear a dress. That Jessie felt there was a policy highlights the power of the interactional order and the pressure to "do gender" embedded in school rituals. She described herself as being very uncomfortable during homecoming: "The dress I wore during the day I wore during the night, and it was outside. It was freezing outside." Her dress was a tight, sparkly, floor-length gold dress with spaghetti straps. Indeed, she looked uncomfortable as the form-fitting dress and the high heels confined her usual long confident stride to short, frequent steps. Even the ladies who worked in the school office, who sat behind me at the Homecoming Rally, talked about how much Jessie didn't like her homecoming dress, saying, "You know she hates that dress. She just does not like that dress."

Jessie fittingly described how constraining the dress was when she

talked about sitting on the homecoming float: "Yeah, I'm sitting there and I'm getting on the float, and they're like, 'Jessie, don't spread your legs so wide!' It's hard. I'm trying to sit with my legs all crossed. I'm just like, 'Oh God, I swear I got a cramp.'" She was so uncomfortable in her dress that she changed her clothes at the homecoming dance afterwards: "I took pictures of me and one of my other friends, we, like, changed clothes. I was wearing pink pajama pants and a white shirt."<sup>4</sup> Jessie's experience of her formal attire reflects what feminists have long highlighted about the confining and nonutilitarian nature of much of women's clothing.

Jessie both resisted normative definitions of femininity and engaged in them in her varying bodily compartments, clothing choices, and romantic relationships. Like the Basketball Girls she was an athlete, though she drew on the "cool pose" to a more limited extent than they did, and she remained somewhat of a liminal figure, moving in and out of masculine and feminine bodily compartments. Also like Rebeca, she was engaging, beautiful, and charming, all traits that allowed her some leeway in a non-normative gendered presentation of self. She engaged, though to a lesser extent than the Basketball Girls, in sexist practices. She also, I think, exhibited quite a bit of bravery as she bucked many school norms of gender and sexuality to serve as an out gay homecoming queen.

#### THE GAY/STRAIGHT ALLIANCE GIRLS

Where the Basketball Girls and Jessie espoused a sort of hip-hop ethos, the girls in GSA displayed a more "goth," alternative, or "punk" ethos. The GSA Girls, Genevieve, Lacy, Riley, and T-Rex, often dressed in black clothing with rainbow accents, Doc Martin shoes, or army fatigues. Three of them sported multicolored hair that often changed hue. Riley, a self-described "riot grrl," favored bright pink or blonde short hair accented with barrettes, whereas Genevieve and Lacy tended toward deeper browns, burgundies, and reds for their long dark hair. Tall and imposing, T-Rex wore baggy "skater" clothes, had long blonde hair, and

often wore contacts with stars on them. T-Rex was the guardian of the group, describing herself as "their bodyguard." Lacy dressed more traditionally feminine, often wearing long flowing dresses and occasionally wearing baggy cut-off jean shorts and old T-shirts. Genevieve wore button-down shirts and a daily changing variety of ties. Like the Basketball Girls, the GSA Girls were almost always together in and out of school. They were an emotionally intense group of girls, deeply committed to social justice and equality.

They were all active members of the school's GSA. GSAs are school clubs that are increasingly popping up throughout the country. They function as "safe zones" for students where they can be free from gender- and sexuality-based teasing and taunts. The meetings consisted of planning political and social activities such as the Day of Silence, movie nights, get-togethers with other GSAs, and the Gay Prom. As many as seventeen kids came to the biweekly GSA meetings, and about five to ten attended regularly. The GSA Girls and Ricky formed the core of the GSA. Students who attended the GSA were a racially diverse group. While many of the members of the GSA did not identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgendered, T-Rex was the only straight-identified girl in the GSA Girls group.

GSA Girls purposefully challenged the sexualized and gendered authority of the school. In one meeting Lacy, the GSA president, helped a boy who said that his friend was harassed by a homophobic teacher. Lacy told him and the rest of the participants in the meeting about California's AB 537, an assembly bill that protects gay students from homophobic harassment in school. Lacy encouraged the boy to speak to school administrators, invoking that law for protection. The GSA Girls constantly challenged norms, especially those having to do with gender and sexuality. They often said things like "Why be normal?" and "Normal is bad."

