

RESISTING REGULATION: LGBTQ TEENS AND DISCOURSES OF SEXUALITY  
AND GENDER IN HIGH SCHOOLS

by

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## Abstract

### RESISTING REGULATION: LGBTQ TEENS AND DISCOURSES OF SEXUALITY AND GENDER IN HIGH SCHOOLS

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This dissertation documents a participatory action research project designed to understand discourses of sexuality and gender in New York City high schools. Lesbian, gay, and bisexual high school students participated as co-researchers in documenting discourses in popular culture, news reports, youth development reports, and through writing exercises about their own experiences. Together researchers created a modified Q sort (the Queer Q Sort) and surveyed a snowball sample of 21 lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer and questioning (LGBTQ) high school students about the discourses of sexuality and gender they encounter in their schools and the ways that they accept or reject discourses as they form their identities. In order to imagine other frameworks for understanding sexuality and gender beyond the discourses of safety, victimization, disease and raging hormones, researchers wrote counter-narratives of their experiences that challenge discourses that reference mental health, physical health, pedagogy and morality. Youth researchers created spatial representations of the ways discourses work in the spaces of their schools by drawing maps showing how the movement and behaviors of bodies are regulated. My analysis triangulates the findings of the Queer Q Sorts, the maps and the discussions and writings of the youth researchers to show that young people create alternatives to the official discourses of sex education materials and much of the media coverage of young people and sexuality. I show that young people make ethical decisions about becoming sexual and fashioning their bodies in certain ways to reflect the

gender identity and sexual subjectivity they wish to inhabit. Students advocate for queering schools by creating curriculum and pedagogical practices that allow critical analyses of gender and heteronormativity with the goal of helping their peers understand that binary categories are not givens, but rather social constructions we are often forced to perform. Using Foucault's theory and methods, the researchers challenged assumptions about teens as victimized, rebellious, promiscuous or innocent in conversations about sexuality and gender in schools.

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## Table of Contents

List of Figures .....	ix
List of Tables .....	ix
CHAPTER 1 .....	1
Why Study Sexuality and Gender in Schools? .....	1
The Current National and Local Setting .....	7
Anti-gay Bullying and Heterosexism.....	7
Pilot Study.....	11
History of Sexuality and Gender in Schools.....	15
Gender and Sexuality Changes: 1850 to 1930.....	16
Fear of the Homosexual: 1920 to present .....	20
Sexuality Education .....	24
Sexual and Gender Identity Development .....	29
Sexual Identity Development Among Teens.....	30
Contextualizing Adolescent Sexual and Gender Choices.....	34
CHAPTER 2 .....	38
Methods: Understanding Discourses of Sexuality and Gender in High Schools.....	38
Participatory Action Research .....	41
Theory of PAR.....	42
Creating Our PAR: Recruiting the Team.....	44
Team Members .....	45
Developing the Team.....	52
Writing.....	53
Activities.....	54
Reading and Text Analysis .....	57
Critical Decisions/Critical Dilemmas .....	59
Method of Analysis of PAR Work.....	61
Creating Our Survey Instrument.....	62
Theory of Q methodology.....	64
Our Q Methodology .....	65
Method of Analysis of the Queer Q Sorts.....	70
Mapping School Spaces.....	73
Theory of Sexuality and Space .....	74
Method of Analysis: Reading the Maps.....	75
Conclusion .....	77
CHAPTER 3 .....	78
Theorizing Sexuality and Gender .....	78
Theory in Research Design.....	80
Concepts and Critiques of Queer Theory.....	82
Michel Foucault .....	83
Judith Butler.....	86
Critiques of Queer Theory .....	88
Queer Theory In Education.....	91
Heteronormativity.....	92
Identity Categories.....	95

