

class performances of femininity" as a way to indicate that class performances have race and gender specific meanings. But I could just as well speak of "gender-class performances of race" or "race-gender performances of class." That race, class, gender, and sexual meanings and identities intersect is not simply an abstract theoretical insight. This is a multiplicity "born of history and geography" (Mohanty 1991, 37). Race/ethnicity and class and gender and sexuality are always produced and read in relationship to one another in the social world.

CHAPTER 3

How Working-Class Chicas Get Working-Class Lives

Since I spent my first days at Waretown High in a college-preparatory class (a class that fulfills a requirement for admission to either California State University or University of California institutions), the first students I met were college bound. Later I came to know these girls through the eyes of non-college-preparatory students as "the preps." They were mostly white, but included a handful of Mexican-American girls. Some of the white girls were also known as "the 90210s," after the popular television show about wealthy high schoolers, *Beverly Hills 90210*. The preps eagerly volunteered to help me out with what they saw as my "school project," relating easily to the concept, and they were ready and willing to talk at length about themselves and others. Displaying both social and academic skills, they were, in short, "teacher's pets" (Luttrell 1993) or the "rich and populars" (Lesko 1988).

I soon began wandering the halls of the school in search of a non-prep class where I might find girls who seemed more like I was in high school. The memory of my own gender-specific high school experience led me to the business building, where unthinkingly I looked for a roomful of typewriters and girls with steno pads. Of course, I found neither, but rather rooms full of computers on which some students were practicing their word-processing skills while others were learning computer programming.

Looking for help connecting with non-college-prep girls, I visited the faculty room in the business department, which offers primarily voca-

tional track classes, to recruit the aid of teachers and ask whose class I might visit. When I told these teachers that I wanted to talk to some of their girl students about their aspirations beyond high school, teachers shook their heads and laughed together in a knowing way, one man joking that "They'll all be barefoot and pregnant." While the other teachers expressed discomfort with his way of making the point, they did acknowledge that their students did not have high aspirations and often were "trouble." They told me that one student, Yolanda, would be happy to give me "a piece of her mind," noting further that "if she doesn't like your survey, she'll tell you." They shook their heads about another, Christina, who had recently "told off her employer," and they explained that it would be very difficult to interview any of these girls, because they would fail to show up or I would be able to keep their attention only for a short time. Nonetheless, I was invited to attend their classes and attempt to recruit girls to talk with.

The first day I attended Ms. Parker's business skills class was characteristic of my future visits to non-prep classes. On this particular day, there was a substitute teacher taking her place. The differences between the girls from the college-prep class and these girls were immediately noticeable. The latter wore more makeup and tight-fitting clothing, and seemed to have little interest in the classroom curriculum. In fact, the class was out of the teacher's hands. The girls, mostly Mexican-American, were happy to have me as a distraction. One, whom I came to know later as Lorena, said loudly (Lorena was always loud), "Oh, we heard you might be coming. What do you want to know? I'll tell you." Completely ignoring the substitute, who had clearly given up on having any control over the class, they invited me to play cards. I hesitated, asking what would happen if the vice principal, whom students referred to as "Mr. D," were to come by.

Lorena: Oh, he never does; besides [flirtatiously] he *likes* me.

Becky: He doesn't like me. He's always callin' me into his office for something.

Lorena: He'll just ask me where's the other half of my shirt.

Lorena was referring to the short crop top she was wearing, which was fashionable at the moment, but was against school dress codes because it revealed her bare midriff. Pointing to the man behind the teacher's desk, Lorena went on:

That's "Mr. H." He's our sub. Don't you think he's attractive? He's from the university too.

She called him over to ask a question, and when he arrived, Lorena opened her book and pointed entirely randomly at a paragraph on the page saying coyly, "I don't understand *this*." He tried to respond appropriately by explaining the course material, but when it became clear to him that her question was not serious, he turned to me and politely asked about my "study":

Mr. H: What's your focus?

Lorena: [interrupting] You mean what's your *phone number*?

This brought rounds of laughter from the girls. It became obvious to the sub that Lorena was playing, and he wandered away a bit red in the face. She turned to me:

Did you check him out? You should go on a date with him.

I wasn't sure what to make of this incident for a while, wondering if the girls, whose affectionate self-referent was "las chicas," were "othering" him (as a sub) or me (as the outsider/researcher/white girl) or both of us (as adults) by making one or both of us the target of their humor. As it turned out, this practice of trying to set me up with substitute teachers became almost a hazing ritual. Whenever the girls saw me on a day they knew they were going to have a substitute teacher in class, they asked me to come visit them in class. Not wanting to decline any opportunity to spend time with them, I would always respond to their invitations, stopping in to chat with them for the few minutes before the bell rang and class officially began. Over several weeks, they began to accept and befriend me as I began to respond to the setting-me-up ritual without embarrassment, and I engaged (somewhat reluctantly) in their playful attempts to humiliate the sub, othering him as the sub, as an adult, and as a man; in the process I became less of an other to the girls.