The students and administration at River High were antagonistic to the existence of the GSA. The girls were keenly aware of this antagonism, experiencing both violence and lack of acknowledgment from school authorities and other students. The previous year one of the GSA

Girls had had her locker broken into. Other students tore down posters advertising GSA meetings. The GSA Girls perceived that the administration made it difficult for them to advertise their group. Lacy often worried in second period, as announcements were read over the intercom, that the GSA announcement would not be read, an omission that had in fact happened many times. Once, while enduring the daily ritual of waiting to hear the GSA meeting announcement, she explained that GSA members did not even know about the special lunch organized to highlight student groups until shortly before lunchtime on the day of the event.

GSA meetings provided time for students to discuss inequality and social change. One day Lacy ran an exercise about socialization in which she asked the assembled group of fifteen to brainstorm how they were taught, as children, right versus wrong behaviors. She wrote their answers on the whiteboard at the front of the classroom. On the "right" side students suggested marrying a rich Catholic man, going to school, making money, going to church, morality, respecting adults, no smoking, no lying, no stealing. On the "wrong" side were listed eating yellow snow, Internet porn, playing doctor, dirty walls, cussing, drugs, premarital sex. This spawned a discussion of right and wrong in general. Ricky shouted out that he learned that "eye shadow going on before eyebrows was wrong!" The group laughed as Ricky explained, "That's what happens when you grow up in show business!" Ally contributed: "I learned that girls were supposed to have long hair and wear skirts, and pants go on the boys." Again Ricky chimed in, "I totally break that rule!" flipping his shoulder-length hair dramatically. Lacy then asked them what they still thought was wrong from that list. The students said that playing doctor was not wrong, premarital sex was not wrong, and that eating snow was not wrong. They then turned back to the "good" side and said that going to church wasn't necessarily good. And when Lacy pointed to "being normal," the whole group shouted out "No! No! No! No!" Lacy used this as an opportunity to discuss where homophobia comes from. Some students suggested that people were raised that way. Others suggested the government was re-

sponsible. GSA meetings served as a place to both challenge norms and explore possibilities for social change. It also gave these youth a place to be with other kids like themselves and to plan a social life outside school.

For Genevieve, Lacy's girlfriend, the GSA was a safe space at school where she could be with people like her. When I asked her, "What does it feel like for you to be in a GSA meeting?" she answered:

It's really weird, being with people that are like me and then being around people that aren't like me. A lot of times I forget that everybody, that there's a lot of people that aren't gay. I go to GSA and it's normal to me. Then it's like, wow, there's a guy and a girl. That's weird. I see it every day, I don't care, I'm like, whatever, but if I think about it it's different and I feel different, that's the only time I think about it.

But the students often felt that this space was under threat due to both administrative negligence and peer harassment. For instance, students expressed fears of being disrupted or attacked by other students. Genevieve said that she believed that a homophobic student would probably disrupt one of their meetings. During a GSA meeting, Natalia, a white bisexual girl with multicolored hair and baggy pants, shared a nightmare that she had had the previous week. She told the GSA she had dreamt that a bunch of "jocks" had come into a meeting and started "shooting up the place." The other students laughed, but some also commented that they wouldn't be surprised if that happened. The GSA meetings were a safe place and a space that was constantly under threat.

Even in the context of these homophobic experiences, Genevieve described her school experiences before coming to River High as even more homophobic. She had lived with her mother in Minnesota and her father in Arkansas before moving in with her grandmother in California. "In Arkansas, whenever people would find out that I was gay, I couldn't walk down the hall without someone being like, 'faggot,' 'fuckin' dyke,' or whatever." She tried to start a club at her previous high school because "they didn't have any sort of support group or club, but they said no." Before living in Arkansas she had attended school in Minnesota, where stu-



dents were less vitriolic but generally unsupportive because the town was “hard-core Christian.” While she repeatedly noted the homophobia at River High, she said that the presence of the GSA made a big difference. She described being surprised when she came to River High and found out that “wow, there’s a GSA. What’s a GSA?” She hastened to tell me that the students at River High “don’t like the GSA.”

