

CHAPTER ONE

Making Masculinity

Adolescence, Identity, and High School

REVENGE OF THE NERDS

Cheering students filled River High's gymnasium. Packed tightly in the bleachers, they sang, hollered, and danced to loud hip-hop music. Over their heads hung banners celebrating fifty years of River High's sports victories. The yearly assembly in which the student body voted for the most popular senior boy in the school to be crowned Mr. Cougar was under way, featuring six candidates performing a series of skits to earn student votes.

Two candidates, Brent and Greg, both handsome, blond, "all-American" water polo players, entered the stage dressed like "nerds" to perform their skit, "Revenge of the Nerds." They wore matching outfits: yellow button-down shirts; tight brown pants about five inches too short, with the waistbands pulled up clownishly high by black suspenders; black shoes with white kneesocks; and thick black-rimmed glasses held together with white tape. As music played, the boys started dancing, flailing around comically in bad renditions of outdated dance moves like the Running Man and the Roger Rabbit. The crowd roared in laughter when Brent and Greg rubbed their rear ends together in time to the music. Two girls with long straight hair and matching miniskirts

and black tank tops, presumably the nerds' girlfriends, ran out to dance with Brent and Greg.

Suddenly a group of white male "gangstas" sporting bandannas, baggy pants, sports jerseys, and oversized gold jewelry walked, or, more correctly, gangsta-limped, onto the stage. They proceeded to shove Brent and Greg, who looked at them fearfully and fled the stage without their girlfriends. The gangstas encircled the two girls, then "kidnapped" them by forcing them off the stage. After peering timidly around the corner of the stage, Brent and Greg reentered. The crowd roared as Brent opened his mouth and, in a high-pitched feminine voice, cried, "We have to get our women!"

Soon a girl dressed in a sweat suit and wearing a whistle around her neck carried barbells and weight benches onto the stage. Greg and Brent emerged from behind a screen, having replaced their nerd gear with matching black and white sweat pants and T-shirts. The female coach tossed the barbells around with ease, lifting one with a single hand. The audience hooted in laughter as the nerds struggled to lift even the smallest weight. Brent and Greg continued to work out until they could finally lift the weights. They ran up to the crowd to flex their newfound muscles as the audience cheered. To underscore how strong they had become, Brent and Greg ripped off their pants. The crowd was in hysterics as the boys revealed, not muscled legs, but matching red miniskirts. At first Greg and Brent looked embarrassed; then they triumphantly dropped the skirts, revealing matching shorts, and the audience cheered.

Brent and Greg ran off stage as stagehands unfurled a large cloth sign reading "Gangstas' Hideout." Some of the gangstas who had kidnapped the girlfriends sat around a table playing poker, while other gangstas gambled with dice. The nerds, who had changed into black suits accented with ties and fedoras, strode confidently into the hideout. They threw the card table in the air, causing the gangstas to jump back as the cards and chips scattered. Looking frightened at the nerds' newfound strength, the gangstas scrambled out of their hideout. After the gangstas had fled, the two miniskirted girlfriends ran up to Brent and Greg, hugging them

gratefully. Several African American boys, also dressed in suits and fedoras, ran onto the stage, dancing while the former nerds stood behind them with their arms folded. After the dance, the victorious nerds walked off stage hand in hand with their rescued girlfriends.

I open with this scene to highlight the themes of masculinity I saw during a year and a half of fieldwork at River High School. The Mr. Cougar competition clearly illuminates the intersecting dynamics of sexuality, gender, social class, race, bodies, and institutional practices that constitute adolescent masculinity in this setting. Craig and Brent are transformed from unmasculine nerds who cannot protect their girlfriends into heterosexual, muscular men. This masculinizing process happens through a transformation of bodies, the assertion of racial privilege, and a shoring up of heterosexuality.

The story line of the skit—Brent and Craig’s quest to confirm their heterosexuality by rescuing their girlfriends—posits heterosexuality as central to masculinity. Brent and Craig’s inability to protect “their women” marks their physical inadequacy. Their appearance—tight, ill-fitting, outdated clothes—codes them as unmasculine. Their weakness and their high-pitched voices cast them as feminine. Their homoerotic dance moves position them as homosexual. By working out, the boys shed their weak, effeminate, and possibly homosexual identities. Just in case they didn’t get their message across by bench-pressing heavy weights, the boys shed their last remnants of femininity by ripping off their matching miniskirts. They become so physically imposing that they don’t even have to fight the gangstas, who flee in terror at the mere hint of the nerds’ strength.

