

female stars earn around \$1 million a season, nearly 10 times the maximum WNBA salary.) “She can change the way people think,” says Lindsay Kagawa Colas, Griner’s agent at Wasserman Media Group. “And her success will mean society is working a little better for everyone.”

Androgynous models are coveted in high-end fashion, but the trend toward gender-neutral clothing has only just begun to reach the sports world, with NBA stars Russell Westbrook and Dwyane Wade blurring the lines in their tight jeans and fitted sweaters. No sports apparel company has expressly targeted the gender-fluid crowd, and whether Nike is willing to ride the edge with Griner remains to be seen. “We can’t get into specifics,” says Nike spokesman Brian Strong, “but it’s safe to say we jumped at the opportunity to work with her because she breaks the mold.”

Griner relishes the chance to show her evolved style, saying she doesn’t see herself as a certain “type” anymore. Others might call her a stud, but she’s just BG now. “It clicked for me,” she says. “I used to do the whole baggy, hard-core, I’m-a-boy look. Then I went through a preppy phase. Now I have the athletic, bow-tie look. I found my style.”

And along the way, she found an identity that feels like home. A week before joining the Mercury for training camp, Griner spent eight hours getting the flower tattoo on her left shoulder extended into a sleeve, complete with a hummingbird. “It’s to show my girlie side,” she says. “So many people exist between the two ends of the spectrum, but no one wants to admit it. If you’re in between, they say something is wrong with you. ‘We can fix you.’ Well, I don’t need fixing.”

**IN THE YEARS** since Griner first sat at her family’s computer, looking for answers, the world around her has done some soul-searching of its own. Massachusetts became the first of 12 states to legalize gay marriage; the It Gets Better Project launched; President Obama repealed Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell; and in April, of course, NBA center Jason Collins stepped out as the first openly gay male professional athlete in a major sport. Still, while Griner is a hero to some, she knows she will always be a villain to others. She’s not afraid to play either role because she has done it all of her life.

On this April afternoon, though, she is simply chilling in the backseat of a van that’s been shuttling her between media appearances in Phoenix. As she sips her frozen strawberry lemonade, she scrolls through Google images of pit bulls on her phone. She wants to adopt a dog, which would join her two other pets, Audii and Sage, the albino corn snakes she bought while playing at Baylor.

“Everybody is scared of snakes because they’re different,” Griner says, lowering the phone. “They’re not the expected pet to have in society. But you know why? They’re misunderstood. People say they’re aggressive, but they’re not what people think they are. When I see them, I think of finesse, elegance, grace.”

She pauses for a moment.

“You just have to look at it in a different way.” ■

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