Though other students at River High didn’t readily describe the GSA Girls as “girls who act like boys,” the GSA Girls themselves often described their own gender practices as masculine. Genevieve dressed masculine, although in a different way than the Basketball Girls. Much to the consternation of her conservative, religious grandmother, her fashion trademark was her ever-present tie.

I don’t wear ties around my grandma. She asked me what I wanted for my birthday. I said, “I want a tie.” She’s like, “You already look like a boy enough.” I said, “Grandma, I do not look like a boy. I have breasts and I don’t hide them, and I don’t wear big baggy boy clothes.” But she’s like, “You have those boy shirts.”

Genevieve’s clothes were form fitting, but they were also masculine. She routinely wore button-down shirts with pants and ties. She identified these ties as masculine. In the hallway one day she ran up to me and grabbed her tie, excitedly bouncing up and down as she exclaimed, “Look at my masculinity!” then added a little strut as if for emphasis. She did have large breasts, which seemed a bit at odds with the boy’s clothes she wore. She said that she wore the ties because she thought “they’re very cute. I feel masculine. I feel bigger and better.” Genevieve combined masculine and feminine gender markers in her appearance, wearing typically masculine attire—jeans, button-down shirts, and ties—while making sure they accentuated her curves.

Genevieve also refused to wear makeup, a key signifier of femininity, and put down girls who did wear it:

I hate it when girls can’t leave their house without putting makeup on. I hate that! I went out of my house without makeup on. Just like I feel

like wearing a tie. But some girls are like, “I can’t leave the house without makeup.” Three hours later they’re finally coming out.

Genevieve claimed she was not going to wear makeup because “I’m not going to hide who I really am.” Makeup, for Genevieve, not only was too feminine but also was a lie about her true self.

Genevieve discursively worked to recast herself as masculine by attributing a phallus to herself (much like Rebeca’s claiming a “jock”). She described the boys at River High by saying, “They can suck my cock. They’re rude. I’m serious. I just don’t like them.” By claiming a phallus Genevieve symbolically regendered her body. Importantly, Genevieve claimed a penetrative phallus, much like the boys in chapter 4. Like them she exercised dominance through a sexualized discourse in which she framed herself as a powerful penetrator and the boys as feminized receivers. She turned their language upon themselves by reappropriating it defiantly.

Genevieve, Lacy, and Riley self-consciously played with gender at ritualized school events such as the prom and Winter Ball. For the GSA Girls, these events were not a time for the enactment of normative gender codes but rather a time to challenge gendered norms. Instead of joking about and superficially dismissing feminine dress, the GSA Girls talked about the gendered meanings of clothing. As a result, they invented gender-blending outfits featuring masculine and feminine markers.

When the girls talked about going to Winter Ball, Genevieve and Lacy playfully argued over who was going to wear the dress. Genevieve told me that she wanted to wear a suit to Winter Ball but complained that her grandma would prevent her: “I’d have to sneak because my grandma would be like, ‘Nope.’” Lacy told me, at one point in their negotiations, that she was upset because Genevieve wouldn’t wear a dress. Lacy said, “I made her try on this black velvet dress and she looked sooo hot! It came down to here and up to here! [motioning down to her chest and up to her thigh]. She finally said she’d wear it if I found her shoes. So now she can just say ‘no’ to any pair of shoes!” Lacy concluded by sighing in

mock frustration, rolling her eyes, and smiling. Both of them smiled at the end of this discussion.

At the dance, Genevieve was in fact quite proud as she ran up to me in this same long black dress, saying "I'm wearing a dress!" When I asked her why she had decided to wear a dress, she pointed at Lacy and said, "Cause she wanted me to look sexy." She quickly added with pride, as she pointed to the jewelry on her neck, "But I'm still wearing a tie!" Around her neck was a black velvet choker with a prominent cubic zirconia tie in the middle.

Genevieve and Lacy both claimed masculine and feminine attributes in their clothing styles, interactional styles, and interests. While, with her long flowing skirts, Lacy appeared normatively feminine, at times at least she proudly talked about ways she saw herself as masculine. One day, when we were sitting in the drama class room, Lacy told me, "My car is my manhood. Ask anyone. Guys talk about dick size. I'll talk about my car." She told me that Genevieve teased her about her car obsession: "You're such a butch guy. It's just a car." Like the Basketball Girls, the GSA Girls lightheartedly teased each other about gender maneuvering.