This skit lays bare the ways racialized notions of masculinity may be enacted through sexualized tropes. The gangstas symbolize failed and at the same time wildly successful men in their heterosexual claim on the nerds’ women. Their “do-rags,” baggy pants, shirts bearing sports team insignias, and limping walks are designed to invoke a hardened inner-city

gangsta style, one portrayed on television and in movies, as a specifically black cultural style. In representing black men, the gangstas symbolize hypersexuality and invoke a thinly veiled imagery of the black rapist (A. Davis 1981), who threatens white men's control over white women. But in the end, the gangstas are vanquished by the white, middle-class legitimacy of the nerds, turned masculine with their newfound strength. The skit also portrays black men as slightly feminized in that they act as cheerleaders and relieve the white heroes of the unmasculine practice of dancing.

Markers of femininity such as high voices and skirts symbolize emasculation when associated with male bodies. The girlfriends also signal a relationship between femininity and helplessness, since they are unable to save themselves from the gangstas. However, the female coach symbolizes strength, a sign of masculinity the nerds initially lack. The students in the audience cheer her as she engages in a masculinized practice, lifting weights with ease, and they laugh at the boys who can't do this. Male femininity, in this instance, is coded as humorous, while female masculinity is cheered.

Drawing on phenomena at River High such as the Mr. Cougar Assembly, the goal of this study is to explain how teenagers, teachers, and the institutional logics of schooling construct adolescent masculinity through idioms of sexuality. This book investigates the relationships between gender and sexuality as embedded in a major socializing institution of modern youth: high school. I ask how heteronormative and homophobic discourses, practices, and interactions in an American high school produce masculine identities. To examine the construction of masculinity in adolescence, I follow the deployment of, resistance to, and practices surrounding sexuality and gender in high school. I focus on the gender and sexuality practices of students, teachers, and administrators, with an emphasis on school rituals.

My findings illustrate that masculinity is not a homogenous category that any boy possesses by virtue of being male. Rather, masculinity—as constituted and understood in the social world I studied—is a configuration of practices and discourses that different youths (boys and girls) may embody in different ways and to different degrees. Masculinity, in this sense, is associated with, but not reduced or solely equivalent to, the male body. I argue that adolescent masculinity is understood in this setting as a form of dominance usually expressed through sexualized discourses.¹

Through extensive fieldwork and interviewing I discovered that, for boys, achieving a masculine identity entails the repeated repudiation of the specter of failed masculinity. Boys lay claim to masculine identities by lobbing homophobic epithets at one another. They also assert masculine selves by engaging in heterosexist discussions of girls' bodies and their own sexual experiences. Both of these phenomena intersect with racialized identities in that they are organized somewhat differently by and for African American boys and white boys. From what I saw during my research, African American boys were more likely to be punished by school authorities for engaging in these masculinizing practices. Though homophobic taunts and assertion of heterosexuality shore up a masculine identity for boys, the relationship between sexuality and masculinity looks different when masculinity occurs outside male bodies. For girls, challenging heterosexual identities often solidifies a more masculine identity. These gendering processes are encoded at multiple levels: institutional, interactional, and individual.

To explore and theorize these patterns, this book integrates queer theory, feminist theory, and sociological research on masculinities. In this chapter I address the current state of sociological research on masculinity. Then, using feminist theories and theories of sexuality, I rework some of the insights of the sociology of masculinity literature. I conclude by suggesting that close attention to sexuality highlights masculinity as a process rather than a social identity associated with specific bodies.

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY MASCULINITY?

Sociologists have approached masculinity as a multiplicity of gender practices (regardless of their content) enacted by men whose bodies are assumed to be biologically male. Early in the twentieth century, when fears of feminization pervaded just about every sphere of social life, psychologists became increasingly concerned with differentiating men from women (Kimmel 1996). As a result, part of the definition of a psychologically “normal” adult came to involve proper adjustment to one’s “gender role” (Pleck 1987). Talcott Parsons (1954), the first sociologist to really address masculinity as such, argued that men’s “instrumental” role and women’s “expressive” role were central to the functioning of a well-ordered society. Deviations from women’s role as maternal caretakers or men’s role as breadwinners would result in “role strain” and “role competition,” weakening families and ultimately society.

With the advent of the women’s movement, feminist gender theorists examined how power is embedded in these seemingly neutral (not to mention natural) “gender roles” (Hartmann 1976; Jaggar 1983; Rosaldo and Lamphere 1974; Rubin 1984). Psychoanalytic feminist theorists explicitly addressed masculinity as an identity formation constituted by inequality. Both Dorothy Dinnerstein (1976) and Nancy Chodorow (1978) argued that masculinity, as we recognize it, is the result of a family system in which women mother. Identification with a mother as the primary caregiver proves much more problematic in the formation of a gender identity for a boy than for a girl child, producing a self we understand as masculine characterized by defensive ego boundaries and repudiation of femininity. Feminist psychoanalytic theorists equate contemporary masculinity with a quest for autonomy and separation, an approach that influences my own analysis of masculinity.