I came to see the ritual of setting me up as one element of a larger theme among las chicas. Bored with their vocational schooling, las chicas often brought heterosexual romance and girl culture into the classroom as a favorite form of distraction. They regularly brought photo albums to look through during class; these contained pictures of a weekend event like homecoming, a prom, a wedding, a quinceañera,¹ or sometimes a new baby. On this day in the business skills class, Imelda had brought a framed collage photo collection of her and Christina, best friends. She had written sentimental words of friendship on the spaces

in between the pictures in Spanish. She read them aloud and, then after an awkward moment, read them again, but this time in English for the sake of Blanca, who, wearing a long face, had silently tugged on Christina's sleeve to indicate that she didn't understand.

The conversation turned, and they began talking about a girl they didn't like, one who had been "talking shit about Lorena." They took turns telling whom they would most like to fight. Flor declined her turn, "If I say, I'm afraid her girls will jump me." Bored with this conversation, Christina pulled a folded up newspaper page out of her purse and began reading people's horoscopes out loud. In the background the sub made a useless plea, "Okay, whoever's listening, you need to do chapter five today." On other days the topics of our conversations included fashion, shopping, and recent events on the television soap opera *Days of Our Lives*. Near the end of each period, girls would stop their work early, if they were doing it at all, to pull out compacts, powder their faces, and check their lipstick and liner, reapplying when necessary.

These elements of "girl culture" were notably missing from the college-prep classrooms I had been visiting. It is not, of course, that gender display was altogether absent in prep classrooms, but where las chicas could be found blatantly using class time to primp, applying makeup and adjusting hair, in prep classrooms a girl might secretly slip a powder compact out of her backpack and turn her back away from the teacher to powder her face before the bell rang and the walk between classes, where social life happens, was to begin. For preps the overt use of class time for such an activity was recognized as inappropriate. Moreover, the "natural" look adopted by preps suggests one is not really wearing makeup and to pull this off means application of it must be done in secret.

Las chicas, having "chosen" and/or been tracked into non-college-prep courses, showed little interest in the formal curriculum offered at the school, finding a variety of ways to kill time. They employed rituals of girl culture as an alternative to and refusal of official school activities, including the kind of classroom learning that prep students embraced. Like their male counterparts, las chicas, along with most other students at the school, have had their dignity wounded through exposure to preps who, with the complicity of teachers, routinely and unknowingly inflicted class- and race-based injuries. But, unlike the boys, las chicas' strategy of rejecting schooling, and prep values by association, is usually less violent and less confrontational, and perhaps easily overlooked, often naturalized as heterosexual interest and dismissed.

As Penelope Eckert (1993) explains, middle-class performers embrace adult (and I would add middle-class) norms for the adolescent life stage, and this means preparing to enter another institution similar to high school. Non-preps, on the other hand, violate these norms by laying claims to adult status before middle-class adults think they should. Where middle-class-performing girls (both white and Mexican-American) chose academic performance and the acceptance and praise of teachers' and parents' as signs of achieving adult status, non-prep girls earned and wore different "badges of dignity" (Sennett and Cobb 1972; MacLeod 1995). They rejected school-sanctioned notions of proper femininity. For them, expressions of sexuality, and by extension motherhood, operated as a sign of adult status and served to reject teachers' and parents' methods of keeping them childlike.

There were many occasions on which this difference in orientation between working- and middle-class performers was made clear. When I met Mariana, a Mexican-American middle-class performer and told her I was at the school to study girls, she immediately presumed my interest would be in those "at risk." I sat with her in the library where she worked on a report for her "Transition to College English" class. As she meticulously assembled the planning calendar of her report on the college of her choice, her comments parroted adult and middle-class morality: "There are a lot of teen pregnancies here. It is real sad. Girls whose futures are ruined. It's sad. And there's gang violence." Alternatively, a white working-class performer named Brenda, who approached me from the back of the room at an Future Homemakers of America (FHA) meeting where she had been sitting with a group of friends, asked bluntly, "Who are you?" I began to explain, but she interrupted, "Oh, never mind. We know. We've been talking about you back there." Then jutting out her hip, placing her hand on it, and batting her heavily mascara'd eyes, she said mockingly, "Are you here to study our *promiscuity*?" in full recognition of the fact that adult school personnel perceived her sexualized femininity as a violation of adolescence, and she expected me to do the same.

THE SYMBOLIC ECONOMY OF STYLE

There was, at the school, a symbolic economy of style that was the ground on which class and racial/ethnic relations were played out. A whole array of gender-specific commodities were used as markers of distinction among different groups of girls, who performed race-class-

specific versions of femininity. Hairstyles, clothes, shoes, and the colors of lipstick, lip liner, and nail polish, in particular, were key markers in the symbolic economy that were employed to express group membership as the body became a resource and a site on which difference was inscribed.² For example, *las chicas* preferred darker colors for lips and nails in comparison to preps, who either went without or wore clear lip gloss, pastel lip and nail color or French manicures (the natural look). Each group was fully aware of the other's stylistic preference and knew that their own style was in opposition. In short, girls created and maintained symbolic oppositions, where "elements of behavior that come to represent one category [are] rejected by the other, and . . . may be exploited by the other category through the development of a clearly opposed element" (Eckert 1989, 50).