The GSA Girls talked with ease about relationships among a butch-femme aesthetic, romantic relationships, and gendered oppression. Romantic relationships were a frequent topic of conversation during GSA meetings. Talking about their relationships in this club provided both a forum for personal advice and a place to talk about these relationships in terms of larger meanings about masculinity and femininity. For instance, during one GSA meeting Ally said, "I think no matter who you date there is always one who is more masculine and one who is more feminine." Riley responded,

I totally don't think that is true! Gender roles suck! When I was dating Jenny sometimes I wanted to wear pants and walk on the outside of the sidewalk. She wouldn't let me. It's weird dating in gender roles if you are not particularly in one. I would wear something and she would be like, "You look too butch. Take that off."

Talking analytically about "gender roles" was something that really only happened among the GSA Girls and during GSA meetings. This sort of political engagement and social criticism probably elaborated the GSA Girls' vocabulary about complex issues of gender, identity, and sexuality.

Not surprisingly, Genevieve found the school not only hostile to her relationship but hostile to any politicization around same-sex relationships. Genevieve, Lacy, and Riley experienced antagonism from both the students and the administration at River High school in terms of their gendered and sexual identifications. Genevieve hated it "when guys are like, 'Oh, I'm okay with two chicks in bed, but I'm not okay with two guys.'" She saw the boys' seeming acceptance of lesbians as an indication of sexism, not antihomophobic attitudes. Genevieve did not see herself as a sexual object for these boys but rather rejected their sexualization of her and her relationship. Conversely, Rebeca's friends talked about guys desiring her as a badge of pride. Unlike Rebeca, Genevieve felt antagonism from the students and the administration at River High school in terms of both her gendered self-presentation and her lesbianism. Genevieve told me, "I've been getting really dirty looks from that guy, some guy in authority at our school. I don't know what he is. I don't care what he is. All I know is that he looks at me and Lacy really rude."

Interactions between the Basketball Girls and the GSA Girls were rare. Though the girls of both groups engaged in gender maneuvering, they were at opposite ends of the social hierarchy and had very different political and interactional styles. Often when I was around they would come together in order to talk to me. I sometimes tensed during these interactions, realizing that their different ideologies about gender and politics might conflict and fearing that I would have to mediate. One afternoon their different approaches did appear during an interaction. As the school bell rang Rebeca yelled "It's C. J.!" as she and her girlfriend, Annie, ran up to me. I congratulated them on their three-month anniversary as Lacy and Genevieve walked up holding hands. An uneasy tension hung in the air, since the two groups usually didn't interact with one another. To ease

the tension I spoke first. I asked the group if they were planning to attend Winter Ball. Rebeca responded excitedly, "I am! I'm wearing a dress!" Genevieve piped up, "Me too!" Surprised that after all of her talk about wearing a tux Rebeca planned to wear a dress, I asked her why. "My mom is so gay!" she responded. "She won't let me out of the house in a suit!" Lacy challenged her, "Why are you calling something you don't like gay?" Rebeca stated, "I always do that. I always call people I don't like gay." As if unable to continue with this line of discussion, the girls dropped the subject and began to talk about Rebeca's shoes. Lacy's question to Rebeca demonstrated her politicized understanding of sexuality, challenging Rebeca's use of a homophobic epithet. It was as if Rebeca couldn't make the connection between homophobia at River High (which she didn't experience) and her own derogation of the term *gay*.

The GSA Girls also challenged this casual, daily homophobia at institutional events. In chapter 2 I documented how River High endorsed heterosexuality and gendered difference through school-sponsored rituals. The school's resistance to expressions of non-normative feminine identities was made clear when National Coming Out Day fell on the same day as homecoming, a day when the school celebrates heterosexual pairings through the Homecoming Assembly and football game (resulting in the GSA Girls' joking references to National Homecoming Out Day). Several of the students from GSA had been busy creating special shirts that read "Nobody Knows I'm a Lesbian" or "Nobody Knows I'm Gay" for National Coming Out Day. They wore them proudly to the Homecoming Rally, which, just like the Mr. Cougar Rally, consisted of the six homecoming princesses competing in skits to be voted as that year's homecoming queen. These shirts were planned to contrast sharply with the celebration of heterosexuality that was the Homecoming Rally. As with Mr. Cougar, the weeks leading up to the Homecoming Rally, game, and election were filled with student competitions, spirit days, and votes for homecoming princesses and queens.