Recognizing the changes wrought for women by feminist movements, sociologists of masculinity realized that feminism had radical implications for men (Carrigan, Connell, and Lee 1987). Frustrated with the paucity of non-normative approaches to masculinity, and what they

saw (a bit defensively) as feminist characterizations of masculinity as “unrelieved villainy and all men as agents of the patriarchy in more or less the same degree” (64), these sociologists attempted to carve out new models of gendered analysis in which individual men or men collectively were not all framed as equal agents of patriarchal oppression.

The emergent sociology of masculinity became a “critical study of men, their behaviors, practices, values and perspectives” (Whitehead and Barrett 2001, 14). These new sociologists of masculinity positioned themselves in opposition to earlier Parsonian theories of masculinity, proffering, not a single masculine “role,” but rather the idea that masculinity is understandable only in a model of “multiple masculinities” (Connell 1995). Instead of focusing on masculinity as the male role, this model asserts that there are a variety of masculinities, which make sense only in hierarchical and contested relations with one another. R. W. Connell argues that men enact and embody different configurations of masculinity depending on their positions within a social hierarchy of power. *Hegemonic masculinity*, the type of gender practice that, in a given space and time, supports gender inequality, is at the top of this hierarchy. *Complicit masculinity* describes men who benefit from hegemonic masculinity but do not enact it; *subordinated masculinity* describes men who are oppressed by definitions of hegemonic masculinity, primarily gay men; *marginalized masculinity* describes men who may be positioned powerfully in terms of gender but not in terms of class or race. Connell, importantly, emphasizes that the content of these configurations of gender practice is not always and everywhere the same. Very few men, if any, are actually hegemonically masculine, but all men do benefit, to different extents, from this sort of definition of masculinity, a form of benefit Connell (1995) calls the “patriarchal dividend” (41).

This model of multiple masculinities has been enormously influential, inspiring countless studies that detail the ways different configurations of masculinity are promoted, challenged, or reinforced in given social situations. This research on how men do masculinity has provided insight into practices of masculinity in a wide range of social institutions, such

as families (Coltrane 2001), schools (Francis and Skelton 2001; Gilbert 1998; Mac an Ghail 1996; Parker 1996), the workplace (Connell 1998; Cooper 2000), the media (Craig 1992; Davies 1995), and sports (Curry 2004; Edley and Wetherell 1997; Majors 2001; Messner 2002). This focus on masculinity as what men do has spawned an industry of cataloguing “types” of masculinity: gay, black, Chicano, working class, middle class, Asian, gay black, gay Chicano, white working class, militarized, transnational business, New Man, negotiated, versatile, healthy, toxic, counter, and cool masculinities, among others (Messner 2004b).

While Connell intends this model of masculinities to be understood as fluid and conflictual, the multiple masculinities model is more often used to construct static and reified typologies such as the ones listed by Michael Messner. These descriptions of masculinity are intended to highlight patterns of practice in which structure meets with identity and action, but they have the effect of slotting men into masculinity categories: a hegemonic man, a complicit man, a resistant man (or the multitude of ever-increasing types of masculinities catalogued above). While these masculinities may be posited as ideal types, they are sometimes difficult to use analytically without lapsing into a simplistic categorical analysis. Because of the emphasis on masculinities in the plural, a set of types some men can seemingly step in and out of at will, this model runs the risk of collapsing into an analysis of styles of masculinity, thereby deflecting attention from structural inequalities between men and women. In other words, we must always pay attention to power relations when we think in pluralities and diversities; otherwise we are simply left with a list of differences (Zinn and Dill 1996). Additionally, the category of “hegemonic masculinity” is so rife with contradictions it is small wonder that no man actually embodies it (Donaldson 1993). According to this model both a rich, slim, soft-spoken businessman and a poor, muscular, violent gang member might be described as hegemonically masculine. At the same time neither of them would really be hegemonically masculine, since the businessman would not be physically powerful and the poor gang member would lack claims on institutional gendered power. Be-

cause of some of these deployment problems, those studying masculinities have for some time called for a more sophisticated analysis of masculinity (Messner 1993; Morgan 1992).

To refine approaches to masculinity, researchers need to think more clearly about the implications of defining masculinity as what men or boys do. This definition conflates masculinity with the actions of those who have male bodies. Defining masculinity as “what men do” reifies biologized categories of male and female that are problematic and not necessarily discrete categories to begin with (Fausto-Sterling 1995). In the end, masculinity is framed as a social category based on an assumed biological difference that in itself is constituted by the very social category it purports to underlie. This is not to say that sociologists of masculinity are biological determinists, but by assuming that the male body is the location of masculinity their theories reify the assumed biological basis of gender. Recognizing that masculinizing discourses and practices extend beyond male bodies, this book traces the various ways masculinity is produced and manifested in relation to a multiplicity of bodies, spaces, and objects. That is, this book looks at masculinity as a variety of practices and discourses that can be mobilized by and applied to both boys and girls.

