

# CHAPTER 7

## Queering School

The sociologist C. J. Pascoe, in her book *Dude, You're a Fag: Masculinity and Sexuality in High School*, persuasively argues that even when used without any conscious intention to label the addressee's actual sexuality, there is a homophobic subtext at play in the middle and high school use of such words as *gay* and *fag*. Pascoe explores various kinds of "performances" centered on verbal acts that reinforce proper ways of being masculine and ways in which female athletes either profit from assuming masculinity or are derided for it. In the realm of collegiate sports, male athletes who participate in non-contact sports are often named into realms of queerness (soccer becomes "fairy football"), and, inversely, female athletes who play contact sports are often labeled as lesbians (or, in less polite terms, *lesbos* or *lezzies*). Though what seems to be at stake is adherence to gender scripts, it is impossible to distinguish categories of and assumptions about the sexual identities of children and adolescents that are based on rigid binaries of male and female, masculine and feminine, queer (usually lesbian or gay in the typically dualistic thinking of pre-adult minds) and straight (or "normal" or "good").

The bullying that led to the suicide of Tyler Clementi, the undergraduate at Rutgers University, who, after having been spied on and filmed by his roommate while having a romantic encounter with another male in his dorm room (and the video shared with many others on campus), is but one example of how much sexuality remains schooled — indeed, what the French philosopher and social critic Michel Foucault would call "disciplined and punished" through surveillance and other means — even past secondary school. Residence halls are filled with stories, both from the past and probably still occurring as you read these words, of queer folk (or even non-queer folk simply perceived as queer) being subjected to such "learning."

This schooling is by no means confined to the residential realm of college life. Students report classrooms where faculty and other students regularly feel empowered to devalue and diminish the experiences and lives of queer people, through such strategies, sometimes unconscious, sometimes

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING AND VIEWING

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*I Am Jazz*. Seasons 1–. TLC, 2015–.

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