

Dude, You're a Fag

Masculinity and Sexuality in High School

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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA PRESS

Berkeley Los Angeles London

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University of California Press
Berkeley and Los Angeles, California

University of California Press, Ltd.
London, England

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Pascoe, C. J., 1974–

Dude, you're a fag : masculinity and sexuality in high school / C.J. Pascoe.
p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN-13: 978-0-520-24862-5 (cloth : alk. paper), ISBN-10: 0-520-24862-7
(cloth : alk. paper)

ISBN-13: 978-0-520-25230-1 (pbk. : alk. paper), ISBN-10: 0-520-25230-6
(pbk. : alk. paper)

1. Teenage boys—California—Social conditions. 2. High school students—California—Social conditions. 3. Masculinity. 4. Heterosexuality. 5. Gender identity. 6. Identity (Psychology) in adolescence. 7. Socialization. I. Title.

HQ797.P37 2007

306.76'40835109794—dc22

2006023537

Manufactured in the United States of America

15 14 13 12 11 10 09 08 07
10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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CHAPTER SIX

Conclusion

*Thinking about Schooling, Gender,
and Sexuality*

Walking through the bustling hallways at River High, watching letterman jacket-clad students rush past, and listening to the morning announcements, I often felt as if I had stepped into a filmic representation of the archetypal American high school. Teachers, students, and administrators let me know I wasn't alone in this perception of River High, as they spoke proudly of "tradition" and "Cougar Pride." They demonstrated this pride through their energetic investments in school rituals of homecoming, Mr. Cougar, prom, sports games, and assemblies. This sense of normality rendered River High a particularly helpful case with which to think through contemporary constructions of masculinity, sexuality, and inequality.

Up until this point, I realize, the story of masculinity at River High must seem quite grim. Many of the behaviors students recognized as masculine were sexist and homophobic and at best generally involved insulting others. In this concluding chapter I recap central themes in my analysis of masculinity at River High. I also return to the theories of gender and sexuality I set out at the beginning of the book, adding to and reworking them to better account for the masculinity processes I observed.

MASCULINITY AT RIVER HIGH

Repudiation Rituals

As psychoanalytic theorists of gender identity have pointed out, processes of repudiation are central to a masculine sense of self (Butler 1995; Chodorow 1978; Dinnerstein 1976). Through school ceremonies, engagement with pedagogy, and interactional rituals, boys at River continually repudiated femininity, weakness, and, most importantly, the specter of the "fag." Such repudiations were alternatively, and often simultaneously, funny, as in the Mr. Cougar skit when Brent and Greg finally shed their fire-engine-red miniskirts, and earnestly serious, as when Pablo called Mitch a fag for merely inquiring about male dancers. Fags, for all that boys defined them as powerless, weak, and unmanly, seemed to wield an immense amount of power. A fag is profoundly unmasculine, yet possesses the ability to penetrate and thus render any boy unmasculine. More than femininity, more than powerlessness, more than childhood, the abject nature of the specter of the fag required constant, vigilant, earnest repudiation. These repudiations constituted, in large part, boys' daily relationships and communication rituals. Their humor, in particular, depended on continual joking about fags, imitation of fags, and transformation of one another into fags. The aggressiveness of this sort of humor cemented publicly masculine identities as boys collectively battled a terrifying, destructive, and simultaneously powerless Other, while each boy was, at the same time, potentially vulnerable to being positioned as this Other.¹

Boys' repudiatory interaction rituals didn't occur in a vacuum. School ceremonies and authorities encouraged, engaged in, and reproduced the centrality of repudiation processes to adolescent masculinity. Mocking the unmasculine was central to school rituals such as Mr. Cougar. Boys ripped off skirts, transforming themselves from nerds to real men, and

mocked their weaker, feminized rivals in sporting competitions. The administration not only approved of but also awarded trophies to the winners of these skits, thus cementing these refutations as synonymous with popularity, dominance, and masculinity. Similar masculinity processes happened in the classroom; teachers engaged in or at least tacitly approved of these repudiations by ignoring students' comments, and sometimes, as with Mr. Kellogg or Mr. McNally, teachers engaged in these processes of repudiation themselves.