BRINGING IN SEXUALITY

Heeding the admonition of Carrigan, Connell, and Lee (1987) that “analysis of masculinity needs to be related as well to other currents in feminism” (64), I turn to interdisciplinary theorizing about the role of sexuality in the construction of gender identities. Building on studies of sexuality that demonstrate that sexuality is an organizing principle of social life, this book highlights intersections of masculinizing and sexualizing practices and discourses at River High.

Thinking about sexuality as an organizing principle of social life means that it is not just the property of individuals. Sexuality, in this sense, doesn’t just indicate a person’s sexual identity, whether he or she

is gay or straight. Rather, sexuality is itself a form of power that exists regardless of an individual's sexual identity. Thinking about sexuality this way can be initially quite jarring. After all, usually we discuss sexuality as a personal identity or a set of private practices. However, researchers and theorists have increasingly argued that sexuality is a quite public part of social life (Foucault 1990). Though sexuality was initially studied as a set of private acts, and eventually identities, by physicians and other medical professionals intent on discerning normal from abnormal sexuality, social theorists are now documenting the ways institutions, identities, and discourses interact with, are regulated by, and produce sexual meanings.

In this sense, *sexuality* refers to sex acts and sexual identities, but it also encompasses a range of meanings associated with these acts and identities. The meanings that vary by social class, location, and gender identity (Mahay, Laumann, and Michaels 2005) may be more important than the acts themselves (Weeks 1996). A good example of this is heterosexuality. While heterosexual desires or identities might feel private and personal, contemporary meanings of heterosexuality also confer upon heterosexual individuals all sorts of citizenship rights, so that heterosexuality is not just a private matter but one that links a person to certain state benefits. Similarly contemporary meanings of sexuality, particularly heterosexuality, for instance, eroticize male dominance and female submission (Jeffreys 1996, 75). In this way what seems like a private desire is part of the mechanisms through which the microprocesses of daily life actually foster inequality.

Interdisciplinary theorizing about sexuality has primarily taken the form of "queer theory." Like sociology, queer theory destabilizes the assumed naturalness of the social order (Lemert 1996). Queer theory moves the deconstructive project of sociology into new areas by examining much of what sociology sometimes takes for granted: "deviant" sexualities, sexual identities, sexual practices, sexual discourses, and sexual norms (Seidman 1996). In making the taken-for-granted explicit, queer theorists examine sexual power as it is embedded in different areas of social life and interrogate areas of the social world not usually seen as sex-

uality—such as the ways heterosexuality confers upon an individual a variety of citizenship rights (A. Stein and Plummer 1994). The logic of sexuality not only regulates intimate relations but also infuses social relations and social structures (S. Epstein 1994; Warner 1993).

This book uses queer theory to frame bodies, desires, sexualities, and identities in a way that isn't necessarily or solely about the oppression or liberation of the homosexual subject but rather about how institutional and interactional practices organize sexual life and produce sexual knowledge (Seidman 1996). Queer theory draws on a postmodern approach to studying society that moves beyond traditional categories such as male/female, masculine/feminine, and straight/gay to focus instead on the instability of these categories. That is, we might think of "heterosexual" and "homosexual" as stable, opposing, and discrete identities, but really they are fraught with internal contradictions (Halley 1993). To this end, queer theory emphasizes multiple identities and multiplicity in general. Instead of creating knowledge about categories of sexual identity, queer theorists look to see how those categories themselves are created, sustained, and undone.

One of the ways a queer theory approach can bring studies of masculinity in line with other feminist theorizing is to uncouple the male body from definitions of masculinity. The masculinities literature, while attending to very real inequalities between gay and straight men, tends to look at sexuality as inherent in static identities attached to male bodies, not as a major organizing principle of social life (S. Epstein 1994; Warner 1993). As part of its deconstructive project, queer theory often points to disjunctures between pairings thought of as natural and inevitable. In doing so queer theorists may implicitly question some of the assumptions of the multiple masculinities model—specifically the assumption that masculinity is defined by the bodily practices of boys and men—by placing sexuality at the center of analysis. Eve Sedgwick (1995), one of the few theorists to address the problematic assumption of the centrality of the male body to academic discussions of masculinity, argues that sometimes masculinity has nothing to do with men and that men

don't necessarily have anything to do with masculinity. As a result "it is important to drive a wedge in, early and often and if possible conclusively, between the two topics, masculinity and men, whose relation to one another it is so difficult not to presume" (12).

Assuming that masculinity is only about men weakens inquiries into masculinity. Therefore it is important to look at masculinizing processes outside the male body, not to catalogue a new type of masculinity, but to identify practices, rituals, and discourses that constitute masculinity. Doing so indicates the centrality of sexualized meanings to masculinity in relation to both male and female bodies.

Dislodging masculinity from a biological location is a productive way to highlight the social constructedness of masculinity and may even expose a latent sexism within the sociological literature in its assumption that masculinity, as a powerful social identity, is only the domain of men. Judith Kegan Gardiner (2003) points out in her review of gender and masculinity textbooks "the very different investments that men, including masculinity scholars, appear to have in preserving masculinity as some intelligible and coherent grounding of identity in comparison to the skepticism and distance shown by feminists towards femininity" (153). Indeed, gender scholars who study women have not been nearly as interested in femininity as scholars of men have been in masculinity.