Beyond Homophobia and Heteronormativity .....	98
Our Contestations with Theory .....	102
CHAPTER 4: .....	108
Queerly Belonging: LGBTQ Youth and Safety in School .....	108
Do We Need to Talk About Safety? .....	108
School Climate.....	123
Student Sexual and Gendered Subjectivity.....	126
Reframing Safety as Belongingness .....	131
What’s Wrong With Safety?.....	133
How Belonging Offers New Freedoms for Students .....	136
Conclusion .....	138
CHAPTER 5: .....	141
Spaces of Sexuality and Gender in Schools.....	141
Public Spaces and Schools as Public Space.....	144
School as Public Space .....	147
Gay Straight Alliances as Political Organizations .....	149
Theoretical Reimaginings .....	151
Analyzing the Maps .....	152
Narration of Sally’s Map .....	153
Analytic Discussion of Sally’s Map .....	154
Narration of Mikey’s Map .....	155
Analytic Discussion of Mikey’s Map .....	156
Narration of Sankofa’s Map.....	158
Analytic Discussion of Sankofa’s Map.....	159
Narration of Tayla’s Map.....	160
Narration of Yajaira’s Map.....	162
Analytic Discussion of Yajaira’s Map.....	163
Where Our Maps Lead Us .....	164
Sex in School Spaces .....	164
Spaces in which to Explore Desires and Pleasures.....	167
Teachers and Spaces in Schools .....	169
Conclusion .....	171
CHAPTER 6: .....	175
Becoming Sexual and Gendered Subjects: The Identities Young People Claim and the Freedoms Within Them .....	175
Telos, or goal .....	182
Ethical Substance .....	190
Mode of Subjection.....	198
Self-Forming Activity.....	209
Relationships to Others and to Self.....	218
CHAPTER 7: What More Can Be Done?.....	222
Summary of Project .....	223
Summary of Findings.....	226
Significance.....	228
Implications for Education.....	231
Appendix A: Recruitment Flyer.....	239

Appendix B: Popular Culture and Documentary Sources .....	240
Appendix C: List of Statements for Queer Q Sort.....	243
Literature Cited .....	246

## List of Figures

Figure 2.1 Sort Line .....	63
Figure 2.2 Sort Grid I.....	67
Figure 2.3 Sort Grid II .....	68
Figure 2.4 Queer Q Sort Grid .....	69
Figure 5.1: My Gay School by Sally .....	153
Figure 5.2: My Gay School by Mikey .....	155
Figure 5.3: Welcome to Broke Back Clinton by Sankofa .....	157
Figure 5.4: Untitled by Tayla.....	160
Figure 5.5: Yajaira’s High School .....	162

## List of Tables

Table 2.1 How Do You Know Someone Is Gay? .....	56
Table 2.2 How Do You Know Someone Is Bi?.....	56
Table 2.3 How Do You Know Someone Is Straight? .....	57
Table 2.4 Queer Q Sort Analysis Attempt I.....	71
Table 3.1 Three Words Chart.....	79
Table 4.1: Safety Discourses.....	120
Table 4.1: Safety Discourses (cont.).....	121
Table 4.2 Prevalent Discourses by Belongingness .....	124
Table 6.1 Care of the Self .....	190

## CHAPTER 1

### Why Study Sexuality and Gender in Schools?

The situation for lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans(gender), queer and questioning (LGBTQ) youth in America's high schools, although not perfect yet, seems to some observers be improving. Students are advocating for gay-straight alliances (GSAs), teachers are naming themselves as allies or queer adult supporters, and administrations are being pushed to be responsive to students' pleas for help when they are being bullied ("L.W. v. Toms River Regional Schools, Board of Education," 2007; "Nabozny v. Podlesny," 1996). Although students report name-calling, bullying behavior and resulting academic and social difficulties in nation-wide surveys, these same surveys report that in schools that offer administrative support for student organizations such as GSAs and have a clearly enumerated disciplinary code that punishes harassment on the basis of gender expression or sexual orientation students feel much safer (Kosciw, Diaz, & Greytak, 2008). In the national media it has been reported that teens are coming out at younger and younger ages (Cloud, 2005) and that even some elementary schools have changed their policies to accommodate gender variant second graders (P. L. Brown, 2006).

Conversely and concurrently, homicidal acts of violence have been recorded against LGBTQ and gender variant young people over the last 10 years. Some of these stories have gotten little or no media coverage, and some have been national events<sup>1</sup>. In

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<sup>1</sup> In February 2008, during the time the research team (myself and 7 youth researchers) were working together, we followed the coverage of the murder of Lawrence King by his 8<sup>th</sup> grade classmate in Oxnard, CA and the murder of Sanesha Stewart, a 25 year old transwoman, in the

New York City the Harvey Milk High School (HMHS), which existed to provide educational opportunities to students who could not attend their regular high school due to the virulence of the harassment they encountered there, expanded in 2003 to accept more students and has become a permanent, official Department of Education school, although it has also moved its focus away from serving LGBTQ youth as its primary focus, and now functions much like any transfer school in the city<sup>2</sup> (Teacher, HMHS, personal communication, May 2007). Every semester in some New York City high schools, a few queer or gender variant students gradually stop coming to school and then disappear altogether (NYQueer Beyond Tolerance conference, personal communication, May 2008).