Confirmation Rituals

In addition to rituals of repudiation, masculinity processes at River High included interactional and institutional rituals of confirmation. Through engaging in rituals of sexualized dominance, boys invested in and reproduced meanings of masculinity as heterosexual and agentic. Like processes of repudiation, confirmation processes were embedded in school ceremonies. Mr. Cougar skits centered on the ability of boys to "get girls," linking male popularity with control of girls' bodies and desires. In classrooms teachers garnered the favor of male students by drawing upon relationships between masculinity, heterosexuality, and sexual activity. For instance, Mrs. Mac assumed that only boys and not girls would be interested in absconding with the condoms after the safer-sex presentation. Teachers ignored dangerous forms of these confirmation processes when boys' sex talk took the form of blatant sexual harassment. In fact, I never heard a faculty member reprimand a boy for the sometimes offensive (and often nonsensical) ways they spoke about girls' bodies. Indeed, this type of symbolic violence permeated boys' discussions about girls.

In public spaces (though not necessarily when alone with their girlfriends, or even in one-on-one interviews with me),² boys repeatedly engaged in heterosexual discourses not so much to express desire, longing, or pleasure as to indicate that they could control girls' bodies. They "got girls" in ways that ranged from the seemingly benign to the, quite

frankly, violent and dangerous. Having a girlfriend seems like a normal and mostly harmless teenage rite of passage. But in the context of the public interaction between heterosexuality and masculinity, having girlfriends becomes, in part, a form of "getting girls" through discursive violence and physical force in which having a girlfriend confirms some sort of baseline heterosexuality.

Certainly this does not mean that boys don't have girlfriends for whom they care deeply. Even Chad, the exemplar of masculinity at River High, told me, at length, during our interview, about how much he loved his girlfriend. Possessing intense emotions for one's girlfriend doesn't negate the fact that this same girlfriend may also serve as a masculinity resource, bolstering a boy's claim on heterosexuality. In public contexts, which is where manifestations of compulsive heterosexuality occur, boys tended to close off, hide, or otherwise deny emotional attachments to girls. Instead, many boys physically and verbally harassed girls sexually. Under the guise of flirting they manipulated girls' bodies by throwing them around and engaging in games of "uncle" in which girls squealed submissively in order for the "game" to end. While their private interactions with girls or even with each other might involve tender discussions of desire and emotion, public sex talk didn't indicate desire; instead it highlighted boys' control over girls' bodies. These rituals of mythic storytelling included boys' stories about the crazy things they could make girls' bodies do—fart, poop, orgasm, or bleed. These stories were simultaneously information-sharing ventures and masculinity processes. In talking about and interacting with girls this way, boys invested in and reproduced meanings of masculinity characterized and constituted by eroticized male dominance and sexualized female submission.

Race

These processes of confirmation and repudiation were characterized by racialized meanings and, more importantly, are ways of reproducing a gendered racial inequality. The findings in this book echo other research on

masculinity indicating that masculinity varies with race and is constituted by and constitutes racialized meanings (Almaguer 1991; Bucholtz 1999; Fine et al. 1997; Kelley 2004; Majors 2001; Mercer 1994; Riggs 1991; Ross 1998; Zinn 1998). Indeed, racial and gendered meanings often cannot be understood if they are decoupled (Combahee River Collective 1981; Collins 1990; V. Smith 1994; Zinn and Dill 1996). Like many Americans, students at River High understood race primarily in terms of whiteness and blackness.³ While several of the students I observed and interviewed listed a number of racial/ethnic backgrounds—German, Puerto Rican, Hispanic, Chinese, El Salvadorian, Filipino, Irish, and Mexican, for instance—most regularly identified themselves and others as either white or black.