It is not that bodies are unimportant. They are. Bodies are the vehicles through which we express gendered selves; they are also the matter through which social norms are made concrete. What is problematic is the unreflexive assumption of an embodied location for gender that echoes throughout the masculinities literature. Looking at masculinity as discourses and practices that can be mobilized by female bodies undermines the conflation of masculinity with an embodied state of maleness (Califia 1994; Halberstam 1998; Paechter 2006). Instead, this approach looks at masculinity as a recognizable configuration of gender practices and discourses.

Placing sexuality at the center of analysis highlights the "routinely unquestioned heteronormative expectations and proscriptions that exist as

background context in contemporary U.S. culture,” assumptions that “emerge when traditional normative gender boundaries are crossed” (Nielsen, Walden, and Kunkel 2000, 292). Examining these heteronormative structures and how masculine girls and feminine boys challenge them gets at contemporary constructions of masculinity in adolescence. Studying gender transgressions in adolescence provides empirical evidence to bolster and extend some of the claims of queer theory, an approach that often relies on literary or artistic examples for its data (Gamson and Moon 2004, 49).

RETHINKING MASCULINITY, SEXUALITY, AND BODIES

Attending to sexuality and its centrality to gendered identities opens insight into masculinity both as a process (Bederman 1995) and as a field through which power is articulated (Scott 1999) rather than as a never-ending list of configurations of practice enacted by specific bodies. My research indicates that masculinity is an identity that respondents think of as related to the male body but as not necessarily specific to the male body. Interviews with and observations of students at River High indicate that they recognize masculinity as an identity expressed through sexual discourses and practices that indicate dominance and control.²

As scholars of gender have demonstrated, gender is accomplished through day-to-day interactions (G. Fine 1989; Hochschild 1989; Thorne 2002; West and Zimmerman 1991). In this sense gender is the “activity of managing situated conduct in light of normative conceptions of attitudes and activities appropriate for one’s sex category” (West and Zimmerman 1991, 127). People are supposed to act in ways that line up with their presumed sex. That is, we expect people we think are females to act like women and males to act like men. People hold other people accountable for “doing gender” correctly.

The queer theorist Judith Butler (1999) builds on this interactionist approach to gender, arguing that gender is something people accomplish

through “a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being” (43). That is, gender is not just natural, or something one is, but rather something we all produce through our actions. By repeatedly acting “feminine” or “masculine” we actually create those categories. Becoming gendered, becoming masculine or feminine, is a process.

Butler argues that gendered beings are created through processes of repeated invocation and repudiation. People constantly reference or invoke a gendered norm, thus making the norm seem like a timeless truth. Similarly, people continually repudiate a “constitutive outside” (Butler 1993, 3) in which is contained all that is cast out of a socially recognizable gender category. The “constitutive outside” is inhabited by what she calls “abject identities,” unrecognizably and unacceptably gendered selves. The interactional accomplishment of gender in a Butlerian model consists, in part, of the continual iteration and repudiation of an abject identity. The abject identity must be constantly named to remind individuals of its power. Similarly, it must be constantly repudiated by individuals or groups so that they can continually affirm their identities as normal and as culturally intelligible. Gender, in this sense, is “constituted through the force of exclusion and abjection, one which produces a constitutive outside to the subject, an abjected outside, which is, after all, ‘inside’ the subject as its own founding repudiation” (Butler 1993, 3). This repudiation creates and reaffirms a “threatening specter” (3) of failed gender, the existence of which must be continually repudiated through interactional processes.

Informed by this interactionist approach to gender, in which gender is not just a quality of an individual but the result of interactional processes, this study examines masculinity as sexualized processes of confirmation and repudiation through which individuals demonstrate mastery over others. Building on the insights of the multiple masculinities literature, I emphasize that this definition of masculinity is not universal but local, age limited, and institutional and that other definitions of masculinity may be found in different locales and different times. Examining masculinity

using Butler's theory of interactional accomplishment of gender indicates that the "fag" position is an "abject" position and, as such, is a "threatening specter" constituting contemporary American adolescent masculinity at River High. Similarly, drawing on Butler's concept of the constitution of gender through "repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame" elucidates how seemingly "normal" daily interactions of male adolescence are actually ritualized interactions constituting masculinity. These repeated acts involve demonstrating sexual mastery and the denial of girls' subjectivity. The school itself sets the groundwork for boys' interactional rituals of repudiation and confirmation, like those illustrated in the opening vignette.