While these events seem to counteract or contradict each other and induce confusion about the social reality for queer and gender variant youth, they are all part of the larger discursive struggle about sexuality and the sanctity of differential gender valuation in contemporary United States culture (Sedgwick, 1990). Schools have been the sites for these struggles since the end of the nineteenth century, and both teachers' and students' bodies have been closely regulated within educational settings (Blount, 2000, 2005; Foucault, 1977; Lugg, 2003, 2005; Luschen & Bogad, 2003; Pascoe, 2007; Weiler, 2006). Disputes over the content of the curriculum, the appropriate gender and sexual behavior of teachers and students and the role of schools in teaching about

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Bronx. The youth researchers were surprised to discover that there was very little coverage of these events in the news and no mention of them in their schools (E. Jacobs, 2008).

<sup>2</sup> The inclusion of HMHS as a regular transfer school in the New York City Department of Education was vigorously debated in the media and in LGBTQ community organizations. Among some, it was interpreted as progress, signifying that queer youth no longer needed a "safe school" to go to. Across the street, protestors considered it a sign that the NYCDOE supported a "gay lifestyle" among students. Still others argued that this change marked the loss of an important educational resource for queer youth excluded from their neighborhood schools.

sexuality have raged throughout the twentieth century (Fields, 2008; Fine & McClelland, 2006; Irvine, 2002; Kliebard, 1995; Perrin & DeJoy, 2003; Reese, 1986; Spring, 2004; The New York Times, 2003; Urban & Wagoner, 2000; Zimmerman, 2002). These arguments have often questioned the rights of students who do not conform to gender and sexuality regulations to an education, taken away the rights of non-heterosexual or gender variant adults to be in physical proximity to children, and denied the non-heterosexual and gender transgressing behavior in curriculum subjects' lives in order to keep homosexuality or gender variance out of the classroom. Underlying these efforts are some of the contradictory discourses about sexuality and gender that form the foundation of modern society. These are the contradictions that Foucault (1978) pointed out and many others have built on: that although heterosexuality is the presumed natural and superior half of the heterosexual/homosexual binary, its boundaries are quite unstable and must be enforced and reinforced throughout one's life, and that gender performance and sexual behavior or object choice get conflated and define a certain type of person – the homosexual.

This research project engages that confusing morass of contradictory discourses about sexuality and gender in schools. It examines, not only the current climate in New York City high schools for LGBTQ and gender variant students, but also students' sense of their own contentions and negotiations with the multiple discourses circulating in schools and society about sexuality and gender. Foucault's concept of the care of the self, which he developed in his second and third volumes of the *History of Sexuality: The Use of Pleasure* (1985) and *The Care of the Self* (1986) will be used as a theoretical lens through which to view these discourses and the impact they have on students' lives. It

will ask the question, *How do the discourses of sexuality and gender function in schools to create certain types of sexual and gendered subjects, and how do students interact with these discourses?*

The term “discourse” will be used extensively throughout this proposal and will be the focus of the analysis of the dissertation work. Discourse is the way that a subject – in this case sexuality and gender – is culturally understood. Discourses about a single topic, like sexuality, can be contradictory, as in the United States where sexuality is presumed to be on the minds of all teens, and at the same time is considered to be information that is beyond their years or maturity level. Some may view the U.S. as very liberal about sexuality, while others may view the country as very prudish. Foucault describes a discourse as a field of thought, or a body of knowledge, as in an academic discipline. He links the ordering of knowledge to the disciplinary institutional practices of the church, psychology, medicine and prisons (Foucault, 1973b, 1977).

“Fundamentally, then, Foucault’s idea of discourse shows the historically specific relations between disciplines (defined as bodies of knowledge) and disciplinary practices (forms of social control and social possibility)” (McHoul & Grace, 1995, p. 26). In schools, different discourses of sexuality emerge from the backgrounds of different persons in various positions: administrators have a certain ability to impose their views about sexuality on the students, teachers can react from their own worldview about sexuality in their classrooms or in interactions with their students, the discourses in the community – both local and national – also impact the discourses about sexuality in the school, and students negotiate their own spaces within these discourses.