Research indicates that schools treat African American boys differently from white boys (J. Davis 1999; Ferguson 2000; Majors 2001). I saw several instances at River High in which school officials punished African American boys for behaviors that were expected of white boys. In part, the economic positionings of many of the African American boys at River rendered them more vulnerable to school surveillance. As Darnell pointed out to me, many African American youth at River didn't have cars, so they couldn't leave campus with the ease of white students. Thus they were rarely outside the purview of school authorities. Since many of them used relatives' addresses to attend River rather than the nearby Chicago High School, they suffered worse consequences for punishments due to the threat of expulsion. As a result, when they were singled out by school authorities, the threat of "deportation" to the "bad" school frequently loomed.

While African American boys didn't engage nearly as often in the fag discourse as did white boys, they seemed to suffer more for it, as when Kevin was suspended for accusing the wrestling team of wearing "faggot outfits." Similarly African American boys' enactments of compulsive heterosexuality were watched more closely as school authorities regulated when and how they could touch girls during the dance show. Finally, sexualized insults such as *fag* took on different meanings among African American boys at River. It was not that these boys were more progres-

sive, but, because of a different cultural history and reliance on symbolic power as a result of their lack of institutional power, they didn't call each other fags for engaging in several activities considered unmasculine by white boys, such as dancing, touching, or caring about clothing. African American boys' relationships with the fag discourse and compulsive heterosexuality reflected their positioning in American society as simultaneously hypersexual, dangerous men and utterly failed men (Ross 1998). They were regarded as sexually threatening to other girls and white boys at River; at the same time they were structurally less powerful and rendered vulnerable by their lack of institutional and economic resources.

Homophobia

Even though the fag discourse is and isn't about homophobia, River High as an institution was deeply homophobic. Homophobia took the form of blatant antigay practices and, more commonly, the staging of taken-for-granted heteronormative school ceremonies and traditions. Rallies, yearbook photos, graduation, and dances all celebrated heterosexual gender difference, encoding inequality in what Judith Butler (1993) calls the "heterosexual matrix." In this ferociously heteronormative context GSA members had to struggle to get their club approved and have it recognized in school announcements. Several gay pride events, such as the Day of Silence and the celebration of National Coming Out Day, were barred from the campus. The school authorities didn't protect the most vulnerable gay students, such as Ricky, who was teased, taunted, and eventually threatened out of the school. Indeed, I felt the homophobia so strongly that I took my gay pride sticker off my car while I researched at River High.

Girls' Gender Strategies

Girls at River High adopted a variety of "gender strategies"⁴ (Hochschild 1989) to deal with the masculinity processes of repudiation (the fag dis-

course) and confirmation (compulsory heterosexuality) in which they were frequently used as masculinity resources—capitulation, subversion, and criticism. Girls' popularity, for the most part, depended on successfully navigating masculine approval mechanisms. They received admiration and popularity by confirming heterosexualized gender identities encouraged by school rituals and traditions. Through this sort of capitulation girls traded their own subjectivity for boys' point of view. They giggled and laughed as boys made seemingly offensive comments about their looks, their bodies, and their sexuality. Like other teenage girls, girls at River focused on boys' sexual desire and practices, not their own (Tolman 2005).

Some girls adopted a seemingly subversive approach by engaging in masculinity processes themselves. Rebeca and Jessie were able to escape, to a certain extent, the objectification and dehumanization to which many of the girls at River were subjected. They successfully embodied masculinity themselves by dominating others, dressing like boys, competing like boys, fighting like boys, and dating girls as heterosexual boys did. They were able to draw upon the "cool pose" (Majors 2001) frequently embodied by African American boys identified with hip-hop culture. This embodiment of masculinity, combined with their extroversion and good looks, seemed to have allowed them to avoid being used as resources in masculinity processes.

Other girls also developed a variety of systemic and spontaneous "gender strategies" that allowed them to contest boys' treatment of them and other girls. Most girls who did this deployed a sort of off-the-cuff feminism that labeled individual boys as jerks for their practices of compulsive heterosexuality. The GSA Girls adopted a more systemic approach, linking sexism to issues of homophobia. In their daily interactions with each other, with boys, and with the school administration, the GSA girls bravely confronted sexism by holding poster campaigns and days of activism, celebrating non-normative gender practices, and happily identifying as gay.

THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

As I wrote earlier, these findings look pretty bleak. I have detailed the ways boys tortured girls and each other through a barrage of sexualized insults and the ways the school structure itself undergirded such interactions. However, within the rampant harassment and teasing present at River High, I saw several points of entry for thinking about alternative interactions, rituals, and gendered ways of being—political action, parody, and play. I use the term *play* to indicate serious play, like Thorne's (1993) notion of "gender play" or Geertz's (1973) concept of "deep play." Play, in this sense, is not just about fun but is a way of constructing the social world. The theme of play has lurked throughout the book but up until now has remained relatively latent. I found especially illuminating three key instances of gender play and parody at River: Brent and Craig's "Revenge of the Nerds" Mr. Cougar skit, the play of the boys acting in *Carousel*, and the practices of the GSA Girls.

Brent and Craig opened this book with their award-winning Mr. Cougar skit, "Revenge of the Nerds." In this miniplay Brent and Greg transformed themselves, with the help of a female personal trainer, from effeminate nerds into muscular, virile men. Through this transformation, which encouraged students to laugh at their effeminate performances and cheer at their dominance over girls and poor men of color, Brent and Craig drew on and reinforced meanings of masculinity through sexualized dominance. While this skit (like the other Mr. Cougar skits) was an example of gender play and parody in which boys imitated masculinity and femininity, their imitations reinforced prevailing notions of gender identities. They parodied, not dominant gender identities, but the "abject," engaging the student audience in their ritualized repudiations. This sort of "deep play" and parody does not challenge dominant meanings of gender, race, and class but rather reflects and reinforces them.

The boys in *Carousel*, while commissioned to perform similarly masculine men, parodied dominant meanings of masculinity. Instead of insulting one another, putting down girls, or trying to establish some sort

of masculine dominance, these boys moved between a hypermasculinity and an abjected identity, laughing, singing, and dancing. They danced, pirouetted, and squealed but at the same time got to act like tough, swaggering sailors. These masculine and feminine practices did not cohere in one gendered identity. Rather, the boys combined gender markers and practices to create fluid and playful selves. Their parody of sailors indicated that masculinity and unmasculinity could exist concurrently. The boys drew alternatively and simultaneously from both masculine and feminine iconography and bodily comportments. This sort of parody highlights the importance of institutional spaces for such gender play. It was precisely the institutional space of the drama performance, not the football field or the social science classroom, that allowed these boys to explore and play with alternative identities. Playing with gender through parody in this way can challenge the way gendered power inheres in masculine and feminine identities (Richardson 1996).

The GSA Girls, as I highlighted in the previous chapter, exhibited the most politically coherent and stable form of gender play, parody, and political activism through their serious critique of gender sexual norms. They continually mixed gendered symbols and bodily practices, backing up these performances with a sense of social justice through which they confronted both sexism and homophobia. They cleverly embodied masculine positionings by turning masculinized insults back upon boys. By mixing gendered symbols, bodily comportments, and discourses, these girls called into question the opposition and even the usefulness of the categories of masculinity and femininity. Their gender was, as Sedgwick (1995) puts it, "orthogonal." Their masculinity and femininity were not ends of the same axis but rather occupied different axes, so that they could mix all sorts of gendered imagery and practices.

As these examples indicate, playing with gender and performative gender transgression are not progressive acts in and of themselves (Jackson 1996). Boys who dress up as girls on Halloween (as many of them do) don't challenge the gender order. Rather, they highlight exactly how much they are *not* girls. Craig and Brent used repudiatory parody and

play to highlight the extent to which they were *not* fags or unmasculine. The Basketball Girls' form of gender play both reworked notions of masculinity as inherent in male bodies and reinscribed notions of masculinity as dominance. Play and parody can be progressive when they open up opportunities for alternative gender expressions and gender fluidity. Brady and the rest of the boys in the drama performance moved in and out of typically masculine positions, mocking ideas of masculinity as dominant while also embodying it without repudiating the specter of the fag. They enacted seemingly contradictory gender positions simultaneously. It is important to note that Graham and Heath (who had celebrated getting a kiss from a girl during a ritual of "getting girls") were both involved in drama productions and when in those spaces did not engage in the fag discourse or compulsive heterosexuality in the same way. In this sense, looking at the same boys in a variety of public spaces is important to understanding masculinity processes. The GSA Girls simultaneously occupied multiple gender positions, mixing both masculine and feminine styles. These sorts of gender play and parody emphasize fluidity and change while highlighting gender and sexuality as vectors of power and inequality.