The association of light with prep girls and dark with non-prep girls may be arbitrary, but the association of pastels with "youth, innocence, and gaiety" and darker colors with "somberness, age, and sophistication" does happen to coincide with middle- and working-class life stage trajectories (Eckert 1989, 50). Where middle-class performers experience an extended adolescence by going to college, working-class performers across race/ethnicity begin their adult lives earlier. The importance of colors as a tool of distinction was evident one day before business skills class when I complimented Yolanda on her nail color, and the girls clustered around her desk to compare colors. Bianca felt the need to apologize for hers. Displaying her hand on the table with others, she explained, "Mine is too pink, but it's my grandma's. I was at her house last night and she offered it, and I didn't want to hurt her feelings."

Further, *las chicas* explained to me that the darker colors they chose and the lighter colors preps wore were not simply related to skin color. As Lorena explained, "It's not that, 'cause some Mexican girls who look kinda white, they wear real dark lip color" so no one will mistake them as white. And when I mentioned that I rarely saw white girls in dark lipstick, Lisa, a white prep, explained, scoffing and rolling her eyes,

Oh, there are some, but they're girls who are trying to be hardcore [meaning these were white girls who were performing *chola* identity]. And those hick girls [white working-class], some of them wear that bright pink crap on their lips and like *ba-loo* eye shadow!

The dissident femininity performed by both white and Mexican-American working-class girls were ethnic-specific styles, but nonetheless

both sets of girls rejected the school-sanctioned femininity performed by college prep students.³ Working-class performers across race were perceived similarly by preps as wearing too much makeup.

Girls often expressed disdain for one another's style or at least were perplexed by preferences other than their own. Lorena, describing the difference between *las chicas* and preps, said:

Well, those prep girls, they wear their hair real straight and then sometimes just curl it at the end, either this way or that way [motioning a flipped-up or turned-under curl with her hands].

When I asked about makeup, she said:

Natural! Barely any. Maybe pink or something. Like that ugly girl who got homecoming queen. You know how *we* do our hair right? We put stuff [gel] in it and then scrunch it like this [demonstrating]. Well, some of us wear our hair straight. But then it's real long and no curl at the end.

Leticia gave a lucid accounting of the typography of subculture and style and was very clear in her recognition that preps were the norm from which all others deviated.

Leticia: Well, the preps they usually wear their jeans regular, you know, normal, like how pants are *supposed* to fit. We wear our pants either too big and baggy or at least big at the bottom but tight at the top [bell bottoms], depends on your figure. Those hicks they wear their pants, those ones, umm . . .

Julie: Wranglers?

Leticia: Yeah, they wear 'em way too tight. And big belts too. I don't know what their shoes are called.

Julie: What about the smokers, what do they look like?

Leticia: Tore up! They have holes in their pants, and they are all ripped at the bottom. And they wear a lotta black. Heavy metal T-shirts and chains. They dye their hair weird colors.

In spite of the meanings that working-class girls themselves gave to their gender-specific cultural markers—a desire to remain differentiated from preps—their performances were overdetermined by broader cultural meanings that code women in heavy makeup and tight clothes as low class and oversexed, in short, cheap. In other words, class differences are often understood as sexual differences, as Sherry Ortner usefully explains, where "the working class is cast as the bearer of an ex-

aggregated sexuality, against which middle-class respectability is defined" (1991, 177). Among women, "clothing and cosmetic differences are taken to be indexes of the differences in sexual morals" between classes (178).⁴ And indeed, this was the case, as middle-class performing prep girls (both white and Mexican-American) perceived *las chicas*, as well as working-class performing white girls, as overly sexually active. But non-prep Mexican-American girls were seen as especially so because, although there was no evidence that they were more sexually active, they were more likely to keep their babies if they became pregnant, so there was more often a visible indicator of their sexual activity.

BOYS ARE "BUGGIN' "

Las chicas' gender performance and girl culture worked, whether by intent or not, as a strategy to reject the prep version of schooling but, despite appearances, were not necessarily designed to culminate in a heterosexual relationship. Some of the girls whose feminine performance appeared the most sexualized were actually the least interested in heterosexual relations, marriage, or children. Despite what appeared to be an obsession with heterosexual romance, a "men are dogs" theme was prevalent among them. They knew men could not be counted on to support them and any children they might have, and they desired economic independence.

And so their girl culture was less often about boys at all than about sharing in rituals of traditional femininity as a kind of friendship bonding among girls. As Angela McRobbie (1991) describes, although the overt concern in girl culture is with boys and romance, girls often set themselves physically apart from boys. Lorena made this clear one day.

Lorena: Well, when we go out, to the clubs or someplace, we all get a bunch of clothes and makeup and stuff and go to one person's house to get ready. We do each other's hair and makeup and try on each other's clothes. It takes a long time. It's more fun that way. [Thoughtfully, as if it just occurred to her] Sometimes, I think we have more fun getting ready to go out than we do going out—'cause when we go out, we just *sit* there.