This study offers to the field of education and to studies of queer youth a new theoretical lens through which to view student and policy discourses on sexuality and gender. Research on LGBTQ youth in schools focuses on the issues of safety and tolerance (Advocates for Children of New York, 2005; GLSEN, 2004; GLSEN & Harris Interactive, 2005, 2008; Human Rights Watch, 2001; Kosciw et al., 2008), on the need for schools to serve LGBTQ youth (Friend, 1993, 1998; MacGillivray, 2000; Russell, 2002; Russo, 2006; Sadowski, 2001, 2003; Swartz, 2003), or on sex education (Planned Parenthood, 2007; Rothbart, 2005; Sen & Fellner, 2005; Smith, 2004; Szalacha, 2004). In many of these bodies of literature the incidence of queerness in youth is considered to be a matter of pluralism, another difference that needs to be included. As such, school is considered a place where queer youth should be protected from harm and other students should learn to tolerate her.

This research did not take that approach, although it did not contest the need for schools to provide safe access to education for queer youth and protection for queer and gender non-conforming bodies. The research and reports that show continuing violence, harassment and mistreatment of LGBTQ youth should be cause for ongoing organizing and outrage among all educators. However, in the interest of complicating the existence and experiences of LGBTQ youth represented in educational research, I started from the position that sexuality is an expression of oneself, a search for physical pleasure and a way of relating, and that gender is a way of presenting oneself in the world. These bodily expressions can take many forms, even within the circumscribed possibilities of any temporal moment. As such, sexuality and gender were not viewed in this project as

something to be tolerated, but as a way that students seek to form themselves as ethical subjects.

An ethics of sexual subjectivity motivated the readings of sexuality and gender discourses in schools and informed the policy changes suggested. An ethics of sexual subjectivity assumes that we all engage with discourses of sexuality and gender to create a sexuality and gender presentation that represents the ways we want to engage sexually, and in gender positions, with others. Those who conform to more traditional sexual and gendered roles also engage with these discourses, by deciding to accept them as right. I assert that those who do not conform to traditional roles also engage ethically in deciding how they will resist or remake sexuality and gender for themselves. This lens has not previously been used to do empirical research in schools with youth co-researchers, and it provides an opportunity to look at sexuality within schools not as a “problem” or a “risk-factor” for students, but as a way for students to fashion themselves and learn to relate to others. This research also enacts in the social sciences a new application of Foucault’s work. Although his words are often used to theorize a research project, his methods are not often applied. This research is a new application of Foucault’s methods to the present school setting.

This chapter presents the current national and local climate for LGBTQ youth in school settings, the history of sexuality and gender in schools in the United States, and a framework often drawn from when talking about sexuality and adolescence – psychological adolescent development literature. These three discourses help to situate the study of sexuality and gender in schools and provide a context for the work of the

Resisting Regulation Research Team, a group of youth participatory researchers and myself, who conducted the research.

### The Current National and Local Setting

Within schools homosexuality has primarily been studied as an issue of bullying, homophobia or heterosexism. Visible, or legible, queer students have been shown to have been tormented for their sexual or gender non-conformity. Other students who perhaps had same-sex attractions or wayward gender performances were controlled by the verbal and physical harassment, punishment and ostracism of those who were unable to keep themselves “closeted”. These studies show the situation at its worse – at those junctures where it is destroying lives and sometimes killing youth. These studies are important for showing researchers and policy makers why work to change school settings for LGBTQ youth is urgent, but they are only part of the story.

### *Anti-gay Bullying and Heterosexism*

A few large-scale, survey studies of youth across the country have been conducted to measure the impact of harassment and sexuality and gender violence on all students, including those who claim non-heterosexual sexuality or non-normative gender. These include the Gay, Lesbian, Straight Education Network’s (2005) *From Teasing to Torment: School Climate in America* (n=3450), which surveyed both LGBTQ identified students and straight-identified students, and GLSEN’s biannual *National School Climate Surveys* (n=1732 in 2005 and n=6209 for 2007), which surveys LGBTQ identified students (Kosciw & Diaz, 2006; Kosciw et al., 2008). Also, the Human Rights Watch (2001) report *Hatred in the Hallways* (n=140), and the New York City Advocates for Children (2005) report *In Harm’s Way: A Survey of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and*