The final skit of the Homecoming Rally, entitled "All for You," starred Jessica and Angelica, two Latina seniors. Clad in tight jeans and black tank

tops, the two princesses began dancing to a popular dance song by Janet Jackson. Their dance moves consisted of repeatedly gyrating their hips in sexually suggestive dance moves. During the song that followed, seven girls, including Jessica and Angelica, each grabbed a boy as Janet Jackson sang, "How many nights I've laid in bed excited over you / I've closed my eyes and thought of us a hundred different ways / I've gotten there so many times I wonder how 'bout you . . . If I was your girl / Oh the things I'd do to you / I'd make you call out my name . . ." The girls walked up behind the boys and ran their hands down the front of the boys' bodies. Then they turned the boys around and made them kneel in front of them so that the boys were face to face with the girls' crotches. The girls took the boys' heads in two hands and moved them around as the girls wiggled their hips in the boys' faces. The dance ended with the boys getting up and the group posing together with Jessica and Angelica lying down in front with one leg jutting into the air, crotches exposed. This skit followed two other skits featuring homecoming princesses performing similar, only slightly less sexually explicit, dances.

After the Homecoming Rally and its celebration of girls' heterosexual availability, Lacy, Genevieve, and Riley ran up to me wearing all black with rainbow pins and belts. Given the GSA's preparations leading up to National Coming Out Day, I was wondering why they weren't wearing their special gay pride T-shirts. I didn't have time to ask where their shirts were as they tumbled over each other, indignantly explaining to me what had happened. Lacy angrily unbuttoned her sweater revealing her black and white "Nobody Knows I'm a Lesbian" T-shirt, and said, "Mr. Hobart came up to me and said I have to cover this shirt up. I couldn't wear it!" Riley and Lacy, equally resentful, cried, "He made me take mine off too!" Riley unfolded the shirt she had painted in rainbow colors. Neither of them was wearing a gay pride shirt anymore. Lacy, incensed, cried, "And look what they can do up there! All grinding against each other and stuff! And I can't wear this shirt!"

When I asked Genevieve later why the girls couldn't wear the shirts, she explained,

'Cause this school says that if you are wearing a shirt saying that you're a lesbian that says that you are supposedly having sexual acts with the same sex. I find that stupid, because what if someone was walking around saying, "Hey, I'm a heterosexual," does that mean that you're sexually active? I was very very very angry that day. 'Cause that was the Homecoming Assembly day, my God! Did you see what those girls were doing? Not that I was complaining, but I did have a complaint toward the authority of the school. The school will let chicks rub their crotches and shake their asses in front of all these students in the school. Like nastiness, but my girlfriend can't wear a "Nobody Knows I'm a Lesbian" shirt.

While the principal argued that the problem was not homosexuality but sexual activity, the explicitly sexual displays in the homecoming skits seemed to indicate that something more than concern over sexual activity was going on. The girls argued that equality, not sex, was the point of their T-shirt slogans. It seems the school had very little problem with students addressing sex as long as they focused on girls' heterosexual availability. Mr. Hobart had effectively set up a two-tiered system in which explicit expressions of heterosexuality such as sensual dance moves, skits that told stories about heterosexual relationships, and an entire ritual based on male and female pairings were sanctioned, whereas expressions that challenged such an order, such as T-shirts expressing alternative identities, were banned.

By engaging in a variety of gender practices that challenged sexism and homophobia, the GSA Girls actively reconstructed gender. Instead of giving in to a binary gender system and identifying as either male or female, they drew upon a variety of gender markers. They purposefully wore gender-bending clothing. They saw themselves as agents of social change as they challenged school norms about gender and sexuality. Similarly they self-consciously rejected strict gender roles in dating relationships, moving in and out of feminine and masculine identifications. Their anger at inequality and injustice was a powerful tool that they expressed through politicized gender maneuvering.