Julie: So then the clothes and makeup and all aren't for the men or about getting their attention?

Lorena: Well, we like to see how many we can *meet*. But, well, *you* know, I don't fall for their lines. We talk to them, but when they start buggin', then we just go.

In short, non-preps had no more or less interest in heterosexual romance than did girls who performed prep or school-sanctioned femininity. Nonetheless, teachers and preps often misread the expression of class and race differences in style among working-class performers as evidence of heterosexual interest. They failed to perceive girls' class and racial/ethnic selves and so unknowingly reproduced the common-sense belief that what is most important about girls, working-class performers in particular, is their girliness. *Las chicas'* style was not taken as a marker of race/ethnicity and class distinction but was reduced to gender and sexuality.

Not only has girl culture as a method to refuse schooling been missed by androcentric social science, but teachers too tended to naturalize gender and heterosexuality, treating girls' strategies as harmless. Although I once saw a teacher take a magazine away from a boy in class because it was distracting him from the assignment, no teacher ever told the girls to put away their photo albums, although they were at least as much a distraction. Girls across race and class performance were aware of their ability to violate rules without consequence as a result of teachers', and in particular male teachers', view of boys as troublemakers and girls as harmless. Girls told stories of getting out of gym class by faking menstrual cramps, of cheating on laps by doing one and then panting and exclaiming to the coach that they'd done thirteen. Lisa told how a boy who said "fuck" was put in detention all day, but "a girl who was yellin' it in the office, nothin' happened to her. I counted, and she said it thirteen times!" On our way back to school from a lunchtime birthday party at Yolanda's that had lasted too long, *las chicas* decided to bring a piece of cake for the teacher they called "Mr. M." so that he wouldn't count them tardy. It worked. When Bianca told me about flirting with a boy in her math class who allowed her to cheat from his paper, I recalled the similar tactics my high school friend Michelle and I used. We were the only two girls in an auto mechanics class, and when the classroom work was over, the boys would work on their cars in the shop while the teacher allowed my friend and me to lounge in his office reading romance novels. One day we discovered a copy of the final course exam on his desk. We scored higher than any of the boys in auto mechanics that year. In a conversation with Mr. Ross about Leticia he said, "It's hard not to like her. I mean she smiles at you the whole time you're chewing her out."

The primacy of gender as the defining characteristic of girls, which I heard from administrators, teachers, and the girls themselves, obscured

the ways in which class and race identities informed girls' actions. Evidence of the naturalization of gender, and of heterosexuality in particular, was found in the way physical fights among girls were understood. In my naïveté, I first imagined that there were probably far fewer physical fights among girls than stories told by students and school personnel, as I thought the novelty of a few fights among girls had been sensationalized. So I consulted an administrator, asking about precise statistics. He looked over his chart of violations, which included possession of a chemical substance, truancy, tardiness, and so forth, and found that the rate of violation among boys was higher than girls on every count except fights, on which they were even. Further, these "girl fights" (as well as fights among boys for that matter) were not limited to any particular demographic grouping. When I asked what it was that girls got into fights about, the answer according to administrators, teachers, and girls themselves, was always "boys."

But as I began to ask girls to tell me stories about the specific fights they had been in, it turned out that racial/ethnic and class identities were often center stage in their accounts.⁵ In one story, a car full of hick girls laughed at a car full of cholas, who had been pulled over by the police. That night, the cholas showed up, uninvited, at the levee, hick territory, to fight the girls who mocked them. Further, Yolanda explained that the red stain on a soiled maxi pad, the color of which signified *norteño* affiliation and which was stuck on the wall of the bathroom used by *sureño* girls, had nothing to do with boys. I asked Leticia about fights.

Leticia: Yeah, I do. I fought this girl last week. I jus' walked up and smacked her.

Julie: Was it about a guy?

Leticia: Shit no, I would never fight over no guy. They're not worth it.

Julie: Why then? What was it about?

Leticia: I don't know, she just thought she was "all that" you know. About color I guess. This *sureño* girl was talking shit to me. She said, "It's all about the south." So I went up and hit her.

And Mariana told me how she and a friend were angered in a classroom discussion where two preps made anti-affirmative action arguments. This, she said, led to a hallway confrontation:

It was just that they kept saying "they" meaning like either, you know, undocumented citizens or "they" meaning minorities

or "they" meaning, well, you know. My friend Bianca and her friends went after that girl, went after her and, um, cornered her and asked, "Why are you saying all of this stuff about Mexicans?" They didn't beat her up, they just kinda yelled at her and got her scared and stuff like that.

Mariana and her friends were particularly angered because one of the two preps had a Hispanic surname, so they had presumed her to be Mexican-American and therefore a "coconut."⁶ (She was actually biracial and had little attachment to her Mexican-American ethnic heritage.) As a college prep student, Mariana didn't engage in the fight; rather, her non-prep friends initiated it.