Contemporary queer theorists and poststructural theorists see the concept of play (Lugones 1990) as central to social change. Identifying places and practices in which youth can try on different identities, explore varieties of gender practices, and mix them up opens possibilities for social change through a proliferation of gender identities, instead of locking girls and boys into strict gender identity practices that match up with their presumed genitalia. Theater as a symbolic and metaphorical space is important in this sense. It is a place where it is okay and even required to try on different characters. Boys and girls can step into and out of identities at will and in a less threatening way because they are "just acting." In this sense, playing with gender is an answer. But it is not *the* answer because masculinity and femininity are not arbitrary categories; rather, they are identities required of individuals. As I've shown throughout this book, they are the very identities that reinforce inequality (Jef-

freys 1998). Thus there are limits to parody, play, and doing gender differently, and, as a result, play, even serious play, is not enough. It needs to be accompanied and undergirded by institutional change.

Looking at gender as "deep play" builds on the argument I laid out at the beginning of the book that masculinity isn't so much about men as about processes and practices we associate with male bodies. I argued that many theorists of masculinity were so invested in the centrality of the male body to definitions of masculinity that they sometimes missed the ways masculinity was created through sexualized processes among both boys and girls. By listening to what the students at River actually called masculinity and by thinking about masculinity as a process, in addition to looking at masculinity as the property of those with male bodies, I have shown how, in the world of River High, masculinity was defined as sexualized and publicly enacted dominance. This is not to say that youth at River didn't define masculinity as a description of boys' attitudes, behaviors, and interactional styles. They did. But they also defined masculinity as a publicly enacted interactional style that demonstrated heterosexuality and dominance while at the same time repudiating and mocking weakness, usually represented by femininity or the fag.

By attending to students' multiple definitions of masculinity (both as what boys do and as a description of a specific public interactional style), this analysis builds upon the "multiple masculinities" model. Theorists of masculinity have been helpful in identifying how masculinity is multiple—how different men enact different configurations of masculinity. What the interactional rituals of youth at River High indicate is that these students saw a constellation of behaviors, whether the actor was a boy or a girl, as masculine. Thus it is important to attend to the manipulation, deployment, and enactment of varieties of masculinity, not just as what men do, but as how respondents recognize it. Looking at masculinity this way differentiates studies of masculinity from studies of men and brings these studies of masculinity in line with feminist studies of gender. As such, the analysis of masculinity is moved from an endless categorization of masculinity (which is really more about categories of men)

into a study of the creation of gendered selves and resistance to normative gender identities. Looking at masculinity this way helps integrate the masculinity literature with feminist theory and its focus on inequality and social change.

PRACTICAL STEPS

It is hard to base policy recommendations on poststructuralist theory and analysis, which often seems far removed from the "nitty-gritty" of lived experience. In its emphasis on deconstructing categories, feminist theory has often outpaced the slower movement toward social justice, which relies on those very categories to illustrate inequality (Bordo 1994). I have detailed above a more theoretical approach to solving some of the problems I outlined in this book. Now I suggest some policy changes that may facilitate more equitable conditions for adolescents. I focus these policy suggestions mostly on schools because while schools, as shown throughout this text, can be places of intense homophobia and sexism, they can also be places for "anti-discriminatory responses to marginalization" (Pallotta-Chiarolli 1999, 183). Organizations, individuals, and professionals from a range of disciplines have been mobilizing around issues of harassment, bullying, sexism, and homophobia in schools over the last decade. I suggest here helpful organizations, curricular changes, resources for parents and educators, and films aimed at helping to facilitate gender and sexual equity in schools.