*Transgender Students Who Speak about Harassment and Discrimination in New York City Schools* (n=75), both of which survey LGBTQ students. According to these reports, physical and verbal harassment because of identity is the number one problem for some students in middle and high school. Sixty-five percent of middle and high school students “have been verbally or physically harassed or assaulted during the past year because of their perceived or actual appearance, gender, sexual orientation, gender expression, race/ethnicity, disability or religion” (GLSEN & Harris Interactive, 2005, p. 7). This bullying can affect students who are heterosexual as well as homosexual, but it is particularly virulent for students who are or are perceived to be lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning. Students who experience bullying often say it is because of their perceived lack of conformity to traditional norms of masculinity or femininity. Students experience harassment on this basis, nationwide, much more than on the basis of race, ethnicity or religion (GLSEN & Harris Interactive, 2005).

The researchers found that harassment in schools, whether on the basis of claimed or ascribed identities of the harassed student, and even when not involving physical violence, interferes with a student’s school performance and can create a less safe environment in the school for all students (Kosciw, Diaz & Greytak, 2008; Advocates for Children, 2005). The seriousness of the impact of harassment and bullying can be seen in the number of students that report being harassed, as well as the reason that they report for being targeted. Sexist and homophobic remarks are the most often heard derogatory comments in schools, with 73.6 percent of LGBTQ identified students surveyed in 2008 reporting hearing these remarks often or frequently. These numbers are fairly consistent across race and class lines, but LGBTQ students heard more homophobic and sexist

comments than non-LGBTQ students and girls were more likely to hear sexist remarks than were boys. One comment, “You’re so gay” or “That’s so gay”, was heard very often or often by 69 percent of all students, and 84 percent of LGBT students (GLSEN & Harris Interactive, 2005, p. 20). These types of verbal harassment are likely to be pervasive in a school, with most students, rather than a small group of bullies, using homophobic and sexist language. Both boys and girls (66.5%) also report being harassed for being too masculine (girls acting too much “like a boy”) or too feminine (boys acting too much “like a girl”) in addition to harassment about sexual orientation (86.2%) (Kosciw et al., 2008). These strict binary gender codes keep all students in check, both heterosexual and homosexual, by threatening violence or ostracism of students who do not adhere to the gender performance mandates of the social system of that school.

Students link skipping class, skipping days of school and poor performance to harassment and bullying. Ten percent of all students and 20 percent of LGBT students know someone who has skipped class or skipped a whole day of school because of harassment. One percent of students skips class 4 or 5 times a month, and another one percent 6 or more times a month due to feeling “unsafe or uncomfortable in that class” (GLSEN & Harris Interactive, 2005, p. 62). These figures are 3 percent and 4 percent for LGBT students. In the Advocates For Children report in New York City (2005), nearly 30 percent of the LGBTQ students in their survey population were out of school “because they encountered violence and harassment based on either their sexual or gender identity” (p. 5). These statistics show that students’ academic performances suffer when harassment, verbal and physical violence and prejudicial remarks are allowed to circulate in schools. These students’ problems are compounded when they receive failing grades,

and they may end up leaving school, escaping the torment of school as soon as it is legal. All students suffer when bullying and harassing behavior goes unchecked. “Students view these [homophobic, racist, sexist and negative religious] remarks as having a negative effect on their school’s atmosphere” (GLSEN & Harris Interactive, 2005, p. 16).

Finally, in some cases students report a better school climate if bullying, harassment and name-calling are officially curtailed within the school. The percentage of students who report incidents of harassment to school authorities jumps from 11 percent in schools with no school harassment policy to 18.7 percent in schools with a comprehensive safe school policy that “explicitly provide protection by enumerating personal characteristics, including sexual orientation and gender identity/expression” (Kosciw et al., 2008, p. 12). Just having a policy is not enough, however, if it is not enforced. In the New York City survey, 68 percent of the students did not know that their schools have a non-discrimination policy in existence in the student disciplinary code. Forty-seven percent did not know how to file a complaint if they were being harassed (Advocates for Children, 2005). Although research has shown that in schools with anti-harassment policies students experience significantly less harassment because of their physical appearance, sexuality or perceived sexuality, gender expression, academic ability, race/ethnicity, class and religion (Sadowski, 2001), students have to know about the policies in order to access their rights under those policies.