While there were many occasions on which jealousies over heterosexual relations with boys were central to fights among girls, this usually occurred *within* racial/ethnic groups since little cross-racial dating occurred. The fact that girls experienced race and class tensions among themselves went essentially unnoticed. School personnel, being privy only to fights that happened at the school, knew less than students about cross-race antagonisms, which occurred primarily off campus. The fact that a color-blind discourse is the most "polite" or school-sanctioned way of talking about race, and that class was largely unavailable as an explanation of social relations, left heterosexual relations as the most readily available way of describing the meaning of "girl fights."

ROUTES TO ADULTHOOD

Sensitive to the fact that girls were aware of the current moral panic over teen pregnancy and anticipated that adults were interested in their sexuality, I generally avoided the topic, letting girls bring it up themselves, then proceeding cautiously with my questions. Often girls preferred to begin talking in the third person about sexuality, describing friends' views and practices, before (sometimes but not always) shifting to their own. Most of the girls I spoke with, across all social groupings, reported that they were sexually active. It was understood that most girls who were in "serious" relationships were probably having sex with their boyfriends, and this was acceptable. Some girls suggested that it was not taboo for girls to have sex outside of relationships, although girls had to be much more careful than boys about their frequency here for fear of being labeled. Girls agreed that there was still a double standard: boys could be sexually active with multiple partners without con-

sequence, while girls were called sluts for the same behavior. What is important to recognize here is that girls' interest in sex was not *always* embedded in a narrative of romance.

In short, there were girls who did and girls who didn't across all group categories, but the race and class injury that occurred was in the perception of who was *too* sexually active. While many prep girls, whose presentation of self was squeaky clean, were sexually active, they were secretive about this violation of adolescence and used birth control pills, often without parents' knowledge (but sometimes with). White middle-class performers were more likely than other girls to have abortions if they became pregnant, as a way of ensuring the life stages that they and their parents had in mind for them. One girl explained, "My friend had an abortion and got her parents' insurance to pay for it without her parents even knowing that was the procedure she had done."

Stories of abortion were almost nonexistent among Mexican-American girls, and Mexican-American girls were less likely than white middle- or working-class girls to use birth control regularly.⁷ Girls became pregnant for a variety of reasons. Blanca explained that she lacked information about birth control—"My parents, they didn't tell me nothing about birth control"—and wrongly believed myths like "you can't get pregnant your first time." Mexican-American girls often said they knew about, but didn't believe in, the use of birth control or in abortion. Christina explained, "Having something growing inside you is a spiritual thing. If it happens, then God meant for it to happen. You just have to deal with it." But some were willing to consider birth control, suggesting that abortion was the worse of two evils. The most common explanation given for pregnancies was "it just happened," which seemed most often to mean that girls were unprepared and had no birth control plan, either because they didn't know they were going to have sex or because they were uncomfortable planning ahead to use birth control, as this compromised their belief system or suggested to themselves and others that they were too willing. Sometimes this situation was combined with stories of boys who refused to use condoms:

Yolanda: Well one reason it happens is that guys don't wanna use condoms. And then you just get caught up in the moment.

While girls did too often say they "felt a lotta pressure" and had sex before they were ready, they also often acknowledged their willing participation. But teen sexuality (and pregnancy) cannot be wholly explained either by girls' victimization or by their desire.⁸ The most pop-

ular discourse at the school among adults was one of female victimization, where girls became pregnant after being pressured by boys to have sex when they were not yet ready. Consequently, in the face of adult authority and public discourse on teen sexuality, the safest narrative for a girl to give is one of victimization, because it evades her responsibility. Less acceptable would be to acknowledge her desire, which is still, it seems, considered taboo for girls even as it is expected among boys. Indeed, any discourse on female desire or recognition that girls may be willing and interested in sex was largely missing among adults with whom I spoke at the school.⁹ But the worst possible thing for a girl to admit to is an intentional pregnancy, and only one girl I spoke with suggested this:

Leticia: Well some girls want kids. You go through that phase you know. I did a year or two ago. I wanted one. You want to be a young mother. Don't want to be an old parent 'cause then [if you are young] you'll understand them better.

Regardless of how a girl becomes pregnant (which occurs for a variety of reasons, including the use of birth control that fails), after the fact, having a baby can be a marker of adult status (just as sexuality was), and girls recognize it as such. For non-prep girls who do not have college and career to look forward to as signs of adulthood, motherhood and the responsibility that comes with it can be employed to gain respect, marking adult status. Teachers often expressed surprise at the degree of casualness among students about pregnancies and babies at school, one saying with ambivalence, "Babies are really celebrated here among girls; they are not ashamed. They bring them to class." Another teacher was more clearly sympathetic about babies in class:

It's a bit awkward because you don't want to seem to support it [teen pregnancy], but the pregnancy and the baby already happened, so it makes no sense to shun them [girls] either. One baby was fussy, so I had to teach while bouncing him on my hip. It's as if the girls are saying, this is my life, this is what happened, don't punish me for it.

In the end, however, girls' overt claim to adulthood startles adult and middle-class sensibility.