Butler also suggests ways to challenge an unequal gender order. Individuals who deliberately engage in gender practices that render them culturally unintelligible, such as practices that are at odds with their apparent sex category, challenge the naturalness and inevitability of a rigid gender order. Some girls at River High engage in precisely this sort of resistance by engaging in masculinizing processes. While challenging an unequal gender order at the level of interactions does not necessarily address larger structural inequalities, it is an important component of social change. That said, doing gender differently by engaging in gender practices not "appropriate" for one's sex category, such as drag, also runs the risk of reifying binary categories of gender. Resistance, in this model, is fraught with danger, since it is both an investment in gender norms and a subversion of them. Sometimes it challenges the gender order and sometimes it seems to bolster it.

METHODOLOGY

Adolescence as a Social Category

Because of the intense identity work that occurs during adolescence, it is a particularly fruitful site for illuminating and developing these theoretical issues. In contemporary Western societies the teenage years are often ones in which youths explore and consolidate identity (Erikson 1959/1980).

The issue of whether adolescence is a universal developmental stage or a creation of modernity has been debated in historical, psychological, and sociological literatures (Suransky 1982; Tait 2000). Regardless of its universal, timeless, localized, or temporal features, adolescence is currently constructed as a time in which teenagers work to create identity and make the transition from childhood to adulthood. It is also constructed as a turbulent time psychologically, biologically, and socially.

Since the “invention” of the adolescent in the United States in the early twentieth century (Ben-Amos 1995), teen cultures have emerged as a unique cultural formation where varied forms are characterized by gender differentiation and sexuality. In fact, G. Stanley Hall, the psychologist who created and popularized the concept of adolescence, described it as a time when boys engage in masculinizing activities that set them apart from girls (Kimmel 1996). One of the primary ways teen cultures evolved was through heterosexual rituals such as courtship, which became enshrined and ritualized through the emergence of large public high schools (Modell 1989). Such rituals began with the popularization of the private automobile and continued to be set up as a cultural norm through school yearbooks, school newspapers, and the organization of school activities encouraging heterosexual pairings, such as dances and proms. Given the historical tie between adolescence, sexuality, and gender, it seems a fitting life phase in which to study the formation of gendered identities.

Levels of Analysis

To explore masculinity as a process, I attend to multiple levels of analysis, including individual investments in and experiences of gendered and sexualized identities, institutional discourses, and collective gender practices.

Social processes can be understood through the experiences of individuals who live them (Chodorow 2000). Social processes and cultural categories are also instantiated at the level of personal meanings, which are created in a “tangle of experience” (Briggs 1998, 2). Although gendered meanings are often contradictory, gender is also experienced and

talked about as a real and stable category. Gender is personally created, understood, and negotiated through individual biography, fantasy, and projection (Chodorow 1995). To get at individual meanings of masculinity, I pay attention to teens' voices in one-on-one interviews where they discuss the role of masculinity in their lives.

However, looking at masculinity in adolescence without paying attention to larger structural patterns results in overly individualized and psychologized analyses that distort larger issues of inequality. Recently a spate of psychological books have called for more attention to be paid to the "real" victims of the so-called "gender wars." These authors claim that boys are forced by families, peer groups, schools, and the media to hide their "true" emotions and develop a hard emotional shell that is what we know as masculinity (Kindlon and Thompson 1999; Pollack 1998; Sommers 2000). William Pollack's book rightly encourages parents and other caregivers to listen to the "boy code" in order to hear boys' emotions and struggles. Sommers and Kindlon and Thompson, among others, either overtly or tacitly treat gender as a zero-sum game in which gains for girls must equal losses for boys, an assumption that has been critiqued by gender researchers (American Association of University Women [AAUW] 2001; Kimmel 1999). None of these volumes address larger issues of gender and power in adolescence and childhood; instead, they focus on the idea that boys and girls are naturally different and that boys are the ones suffering from discrimination, not girls.

To avoid this sort of emphasis on individual and idiosyncratic experiences, I examine relational and institutional gender processes, emphasizing how gender happens in groups. Friendships, peer groups, and cliques are exceedingly important to the formation of identity in adolescence (Bettie 2003; Hallinan and Williams 1990; Kinney 1993). Attending to gender as a relational process is important, since peer cultures trump or at least compete with parental influence in terms of setting up conceptions of gender (Risman and Myers 1997). As a result, masculinity processes look very different in groups than they do when teens discuss their own experiences around masculinity.

At the level of the institution, schools are a primary institution for identity formation, development, and solidification for contemporary American youth. They are important sites for the construction of race, class, and gender inequalities as well as pivotal locations of social change in challenging these inequalities (Tyack and Hansot 1990). Social groups in schools, such as cliques, provide one of the ways that youth begin to identify and position themselves by social class (Eckert 1989; Willis 1981), gender (AAUW 2001; Adler, Kless, and Adler 1992; Eder, Evans, and Parker 1995; Thorne 1993), and race (Eckert 1989; Eder, Evans, and Parker 1995; Perry 2002; Price 1999). The categories most salient to students have varied historically and regionally—cowboys and preps may be salient in one school, whereas jocks and goths may be organizing groups in another. Furthermore, schools play a part in structuring adolescent selves through the setting up of institutional gender orders, or the totality of gender arrangements in a given school—including relations of power, labor, emotion, and symbolism (Connell 1996; Heward 1990; Skelton 1996; Spade 2001). This book examines the way gendered and sexualized identifications and the institutional ordering of these identifications in a California high school both reinforce and challenge inequality among students.