Besides these survey reports, there is qualitative literature that describes the social environment that some LGBTQ students experience in schools. While this experience is not universal for all LGBTQ students in the United States, nor even identical for all the students presented in the studies, it gives a picture of the daunting task that some LGBTQ

students feel they face as they head to school each morning. Some students report verbal and physical harassment, ostracism, isolation, loss of friends and alienation from family as a result either of revealing their sexual identity or hiding it (Munoz-Plaza, Quinn, & Rounds, 2002; Sadowski, 2003). Even some students who attend schools designed to support LGBTQ youth encounter heteronormative and binary gender assumptions that underlie their school's practices (Aleman, 2004). These studies provide the backdrop against which many LGBTQ students attend schools, even in what might be perceived as a supportive situation (i.e. schools with a strong tolerance policy). All of these studies argue, as I will argue, that tolerance for LGBTQ students is not enough. The fact that students can attend a school without harassment, as long as they do not act too gay does not counter the insidious effects of heteronormativity or challenge the hegemony of binary gender, constructs this research hopes to challenge.

### *Pilot Study*

Students interviewed in a pilot project that contributed to the conceptualization of this study added to the complexity of my thinking (Linville, 2008). This pilot study was conceived and analyzed through the lens of queer theory and the ways that it helps to deconstruct sexuality and gender binaries, decenters the "normal" of sexuality and gender and explodes the essential bases of identity politics. Students reacted to the questions posed in the pilot study in three ways that exhibit how they are questioning the gender and sexuality norms which exist in society. The teens participating in this study reported on their attitudes and those of other students in their high schools about LGBTQ students. Heterosexually-identified students reported the heteronormative expectations that they will get married and have children, and that this is the goal of relationships. They

worried that if everyone continues experimenting and becoming lesbian or gay, that humanity will not be able to reproduce itself. They did not have, as some queer educators propose (Rofes, 2000), a queered idea about sexuality that is separate from a notion of procreation and lifelong partnering. They did, however, accept sexual fluidity in their friends. They accepted that teens, both boys and girls, are sexual subjects (Fine & McClelland, 2006; Rasmussen, 2006a) who choose different relationship configurations for different reasons, to meet their sexual and emotional needs. These needs were seen as real and valid, and the relationships were valorized for their ability to meet the needs of these teens. As such, participants in the study questioned a binary construction that posits heterosexuality as normal and homosexuality as deviant. These teens saw their friends and peers not as the deviant Other, but as agentic sexual subjects with emotional and bodily desires expressed in non-heterosexual relationships.

All participants, both queer and straight, in the pilot research project expressed a sophisticated understanding of gender and the ways that it works in society and their lives. They were able to clearly discuss the way that gender interacts with sexuality to create more spaces for girls to transgress sexuality boundaries than boys. Girls, lesbian and bisexual, in their schools were much more able to be “out.” One participant (Emma, interview 6/15/06) estimated that 30 percent of girls in her school identify as lesbian or bisexual, while she knew of only one boy who claims to be gay. Most participants agreed with the separate assertions of two boys that the eroticization of lesbianism and bisexuality in women that can be found in pornography makes lesbian and bisexual girl peers seem sexy to boys (Omar, focus group 5/19/06; Philip, focus group 5/12/06). The approval (or lesser disapproval) by boys creates a social space in which girls can declare

themselves non-heterosexual. Girls' approval of boys' homosexuality and boys' feminine attributes, which was also widely reported, did not confer the same social openness to boys. Boys were generally disapproving in these students' schools of boys' feminine behavior and were verbally derisive, if not physically threatening, to boys who declare themselves gay. In only one school was it reported that girls responded in anger and disgust at a girl who had been passing as a boy. Students could see how gender is constructed through the acts that are called feminine and masculine, and accepted the stated gender, for the most part, of their classmates who transgress gender boundaries. They had begun to deconstruct the concept of gender.

Most of the students declared themselves political allies for LGBTQ students in their schools, and felt that political alliances can be made across identity categories. They affirm that each person should be able to pick the identity label for him/herself, and should not be limited by that label or boxed in to a "culture" by it. Michele states, "I believe that being who you are is being who you are, not based on your sexuality, and if we continue letting our sexuality become who we are, then we won't be anybody at all" (focus group 5/19/06). She voiced for the focus group that the requirements for belonging to a group, whether it's a religion or a subculture or a gender, are sometimes so rigid that they transform or mask the person in favor of the attitudes, dress, actions, ideas, and activities that the group condones. The anti-essentializing moves of queer theory ring true to the teen participants in this study, who understood that society often "puts that status over your head" (Annabelle, focus group 5/19/06) when it ascribes stereotypical attributes to a person who is perceived to be a part of a racial, ethnic, class or sexuality group. The students subscribed to a politics based on affinity rather than

identity, an ethical approach that would entail working for changes in the schools' policies and practices for the greater integration of LGBTQ students, but they base this politics on the liberal ideal of a common humanity.