## EMBODYING MASCULINITY

The non-normative gender activities in which these girls engaged may be considered a form of what Geertz calls "deep play" (1973). Their gender practices reveal larger tensions around gendered inequality, sexualized power, and contemporary American notions of youth. This sort of cross-gendered dressing and behavior is a way of challenging currently held notions of masculinity and femininity as well as challenging the idea that youth are passive recipients of socialization rather than active creators of their own social worlds (Thorne 1993). The Basketball Girls, Jessie, and the GSA Girls were recognized by others as masculine because of the way they "did gender" (West and Zimmerman 1991): their clothes, their lingo, the way they held themselves, their romantic relationships. However, none of them fell into the category of "boy." Rather their gender displays drew on tropes and practices of masculinity in such a way that these girls were categorized as masculine by themselves and others. In this way they destabilized, to a certain extent, the sex/gender binary and the easy association of masculinity with boys and femininity with girls. The girls' gender transgressions opened up spaces for social change. As Judith Butler (1993) points out, "doing gender" differently can both reinscribe and challenge the gender order by destabilizing gender norms. This sort of activity challenges the naturalness of the categories of masculinity and femininity by destabilizing the association of these identities with specific bodies.

The Basketball Girls, Jessie, and the GSA Girls all engaged in gender resistance, but they did it in different ways. The Basketball Girls' and Jessie's doing of gender both resisted and reinscribed gender norms; the GSA Girls' doing of gender more consistently challenged an unequal gender order in which femininity, to a large extent, was defined by submission and masculinity by dominance. Their different gendered and sexualized practices show that a politicized understanding of gender is central to challenging the gender order.

Historically, differences in gender practices in American lesbian communities largely fell along class lines: in general, working-class lesbians tended to be more invested in dual gender roles and less invested in linking a (largely middle-class and white) feminist agenda with their sexual identities (Faderman 1991; A. Stein 1997). Although the Basketball Girls and the GSA Girls conformed to this pattern in the two different sets of gender practices that they displayed, they complicated it with respect to their backgrounds. The Basketball Girls tended to have stable working- or middle-class families and lived with married parents where either both worked or one was a stay-at-home mother. Conversely, the GSA Girls were from homes where one parent had died and the other was unemployed (Riley), a parent had committed suicide (T-Rex), both parents were absent due to drug use and neglect (Genevieve), or one parent was alcoholic (Lacy). While their economic class status might not be that different, the girls were divided between “hard living” and “settled living” families (Bettie 2003).<sup>5</sup> “Settled living” families have predictable, orderly lifestyles with some modicum of job security. “Hard living” families are characterized by less stable employment, marital strife, and, often, drug use. Life for them is not as stable or predictable. In fact, the GSA Girls’ experiences of injustice in their families might have catalyzed their political activism around social inequality.

While all of these girls were aligned with masculinity, they were aligned differently. The Basketball Girls were seen by others as masculine; in fact, other students usually held them up as an example of girls who “acted like boys.” The GSA Girls were only occasionally cited by other students as masculine, though they self-consciously discussed themselves as masculine. For the most part the Basketball Girls and Jessie firmly rejected fully feminine identifications—stopping short of changing their names or self-referential pronouns. The GSA Girls occupied a more self-consciously ambiguous gendered position, alternately purposely rejecting and embracing markers of femininity and masculinity. Several axes of comparison between the two groups—clothing, dominance, rejection of femininity, and sexuality—provide new

ways to think about relationships between masculinity, femininity, sexuality, and bodies.

All the girls resisted, to different extents, normatively feminine clothing. Rebeca and Jessie wore masculine clothing on a regular basis, except at highly gendered school rituals. Genevieve, however, wore masculine and feminine clothing daily and at highly gendered school events, such as the prom. Her clothes—button-down shirt, ties, and pants—drew on traditionally masculine styles. However, she wore them tailored in such a way that her form-fitting pants and button-down shirts accented her breasts and hips. As a result her clothing displayed a playful ambiguity of gender rather than a strict adherence to a binary gender system. Genevieve reflected on her clothing choices and took explicit pride in her “masculinity,” as she called her tie. Even when she went to highly gendered events such as the prom she took pains to mix gendered attributes, such as wearing her cubic zirconia tie with a slinky velvet dress. Rebeca and Jessie refused explicitly gendered interpretations of their masculine clothes, simply claiming that they wore them because they were comfortable. Others required that they account for their clothing practices (teasing them for their clothing) in ways they wouldn’t have if they had actually been boys dressing in the exact same clothes. Though their logic wasn’t explicitly feminist, Rebeca’s and Jessie’s desire to be comfortable was, in itself, a critique of femininity and the confining and oppressive nature of women’s clothing.