Pregnancy and babies became an extension of the girl culture that was present in non-prep classrooms. Talk of baby clothes and the anticipation of delivery were further ways girls overtly expressed their boredom with their vocational schooling and their sense of its irrele-

often consider doing simultaneously with other adult roles. The "going away to college" experience was decidedly a prep one, while working-class performers were likely to attend the local community college and begin their adult lives as workers, parents, and spouses at the same time. They saw no convincing reason to postpone parenthood. Pregnancy is not the cause of their vocational schooling, the cause of their ending up in a low-wage job, or the cause of their poverty, though that myth continues to circulate in public discourse legitimating anti-welfare sentiment and justifying punitive policies (Luker 1996).

For the most part las chicas' girl culture was interpreted as harmless, thought of as natural heterosexual interest, and therefore not negatively sanctioned. But when this girl culture was extended to include maternity, which school personnel saw as too adult and thus found unacceptable, they responded. During a year's end awards ceremony, I sat on the bleachers at the end of the gym near the lunchroom doors among students who were required to attend but had no interest in the ceremony. In the group of Mexican-American students I sat behind, one young mother had a toddler with her who was being passed around, and two young men in particular were competing over who got to hold the child. As one young man made silly faces and got the baby to smile, the group began to laugh, getting louder as they became more and more involved in the baby's play. As the unit administrator and master of the ceremony announced which students had perfect school attendance, had GPAs above 3.5, and were receiving university scholarships, a teacher angrily stomped over to the group of students, chiding them, "You could at least be polite and pay attention when someone is talking." The mother haughtily picked up her toddler and, head held high, walked out of the gym with four girlfriends following in solidarity.

Working-class performers across race shared the resentful view of the ceremony as an imposed glorification of prep students. The teachers and administrators did have some awareness of the way in which celebrating the successes of some made others look and feel like failures. They tried to finesse this by making attendance at such an event optional, where each teacher could decide whether or not to bring her/his class. But if a teacher chose to attend, which most teachers did, every student in that class was required to be either in the gym or in the adjoining lunchroom during this time. Added to the injury of being forced to attend a ceremony celebrating students who were able to achieve "success" by the standards of the institution, adults, and middle-class norms, the teacher's punitive attitude toward the baby's presence was a further insult that

vance. About a month before school ended, Elvira gave birth to a baby girl. Either because she had no child-care options or because she was simply excited about her newborn, she brought the baby to school with her several days during the last few weeks of school. The baby became a great distraction in the classroom, and the teacher dealt with it by asking Elvira to move to another room, allowing girls to go visit her there and see the baby two at a time. Eventually she and another girl who were both failing the class, totally uninvested in the work, and distracting other students who did have a chance of passing, were kicked out of the class. Most girls with babies eventually chose to finish their schooling at an alternative community school where they could graduate with fewer credit hours and where classes ended at one o'clock, making day care arrangements less complicated.

Girls' orientation to early maternity is not necessarily linked to an ideology of romance. Girls know from each other's experience that boys should not be relied upon. Sometimes girls believe they are an exception to this rule, one suggesting, for example, that because her boyfriend did not want her to have an abortion, this was a sign that he really loved her. I had this conversation with Yolanda about her friend Bianca.

Yolanda: Well, she should've protected herself. But since she didn't, she should have just had the baby but not get married. It isn't gonna work. He's not gonna stick around. I mean that's the only reason they got married, even though they say they "wanted to anyway." [rolling her eyes]

Julie: What would you do?

Yolanda: I ain't never gettin' married. But I looove babies!

For the most part, girls were very cynical about boys. They felt that men could not be counted on for economic support or as co-parents, or to meet the girls' ideals of romance and intimacy. One teacher, commenting on conversations among girls that he routinely overheard in his class noted,

You know, they don't talk about the fathers much. They are pretty irrelevant to them.

In short, working-class performers were more willing to consider parenthood and sometimes marriage as an appropriate next life stage after high school (and sometimes during, which usually meant continuing to live with her parent[s]). While these girls knew that "college" was a necessity to insure a living wage, it was something they would more

put non-prep students "back in their place" by trying to recenter attention on the success of students who could and did follow the institutional ideals.

Although las chicas were no more sexually active than other girls at the school, they suffered the consequences of their sexual activity in ways that middle-class performers did not. (White working-class girls were also more likely to keep babies than their middle-class counterparts, but still not at as high a rate as Mexican-American girls.) The presence of more babies among Mexican-American girls than any other group of girls was wrongly perceived by white preps (and some school personnel) as a difference of sexual morals between racial/ethnic groups. But the deeper injury is that those who have babies will experience the punishment of a gender regime, which blames women who become single moms for their own poverty by suggesting sexual immorality, especially if they are young. This logic fails to recognize that teen pregnancy is highly correlated with class and race: most of these young women were working-class or poor before they became mothers (Luker 1996). Their continued (or increased) impoverishment is a consequence of their vocational curriculum, low-wage jobs, and lack of affordable child care. Further, their potential heterosexual partners are working-class men of color who are also less likely to be able to earn wages that can support families. These young moms don't have and, for good reasons, don't want to rely on male support. They want and need to be able to support themselves and any children they might have. They want economic equality outside of heterosexual relationships.