Legal protections need to be in place to shield gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered, and other non-normatively gendered students. Both Brady and Riley invoked California's AB 537, which prevents discrimination in schools based on sexual or gender identity, in order to gain equal treatment. Brady relied upon it, in part, to create the GSA, and Riley later used it to bolster her claim that she be able to wear a black graduation robe rather than a yellow one. The California legislature is not alone in having passed such a law. The District of Columbia, Maine, Minnesota, and New Jersey have all enacted laws that prohibit harass-

ment and/or discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity in school. Several other states—Connecticut, Massachusetts, Vermont, Washington, Wisconsin—have passed laws that prohibit harassment and discrimination based on sexual orientation in school but fail to protect alternative gender expressions. As the experiences of many non-normatively gendered students at River High indicate, these laws need to include gender expression, as alternative gender practices trigger much of the homophobic or sexually based teasing in adolescence. As of the writing of this book, twenty states have no provisions protecting gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered, or other non-normatively gendered students in school.

Though California has one of the most progressive laws about gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered (GLBT) youth in the nation, this law, it seems, did not protect Ricky. Ricky's experience indicates that these laws had little effect on his ability to learn free from harassment. Teachers and administrators actually need to know about and enforce this legislation once it is in place. Had teachers and administrators actually heeded the law (or even been informed of it) and protected Ricky from threats of violence, he might have completed his education instead of dropping out to work as a female impersonator.

Presumably students (male and female) have been protected from sexual harassment since the passage of Title IX in 1972 (Orenstein 2002). However, as with AB 537, the deployment of Title IX leaves something to be desired. Sexual harassment is rampant at River High School, as the boys in chapter 4 demonstrate. Boys' sex talk and predatory behavior has become so normalized that teachers don't even recognize it as harassment but rather consider it harmless flirting. To implement these laws teachers and administrators must look with a new eye at student interactions, noting how both homophobic epithets and so-called flirtatious behaviors shore up normative gender and sexual identities and perpetuate unequal gender arrangements. Films such as *Flirting or Hurting* can help both educators and students recognize more equitable interactions.⁵ Additionally, students who harass other students need to be punished, but

they also need to be educated. It's not enough to reprimand or discipline a boy for making sexist comments or calling someone a fag. To simply punish students who are harassing other students without explaining larger issues of power and inequality leaves those who are harassing confused and angry, and, more importantly, doesn't necessarily change how youth think about power and inequality (Orenstein 2002).

Educators can also take proactive steps to make schools more equitable places. They need to create learning and social environments that are more supportive of gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered, and other non-normatively gendered youth. Administrators can modify both the social organization of the school and the curriculum content so that they are less homophobic and gender normative. Including a range of sexual and gender identities in school rituals and curricula will indicate to both GLBT and non-normatively gendered students as well as straight and normatively gendered students that school authorities don't tolerate gender- and sexuality-based harassment or violence.

Schools can modify homophobic and sexist social environments in several ways—by placing affirming posters in their classrooms, providing support for GSAs, sponsoring assemblies and speakers, and reorganizing highly gendered school rituals. Allowing the formation of GSAs is an especially effective and simple way to support GLBT, gender-variant youth and their allies.⁶ There has been a veritable explosion of GSAs across the country over the past ten years. Students are initiating, forming, and sustaining these clubs in progressive cities like San Francisco and in solidly "red states" like Utah. Since courts ruled that these clubs are protected by the Federal Equal Access Act (which requires that schools allow noncurricular student groups access to the school), students have been banding together in support of gay and lesbian youth. According to the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network, there are at least three thousand GSAs nationwide. GSAs from every state, with the exception of North Dakota, have registered with the network. As Ricky's, Genevieve's, and Lacy's stories indicate, having a GSA at River was crucial for them. It provided a space for them to feel safe, create social net-

works, hear special speakers, plan social events, and learn. The presence of and activism stemming from GSAs are central to combating homophobic and sexist teasing, bullying, and violence in schools (Blumenfeld 1995). Administrators might also want to consider providing counseling and support groups for GLBT and gender-variant teens. Several advocates for gay and lesbian and non-normatively gendered teens indicate that school-sponsored support groups and specially trained counselors may alleviate some of the suffering of gay and lesbian students (Reynolds and Koski 1995; Uribe 1995).