Both Rebeca and Genevieve routinely denaturalized the sexualized receptivity of a female body by claiming a phallus and positioning themselves as sexualized penetrators rather than receivers of sexual activity. Rebeca repeatedly disavowed a feminine body by saying that she had girls on her “jock” and arguing that she had “muscles” instead of breasts. She also made sure that her girlfriend *did* have “boobs” and not muscles. Genevieve also claimed a phallus, but she did so only to insult boys she saw as homophobic or sexist. She actually sounded like boys in the River High weight room who talked in lewd terms about their sexual adventures with girls. Genevieve used masculine, penetrative insults ironically

(if they had come from a boy she probably would have considered them homophobic or sexist) and turned them back upon the boys much as gay activists have reappropriated the word *queer* in their rhetoric.

The Basketball Girls and Jessie also participated in organized sports, a practice associated with boys, masculinity, and dominance (Adams and Bettis 2003; Edley and Wetherell 1997; Griffin 1995; Heywood and Dworkin 2003; Parker 1996; Shakib 2003; Theberge 2000). These girls were able to experience their bodies as agentic and powerful, much as boys might experience their bodies, because of their participation in sports. Their bodies weren't just objects to be ogled but active and powerful. Thus their sports participation, in large part, may have provided them with a different sense of their bodies than other teenage girls had.

The Basketball Girls', Jessie's, and the GSA Girls' different experiences of school status and different perceptions of the River High administration's homophobia lay in their collective levels of politicization (or lack thereof) about their sexuality and gender presentation as well as their ability to redefine themselves as actors in their social worlds. While none were strangers to the disciplinary system, they seemed to get in trouble for two very different reasons. The Basketball Girls got in trouble because they acted like boys. They were loud and disruptive and flouted basic school rules and teachers' authority. While they drew on hip-hop styles associated with African American males, they didn't embody this racialized or sexed status, so their "cool pose" was less of an actual threat.

The GSA Girls, in contrast, were punished for opposing the school in a more subtle and politicized way that revealed the embedded sexism and homophobia embodied in the school's day-to-day activities. Their distinctive ability to connect homophobia and sexism landed them in a different place in the school system than that occupied by Jessie and the Basketball Girls. At homecoming, the GSA Girls directly confronted the school's heterosexism during one of its most heterosexual rituals. The Basketball Girls and Jessie, on the other hand, participated wholeheartedly in various school rituals, and the Basketball Girls actively mocked

National Coming Out Day and used the word *gay* as a pejorative on a regular basis.

A close examination of the girls who challenged gender conventions in interaction and personal style demonstrates that theorists of masculinity need to take seriously the idea of female masculinity because it illustrates masculinity as practices enacted by both male and female bodies instead of as the domain of men. However, to look at girls who "act like boys" only as a challenge to a binary gender system is to miss the complex and contradictory ways gendered and sexualized power operates. A variety of masculinity practices enacted by these girls seemed to combat the equation of male bodies and masculinity on several fronts. The Basketball Girls and Jessie garnered students' respect, notice, and admiration for bucking gender expectations. However, their gender practices sometimes came at the cost of dignity for normatively gendered girls as they engaged in dominance practices of fighting and objectifying girls that sometimes looked like boys' masculinity practices. The GSA Girls provided a coherent and sustained critique of the relationship between gender oppression and homophobia through their activism and gendered practices. That said, they didn't have the social power of the Basketball Girls and Jessie to call attention to this political critique of gender and sexual norms at River High. So it seems that, taken as a whole, their varieties of gender maneuvering all called attention, in the world of River High, to the fact that masculinity cannot be easily equated solely with male bodies.