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POST-HIGH SCHOOL TRACKS

Once a year, a nearby vocational business school invited students to come tour their facility, paying the school for the use of a bus and treating the students to a pizza lunch. Most of las chicas signed up to go. We piled into the bus on a rainy December morning. Girls paired off in twos, sets of best friends sharing a seat near the middle of the bus, while boys moved to the back, each occupying a seat by himself, head against the bus window and legs extended to take up the whole space. Given the purpose of the trip, I presumed this would be a good opportunity to talk to girls about their plans beyond high school. But, as usual, this was of little interest. In fact, it was a topic that I saw clearly caused the girls to feel uncertainty and a related stress, so they changed the conversation to music and fashion.

Yolanda had brought along a photo album of Bianca's recent wedding, photos of her reception which was held in the warehouse of her dad's employer. I asked about marriage, and Lorena began:

I ain't never gettin' married! Or at least not 'til I'm in my 30s. We want to party and kick it and have fun first.

When I pushed further for reasons why, Leticia chimed in:

Them boys who want to date us are buggin'. They try to control you and tell you what to do.

Lorena: Like Omar. We were standing by the business building one day, and he hands me his coat and says, "Watch this." Then he goes off with some friends. I just left the coat on the bench. When he saw me, he said, "Why didn't you watch my coat? It coulda got stolen." Man, that ain't my job!

Yolanda: And they tell you you shouldn't wear certain things.

Lorena: Yeah, like that white top I had on yesterday. Miguel said I shouldn't wear that. I look like a hoochie [laughing]. I told him he looked stupid, like Columbus.

The discussion turned to the prom, and the girls talked amongst themselves about whether or not to go, given the expense, and about all of the pairing up possibilities, making decisions about which of them would go with which boy. They explained, "The boys don't care who they go with. We decide." When our bus arrived at the school, Leticia asked to borrow Lorena's powder. Lorena pulled out her compact, and Leticia closed her eyes and juttied out her chin, waiting for Lorena to powder her face.

At the school we were taken to a classroom and seated in desks. The environment felt school-like and familiar, but in fact this was deceptive, since the woman speaking at the front of the room, a Ms. Laney, was actually giving a sales pitch under the guise of teaching and advising us about the expenses of life and job opportunities. She began by asking how much we thought it cost to live on your own and how much per hour one would need to earn. A boy answered, "About fifteen dollars." This answer clearly was not the one she was looking for, and she kept asking until she got a response of eight dollars. With that she could then follow her routine, which was to list life's expenses on the blackboard and show students how naive they were. In the end she led them (back) to the conclusion that they needed to earn about fifteen dollars per hour and that there was no way they could make this amount with just a high school diploma.

performative. They "chose" from the limited identities made available by cultural discourses on race and class that tend to meld these two together in specific ways. Moreover, racialization and racism pushed the girls in particular directions when they were self-fashioning an identity, and the salience of geography and the demographics of community cannot be underestimated. Erica reported that since no Filipina identity option was available to her within her public peer culture, she traveled from a white middle-class to a white working-class and finally to a Mexican-American working-class identity, stating explicitly that she was most comfortable with friends who understood "just being brown." Even though she began with middle-class cultural capital, explicit racism caused Erica's family to move and instigated her downwardly mobile path. Color shaped her decision to "become Mexican" in a community where to be brown and middle-class was largely incongruous. The fact that these girls made conscious decisions about their racial identities made them aware, on some level, of the malleability (or, more strongly, the falsehood) of racial authenticity and the fact that racial identities can be performed. Their knowledge of this was reflected in their discourse on acting white. What is important to note is that these racial performances were simultaneously class performances, but because of the absence of class discourse the girls' subjective experience was that of performing only a racial identity.

School was EDUCATED IN ROMANCE?

Overall, las chicas' race-class performance of femininity was read by their peers, and at times by their teachers, as a marker of heterosexual interest and sexual practice. It is an easy equation to assume that las chicas' girl culture, lack of interest in schooling, and poor school performance are a consequence of the fact that as girls they have been "educated in romance," that potentially higher aspirations were sidetracked by girls' socialization in romance and relationship (Holland and Eisenhart 1990).

But this suggested sequence of causality is, once again, a consequence of envisioning girls as only gendered, failing to see their gender performances as race- and class-specific. Rather, their working-class location, informed by racial formation, leads them to a vocational track, and their rejection of middle-class prep norms takes a gender-specific form. Ironically, the tendency to see working-class girls as shaped most by gender may occur precisely because of the particular working-class racialized version of femininity they are performing. We will see that working-

class white girls as well are perceived as sexualized; thus class differences, performed in race-specific ways, are often wrongly understood as primarily about gender and a difference of sexual morality between "good girls" and "bad girls." Instead, choices about appearance, girls' use of gender-specific commodities, are one way they negotiate meanings and construct distinctions among themselves in a race- and class-stratified society.