Schools can also send the message that homophobia and sexism are unacceptable through school-sponsored assemblies and speakers. Schools bring in a number of speakers and sponsor a variety of assemblies each year. River High's administration, for instance, brings in guest speakers and performers to celebrate Black History Month, sponsors an annual Multi-Cultural Assembly, and stages emotionally intense programs such as "Every 15 Minutes," which simulates student deaths due to drunk-driving accidents. These programs are organized to teach students lessons about history, respect for difference, antiracism, and alcohol abuse. In addition to these sorts of assemblies and educational programming, schools should bring in speakers from feminist and gay rights organizations to talk about gay history, equal rights, and teasing. Studies have shown that after youth have witnessed gay people talking about their experience as gay people in formal settings, such as these sorts of school assemblies, they are less likely to express homophobic attitudes (Nelson and Krieger 1997). Bringing in feminist, gay, and lesbian speakers might also change the public attitudes at River High. Since schools already bring in many special speakers and put on special programs to combat other social ills, recognizing Women's History Month or National Coming Out Day would send an unambiguous message to students that the school, as an institution, opposed sexism and homophobia. Additionally the school could support GSA members' efforts to stage their own social interventions such as the "Day of Silence."

Similarly, school administrators need to take a serious look at the role of rituals such as dances, proms, homecoming, and Mr. Cougar, in their socialization project.⁷ To the extent that these rituals are heterosexist, homophobic, and sexist they need to be reworked. The messages conveyed to students through these rituals should not be that the school advocates and in fact demands heterosexualized gender difference. Rather, the rituals should be organized to reflect the diversity of gender and sexual identities among students. Small changes can make a big difference in terms of school rituals. For example, River High, like many other high schools, distributes lists of the names of all senior girls for homecoming queen and all senior boys for Mr. Cougar. If schools are wedded to these sorts of popularity rituals, they could consider listing all student names for each competition, instead of deciding in advance the gender of each student and thus the gender of the homecoming queen or Mr. Cougar. They might also want to allow a Ms. Cougar or a homecoming king or to develop alternative gender-neutral titles. Students should be able to take same-gender dates, whether romantically or just as friends, to school dances and as escorts to the more formal rituals. Technically River High had no rule against this practice, but certainly Jessie didn't initially feel comfortable taking a same-gender date to these rituals. Clothing expectations should be applied equally to boy and girl students. Girls should not be required to wear different-colored robes for graduation, nor should they be forced to wear revealing off-the-shoulder drapes for their senior pictures. Finally, schoolwide performances (such as the Mr. Cougar skits) should be vetted for homophobic, sexist, or heterosexist content. The fag discourse should not be allowed to form the story line of these sorts of rituals.

In addition to these modifications to the social world of the school, educators need to look seriously at the inclusion (or lack thereof) of GLBT and gender-variant people in the school curriculum. Arthur Lipkin (1995) makes the case that gays and lesbians can be included in a va-

riety of areas in the curriculum. Inclusion of nonheterosexual and non-normatively gendered people in the official learning of the school would make sexual minority and gender-variant students feel less alone. It would also combat damaging or scary images of gays and lesbians in the mainstream media (Lipkin 1995). Additionally, learning about GLBT or gender-variant people will send a message to straight students about the school's stance on homophobic and sexist teasing. If students are encouraged to be less prejudiced, they may indeed experience more leeway with their own sexual and gender identities (Lipkin 1995).

Whether or not they are teaching specifically about sexuality or gender, teachers need to be aware of how they contribute to the "hidden curriculum" (Campbell and Sanders 2002; Letts and Sears 1999; J. Martin 1976) of the classroom. Teachers shouldn't try to garner masculine favor by allowing sexism or homophobia to go unchecked. For example, the boys who formed the Man Party in response to Mrs. Mac's class assignment should have been questioned about their plan and motivations for the party. Their desire to deny women the right to vote and to make fun of girls by showing how little they knew about women's history could have been used as a moment to teach about sexism, citizenship, and voting rights.