Research Site

I conducted fieldwork at a suburban high school that I call River High. (Names of places and people have been changed.) River High is a suburban, working-class, fifty-year-old high school in a town I call Riverton in north central California. With the exception of median household income and racial diversity (both of which are higher than the national average due to Riverton's location in California), the town mirrors national averages in the proportion of those who have attended college, marriage rates, and age distribution. Riverton's approximately one hundred thousand residents are over half white and about a quarter Latino or Hispanic. The rest identify in relatively equal numbers as African American

or Asian (U.S. Bureau of the Census 2000). It is a moderate to conservative religious community. Most of the churches are Baptist, Pentecostal, Evangelical, or nondenominational. Many residents commute to surrounding cities for work. The major employers in Riverton are the school district, the city itself, medical centers, and large discount retailers such as Wal-Mart or Target.

On average Riverton is a middle-class community. However, residents are likely to refer to the town as two communities: “Old Riverton” and “New Riverton.” A busy highway and railroad tracks bisect the town into these two sections. River High is literally on the “wrong side of the tracks,” in Old Riverton. Exiting the freeway and heading north into Old Riverton, one sees a mix of old ranch-style homes, their yards strewn with various car parts, lawn chairs, appliances, and sometimes chickens surrounded by chain-link fences. Old Riverton is visually bounded on the west and east by smoke-puffing factories. While effort has clearly been made to revitalize the downtown, as revealed by recently repainted storefronts, it appears sad and forlorn, with half of its shops sitting empty.

Driving south under the freeway and over a rise, one encounters New Riverton. The streets widen and sidewalks appear. Instead of a backdrop of smokestacks, a forested mountain rises majestically in the background. Instead of old run-down single-story houses with sheets hanging in the windows for curtains, either side of the street is lined with walled-off new home developments composed of identical stucco two-story homes with perfectly manicured lawns. The teens from these homes attend Hillside High School, the other high school in the Riverton district.

River High looks like many American high schools. It is made up of several one-story buildings connected by open-air walkways, though the students cram into closed hallways to find their lockers in between classes. Like many schools unable to afford new buildings to accommodate their burgeoning student populations, River relies on mobile classrooms, which are continually encroaching on the basketball courts. It is an open campus where students can come and go as they please, though they can't get far in this suburban community without a car. Many of the

students stay on campus to eat and socialize in one of the two main “quads” made up of grass, concrete, and benches, or in the noisy and overcrowded cafeteria.

Roughly two thousand students attended River High during my time there. Its racial/ethnic breakdown roughly represented California at large: 49 percent white, 28 percent Latino, 10 percent African American, and 6 percent Asian (as compared to California’s 59, 32, 7, and 11 percents respectively) (U.S. Bureau of the Census 2000). The students at River High were primarily working class, though there were middle-class and poor students.³ Lauren Carter, the guidance counselor, described it as an archetypical American high school emphasizing tradition, sports, and community. She illustrated this focus by telling me of the centrality of football to the social life of both Riverton and River High. “There’s all these old-timers who come out to the football games. Which I think is pretty funny. It’s like Iowa. This school could be straight out of Iowa.” The principal, Mr. Hobart, had played on the football team when he had attended River. Lauren told me that Mr. Hobart’s career path was a common one: “You go to River. You go to Carrington State for college. You come back to River and teach.” She also told me that the historically industry-based economy of Riverton (which had manufactured a variety of chemical, oil, metal, and paper products) was faltering and that consequently poverty rates were rising. In fact, only one of the factories that had historically provided jobs for residents was still in operation.

Research

I gathered data using the qualitative method of ethnographic research. I spent a year and a half conducting fieldwork in the school and connected sites; I formally interviewed fifty students (forty-nine from River High and one from Hillside), and I informally interviewed countless students, faculty, and administrators.

I recruited students for interviews through formal classroom presentations and through informal networks among students. I conducted pre-

sentations in a range of classes (English, auto shop, drama, history, social studies, weight lifting, stagecraft, bowling, and economics) and clubs (Asian Club, the Gay/Straight Alliance, and Student Government). I also hung around at lunch, before school, after school, and at various school events talking to various students about my research, which I presented as “writing a book about guys.” The Appendix includes a detailed discussion of my experiences conducting research at River High.

The interviews usually took place at school, either after school hours or during class time. Students with a car sometimes met me at one of the local fast-food restaurants, where I treated them to a meal. The interviews usually lasted forty-five minutes to an hour and a half. I tape-recorded them.