What was not clear in this pilot study and in the national and local surveys of school atmospheres for LGBTQ youth is how differing cultures, religions, or geographic areas may have different sexual mores, in which, for example, coming out and “being in your face” with differences is disapproved of. These attitudes might represent, rather than shame specifically about sexuality or some form of oppression enacted by straight students on LGBTQ students, a way of dealing with differences that is culturally accepted and practiced. Intersections between ethnicity, race, religion, region and sexuality and gender need to be analyzed in order to understand where the regulations exist specifically about homosexuality and gender non-conformity.

Additionally, the mostly heterosexual students surveyed in the pilot project believed that coming out and being out were fairly uncomplicated for their peers. The perceived ease with which students come out and declare non-normative sexuality may mitigate the impetus to political action. The two non-heterosexual participants challenged this assumption. The apparent ease that queer students feel may be misleading, as Michael said, “They may look like they don’t care, but they do” (focus group 5/12/06). The perception that coming out is easy, though, is certainly not reflected in student attitudes about LGBTQ peers around the country.

This research project is situated within the national findings, but gives the local specifics to help the researchers understand what is happening within New York City high schools, under neglectful national and state policies (“Adolescent Family Life Act

(AFLA or Title XX)," 1981), and local policies that have been proposed but not implemented or enforced ("Local Law: The Dignity for All Students Act," 2004; New York City Department of Education, 2003, 2005) since the sex education curriculum *Children of the Rainbow* failed to be disseminated in the New York City schools. As those working with identity-based politics have discovered, creating change in schools may require finding a specific problem around which to organize and creating a feeling of injustice that other students could relate to, rather than relying on sexuality as a unifying force. Allowing heterosexually identified students or teachers or administration to feel that the hard work of changing the school atmosphere is over when a school has a gay-straight alliance is also not enough. This research project connects a variety of injustices – not isolating sexuality and gender issues from other inequalities – in order to create a politics of change in schools that shows how all students can benefit from finding fissures between regulatory measures about sexuality and gender to fashion themselves as sexual subjects.

### History of Sexuality and Gender in Schools

The place of sexuality and gender in education is historically situated, as is the terminology. In the current moment, sexuality refers to romantic attractions, sexual behaviors, sexual identity and desires, as well as the presumed embodied existence of these characteristics. Gender encompasses the behavioral characteristics that attach to binarily-sexed bodies – feminine to female bodies and masculine to male bodies – as determined by secondary sex characteristics and hormonal/genetic factors. The 20<sup>th</sup> century saw the rise of the category homosexual and the embodiment in certain persons behaviors that had previously been thought to be possible in anyone. After the early

twentieth century, psychologists and sexologists described certain behaviors as residing in certain kinds of bodies. These bodies were often identifiable because of the ways that they transgressed gender, although sexual behaviors could also call into question the “real” gender of the person. In these views about sexuality that began to gain currency in the early decades of the 1900s, gender deviance and sexual deviance became conflated in the public’s mind, and sexuality was often policed along the lines of gender.

*Gender and Sexuality Changes: 1850 to 1930*

At the end of the nineteenth century, the sexology studies emerging in Europe (Foucault, 1978; Somerville, 2000) changed the image of sexuality in the United States. Both men and women as sexual agents came to be understood differently in light of the creation of the category homosexuality. Prior to this time, it was assumed that all men were capable of having sexual contact with both other men and women, and only the moral restrictions on same-sex contact and their beliefs kept them from doing it (Blount, 2005; Love, 2001). After the creation of “the homosexual” as a person with specific sexual practices, the sexual behaviors that had previously been possible for any man came to be embodied in a person on whose body perversions could be read (Blount, 2005; Foucault, 1978). This was a radical change in the understanding of sexual behavior and its link to gender, and it also changed the role of schools in sexuality and gender. As these changes occurred in the public perception of sexuality, the perception of sexuality and gender in schools changed. In Britain, what had been a long tradition of educating boys in single-sex situations that reflected their adult social lives came to be seen as a breeding ground for perversion (Blount, 2005). Male teachers, already suspect in their masculinity, were seen as preying on young men, teaching them how to be homosexual.