Organizations such as the Safe Schools Coalition, the California Teachers Association, and GALE-BC provide resources, lesson plans, and teaching tools for teachers to create less homophobic and gender-normative classrooms.⁸ The California Teachers Association and the National Education Association partnered to produce a teachers' handbook entitled *Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Youth: Breaking the Silence*. The goal of this handbook is to educate teachers and school employees to ensure that all students receive "equal educational opportunity," though it stops short of encouraging change in values or beliefs. This informative and creative booklet provides discussion guidelines, statistics about sexual identities, definitions, exercises for students, and a variety of ways to include gays and lesbians in the curriculum. It is a model of what might be given to teachers at the beginning of each school year.

Finally, in terms of the earlier discussion of parody and play, providing support and spaces for gendered and sexualized difference and fluidity is key to changing the seemingly entrenched homophobia and sexism central to adolescent masculinity. Spaces should be created and sustained in which youth can think about the possibilities of crafting and inhabiting a variety of gender identities. This is exactly what, with little adult guidance, the kids were doing in both the GSA and the drama performances. They were carving out playful, political, and meaningful ways of redefining, in part by deconstructing, the social categories of girl and boy, masculinity and femininity. In GSA meetings the youth (gay, straight, boy, and girl) challenged the concept of "normal" through their interactions and in their dress styles. They threw "normal" in the face of the administration and other kids in the school by participating in a Day of Silence, by putting up posters, and by having announcements of their meetings read aloud over the loudspeaker. They made their difference public and they did so in a group, which afforded them more protection, and possibly power, than doing it individually. The boys in drama tried on a variety of gender identities, often simultaneously. The spaces for this sort of gendered and sexualized creativity and playfulness are central to challenging gender and sexuality norms in adolescence and high school. Schools need to ensure that drama programs, which are constantly under funding threats, continue and that GSAs are allowed to meet, relatively free from peer harassment.

High school is hard. Negotiating gender identities is hard. Figuring out sexuality is hard. It is up to adults to configure spaces that support youths' variety of gender and sexual expressions. It is also up to adults to protect young people from the vicious teasing and harassment rampant in most modern high schools. We can't accept that boys and girls are defining a masculinity based on damaging notions of power and domination. We can't accept that youth craft masculine identities through physically and verbally harassing girls and some boys. Much as adults have taken a stand, for the most part, against racist epithets in school, we need to take institutional and individual stands against sexist and homo-

phobic epithets. At both institutional and individual levels, we need to support boys and girls who enact non-normative gender and sexual identities. "Making our schools safe for sissies" (Rofes 1995, 79) can make them safer places for all students: masculine girls, feminine boys, and all those in between.

APPENDIX

WHAT IF A GUY HITS ON YOU?

Intersections of Gender, Sexuality, and Age in Fieldwork with Adolescents

"Yeah, she's writing a book on River guys," said sixteen-year-old Ray as he introduced me to a few of his friends in River High School's bustling main hallway. Don, a tall, lanky basketball player, leaned casually against the stone pillar next to me. "Damn," he said, smiling down at me, "I was gonna hit on you." Six months into my research I had grown more accustomed to, although certainly not comfortable with, this sort of response from boys at River High School. During my time in the field I often heard similar comments from boys interested in dating me, asking my advice about their sexual adventures, or inquiring about my own personal life. In this chapter I discuss unique challenges encountered by female researchers when studying adolescent boys. I focus particularly on how the boys infused our interactions with sexual content and how I managed these interactions to maintain rapport while simultaneously enforcing a professional distance (and maintaining my own dignity). I did this through the creation of what I call, building on Mandell's (1988) notion of a "least-adult" identity, a "least-gendered" identity.

The role of sexuality is understudied in ethnographic research in general, and thoughtful analysis of it in methodological discussions of ethnographic research among youth is nearly absent. While teenagers are almost obsessively studied as sexual actors, most research focuses on sex education, "at-risk" behaviors, or non-normative sexual identities (Kulkin, Chauvin, and Percle 2000; Medrano 1994; Strunin 1994; Waldner-Haugrud and Magruder 1996) rather than the ways sexuality constructs daily lives. In researching teenage boys I found that sexuality was