The year I was at the school, the film about the late Tejano music star Selena was being made, and rumor had it that the producers were searching the country for a girl to play the young version of Selena in the film. Las chicas reported stories of younger sisters pleading with their parents to take them to L.A. to try out. The lure that glamorous occupations such as dancers, actresses, pop singers, and models have on teen girls is commonly known (McRobbie 1991, 1994; Walkerdine 1997). But, as Valerie Walkerdine explains, viewing girls' attraction to such stardom only through a gendered lens, which interprets girls as victims of male-dominated culture, misses the class dimension of the draw. In particular, Walkerdine argues against a narrow view that young girls are merely victims, eroticized and exploited, and wants to consider as well (but not instead) their own participation. Aside from what fantasies of sexuality are projected onto them by the male gaze, she asks, what fantasies belong to the girls? Likewise, Angela McRobbie (1984) notes that teenybop culture and the fantasy of fame is far less boring than the menial labor or vocational schooling that working-class girls have to look forward to. Middle-class girls for whom school success is a realistic possibility and who are going on to college and career do have something to look forward to and may be less drawn to the lure of glamour industries as an escape from economic dependency or a crappy job. But for working-class girls, being looked at still presents one of the only ways in which they can escape from the routines of domestic drudgery or poorly paid work (Walkerdine 1997, 142). The body has long been the only raw material or capital with which impoverished and working-class women have to work.¹⁴ When girls reject schooling for glamour, they may resist their class oppression in a very gender-specific way, but—not unlike Paul Willis's (1977) lads—this also works to secure their subordinate place in the class hierarchy, because most of them, of course, will not become stars.

It is far too simple to treat what appears to be a sexualized version of femininity for working-class girls, and girls of color in particular, as a consequence of competitive heterosexuality and gender-subordinate

learning in which working-class girls have an "emphasized femininity" (Connell et al. 1982)—especially when narratives of romance were largely missing from girls' accounts of themselves. Such an analysis would suggest that middle-class (school-sanctioned) femininity is "normal."

And while school personnel at times explained working-class Mexican-American girls' gender performance as a consequence of "their" culture, an assumed real ethnic cultural difference in which women are expected to fulfill traditional roles and/or are victims of machismo and a patriarchal culture, the girls' generational status—in two senses—was not taken into account. Firstly, las chicas, are a generation of girls located in a historical context of dual-wage families, and they did not describe parents who had traditional roles in mind for their daughters. All of their mothers worked, and it was clear that dual incomes were requisite for a family economy. Secondly, they are second-generation Mexican-Americans, young women who have no intention of submitting to traditional gender ideologies, although they perceived first-generation girls and their families as "more traditional" in this way.

Las chicas' girl culture worked as a refusal of schooling and of middle-class prep norms. Girls who did not meet prep norms operated in alternative symbolic economies in which they earned and wore different "badges of dignity" that symbolically healed their race and class injuries. Girls like Lorena and her friends, who did not have the cultural (class and ethnic) capital that would enable them to be successful as defined by the institution, rejected the version of femininity performed by preps, the one most sanctioned by the school, and were simultaneously opting out and being tracked out of the game preps could more easily win. And for middle-class girls like Ana and Rosa, whose cultural capital would presumably mean a prep performance would come more easily, the association of school-sanctioned femininity with "whiteness" was a reason to reject it for a racial/ethnic identity that is coded "low." In the end, las chicas' particular race-class gendered performance helps to entrench them in subordinate class futures. Becoming exactly the kind of labor capital cannot refuse, they enter low-paying sex-segregated jobs right out of high school, or enter certificate programs at local community colleges that still land them in low-wage jobs. And, at times, they enter early maternity.

CHAPTER 4

Hard-Living Habitus, Settled-Living Resentment

I went into Waretown High with the by now tired race-class-gender mantra that characterized the scholarship of my generation of graduate education firmly in one hand and my desire to foreground (but not privilege) class and to come to some understanding of class as a cultural identity in relationship to race/ethnicity, gender, and sexuality in the other. I was both pleased and surprised when an event that marked students' understandings of cultural distinctions based on class occurred on one of my first days at the school. At the time, I did not yet have a full understanding of the informal hierarchy among students or of which girls belonged to which clique, but this event was illuminating.

A group of white girls from the college-prep class I'd been visiting were seated at a table in the library talking. I joined them and asked a few questions about the projects they were working on. It was the first class of the morning, and the air smelled of papaya and coconut from girls' hair still damp with the residue of cream rinse. One girl was applying translucent orange-scented lip gloss, which she then offered to others. On the table lay issues of *Seventeen*, *Glamour*, *Redbook*, and *Vogue*. The girls were cutting letters of the alphabet out of magazines to decorate the covers of their newly finished assignment. Each girl had researched on the Internet, in the library, and by mail and phone the college she hoped to attend next year and had written a report about that school, its virtues, expenses, and deadlines for admission. I asked Lisa why she had chosen her particular school: "Because I would really