

Additional contemporary stories from “Girlhood (It’s Complicated)”

Ryan’s letter jacket (1988)

Sometimes gender isn’t revealed at birth. Ryan was born intersex and socialized as a girl, but he always felt he possessed “a girl body and a boy brain.” He never performed activities expected of a girl, making him an outcast in his social circles. Sports became an important outlet for self-expression, and he earned this letter jacket for playing high school softball. In 2014, after decades of struggling with his gender identity, he legally changed his name to Ryan and transitioned to male. Ryan’s story demonstrates the limitations of checking boxes as “male” or “female”—those boxes could never capture the complexity of gender and sexuality.

Yadira Montoya’s report card and award (1998-2002)

Yadira Montoya is one of approximately 700,000 DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) recipients. Born in Mexico, she grew up in Little Village on the West Side of Chicago. When applying for DACA, she had to submit report cards, certificates, and awards as proof of residency, good moral character, and educational achievements. Undocumented youth have to lead extraordinary lives to be deemed worthy of inclusion.

Monica Camacho’s hoodie and bandanas (2010s)

Girls in agriculture aren’t protected by child labor laws because the 1938 agriculture law argued that farm families needed the help of their children. Currently half a million children harvest a quarter of US crops. These bandanas and hoodie were worn by teenage agricultural worker Monica Camacho to protect her face while she was out in the fields. The hoodie served a dual purpose—wearing a baggy hoodie protected Monica from pesticides and dust as well as sexual harassment since in the hoodie, no one could tell she was a girl.

Karen Maeda Allman’s punk jewelry (1984)

As an underground culture outside of corporate control, punk gave girls the means to express unruly politics and feelings in unconventional ways. These bracelets were part of what Karen called her “armor.” When she was performing, she wore them to shows partly as decoration and partly for protection on the dance floor.

Michelle Gonzalez’ rock t-shirt (1984)

Rebecca Lobo, Simone Manuel, Dominique Dawes

Bat Mitzvah, Cotillon, Quinceñera