The initial interviews I conducted helped me map a gendered and sexualized geography of the school from which I chose my observation sites. In the tradition of Michael Messner (2004a) and Barrie Thorne (1993), I focused on highly salient gendered moments by attending major school rituals such as Winter Ball, school rallies, plays, dances, and lunches. In addition to these schoolwide rituals I conducted most of my research in three areas: a gender-“neutral” site (a senior government classroom, where sexualized meanings were subdued); three sites that students marked as fag (drama classes and the Gay/Straight Alliance); and two normatively “masculine” sites (auto shop and weight lifting). I took daily field notes focusing on how students, faculty, and administrators negotiated, regulated, and resisted particular meanings of gender and sexuality. I would also occasionally ride along with Mr. Johnson (Mr. J.), the head of the school’s disciplinary system, in his battery-powered golf cart to watch which and how and when students were disciplined.

Given the importance of appearance in high school, I gave some thought to how I would present myself to the students at River High. I wore my standard graduate student gear—comfortable, baggy cargo pants, a black T-shirt or sweater, and tennis shoes. I carried a messenger bag instead of a backpack. I didn’t wear makeup. Because I look young, both students and faculty sometimes asked me if I was a new student.

More than a few times teachers or security personnel whom I hadn't yet met reprimanded me for walking around the halls during class time. I did not try to pass as or fit in with the students in my interactional style. I spoke differently than the students, using just enough slang so that I didn't seem like a teacher but asking them to explain themselves frequently enough to indicate that I was not one of them. See the Appendix for a more extensive discussion of the unique difficulties of conducting research in a high school as well as the challenges and benefits of being a woman conducting research on male and female adolescents.

ORGANIZATION OF THE BOOK

Analyzing interactions between teachers, school rules, and students, chapter 2 continues to draw upon the Mr. Cougar competition as a metaphor for masculinity at River High. This chapter begins to paint a picture of River High—its flavor, traditions, students, teachers, and administration. It focuses on how sexuality is embedded in the daily life of the school and how sexual discourses interact with definitions of masculinity. Heteronormative practices, those that affirm that boy-girl pairings are natural and preferable to same-sex pairings, are entrenched in official and unofficial school rules, school rituals, and pedagogical practices.

In chapter 3, I continue to link meanings of sexuality to definitions of masculinity. Specifically I examine how a fag identity is continually used to discipline boys into heterosexually masculine positions. The *fag* epithet has both sexual and nonsexual meanings that always draw on notions of gender. Examining the use of the word *fag* as a trope reveals that it is not necessarily a static identity that attaches permanently to a certain (gay) boy's body; rather, it is a fluid identity that boys struggle to avoid, often by lobbing the insult at others. I conclude by showing that the fag identity is, in part, racialized, taking on different meanings and salience in various social groups.

Chapter 4 discusses complicated relationships between heterosexual-

ity and masculinity in adolescence. Discussions about teenage boys are riddled with clichés concerning hormone-driven behavior. This chapter moves beyond these trite characterizations of testosterone-fueled locker-room talk by reframing it as “compulsive heterosexuality,” in which these sorts of practices are ritualized demonstrations of mastery over girls’ bodies, not necessarily indicators of sexual desire. Compulsive heterosexuality plays a central role in boys’ thoughts, actions, and discussions at River High. Through rituals of “getting girls,” cross-gender touching, and engaging in “sex talk” with one another, some boys continually demonstrate to themselves and others that they are indeed masculine. Defining masculinity as mastery builds on the definitions of masculinity elaborated in chapter 3, in which boys make it clear that the most un-masculine position is a fag position, in which a boy is weak, penetrated, and lacking in mastery over his and others’ bodies. In the Appendix, I discuss how these masculinizing processes in adolescence don’t just take place among peers but also happen between a female researcher and (primarily) male respondents. I focus particularly on the ways the boys infused our interactions with sexual content and the ways I managed these interactions so as to maintain rapport while simultaneously enforcing a professional distance and preserving my dignity.

Chapter 5 challenges the dominant mode of thinking in the sociology of masculinity literature that treats masculinity as, more or less, whatever male bodies do. Three cases of girls who act like guys reveal the different ways non-normative sexual identities interact with gender identity and social status. These case studies indicate that masculine girls occupy higher-status social positions than do feminine boys. They also indicate that doing gender differently can, but doesn’t always, challenge gender inequality.

The concluding chapter revisits topics discussed in the substantive chapters and lays out the theoretical significance of the project. It raises questions about how adolescent gender and sexual identities can be re-configured to be less homophobic and sexist. In this discussion I make

connections between homophobia, sexuality, and inequality. I conceptualize the teasing and bullying that goes on in adolescence as a socialization process in which all youth—boys and girls, straight and gay, feminine and masculine—suffer. This chapter provides specific recommendations about the creation of antihomophobia programs and structural support for gay and non-normatively gendered students.