Although the boarding school was not as common an educational institution in the United States, the changes around sexuality and gender in schools were also felt in the U.S. In the United States the late nineteenth and twentieth century history of public education reflects a conscious effort to keep sexuality contained and mostly out of schools (Lugg, 2003). Historians of education (Blount, 2000, 2005; Lugg, 2003; Spring, 2004; Zimmerman, 2002) trace the emphasis on sexuality as part of schooling back to the mid-1800s.

Of course, a consciousness of gender had previously been part of schooling in the United States – through exclusion of most girls and women from any but the most rudimentary education, gender-segregated schools and classrooms, and gender-specific curriculum (Urban & Wagoner, 2000). Beginning in the later half of the 1800s, girls were able to attend school outside of the home and young women were being trained as teachers. This was made possible because of the position that young, unmarried women held in society: their presumed lack of sexuality and their low status as workers (Blount, 2000; Markowitz, 1993; Rousmaniere, 1997). Women were cheap laborers, with no legal standing to protest for higher wages, and they were perceived to be supported by others, rather than needing to support themselves on their earnings. Additionally, young and unmarried women hired as teachers had their activities and lives closely monitored by the community. In this way, their sexuality and their portrayal of chaste, unmarried womanhood would not contradict the gender ideal of the time (Blount, 2005; Grosvenor, Lawn, & Rousmaniere, 1999; Rousmaniere, 1997). Because the teachers were not married, they were presumed to be asexual.

Women entering the workforce began to change the image of gender (Blount, 2000, 2005; Markowitz, 1993; Rousmaniere, 1997; Sadovnik & Semel, 2002). The first generation in the United States to complete an education that trained them for work outside of the home, these women sought positions in the many localities that were scrambling to provide a public education to their populations. With the advent of mandatory common schools (Urban & Wagoner, 2000), there were many more teaching positions than there were available male teachers, so the circumstances provided the perfect opportunity for educated young women. Taking paid employment challenged gender roles of men as providers for all the dependents in their households, and also of women as economically dependent on their fathers, brothers and husbands. In the United States setting, increases of girls as students in secondary and higher educational institutions was contemporaneous with and facilitated women filling the demand for teachers.

Sexuality was not considered to be an issue among women because, for the most part, sexual energy and drive was presumed to reside in men in the sexology of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Blount, 2000). Intense relationships between women were considered harmless until women started pushing for recognition in other ways. Blount asserts, “Essentially, passion between women escaped notice until they were perceived to have transgressed their gender-appropriate boundaries and entered the public realm” (2005, p. 33). Some historians believe that through the early years of the twentieth century, because of economic circumstances which required all but the wealthiest women to marry in order to survive, love between women was believed to coexist with and not challenge heterosexual marriage (Vicinus, 1984). However, as

economic structures began to make heterosexual marriage unnecessary for some women, and as models of single, aging, teachers became available for young women, the public discourse began to question the value, content and wholesomeness of passionate friendships and relationships between girls and women. Older, unmarried women teachers were seen as fostering unhealthy ideas in young girls, encouraging them into abnormal desires to resist marriage and become unnaturally attached to other girls. Blount (2000) describes the transformation of the image of the single woman teacher during the first two decades of the twentieth century, from being viewed as moral guides, benevolent mentors and self-sacrificing spinsters to being portrayed as sexually repressed, abnormally affectionate, or bitter and dried up old maids. Because of changing economic and social circumstances, bodies of women engaged in love and sexual relationships with other women became visible. Notably, this derision and censure of women's choice not to marry heterosexually became conflated with the eugenics movement, which accused women of committing race suicide by not reproducing the White (especially upper and middle-class) race (Butcher, 1986). The fear of the Eastern European immigrants, Black migrants from the south and women's changing place in society all became focused on the homosexual body, and especially on the female body.

After a period in which the ranks of women teachers grew, women were promoted to leadership roles in urban schools, and the numbers of men teachers fell, teaching became "feminized". It was seen as an unsuitable profession for men, and was thought to turn out feminized boys. In what has been portrayed as a backlash against the growing numbers of unmarried women teachers, married women were promoted as more

experienced at mothering and handling children, and therefore better equipped to manage their classes of young students (Markowitz, 1993; Rousmaniere, 1997). Teaching positions were opened to married women, and teachers became safely sexualized, within heterosexual marriage, and very clearly gendered, with the elementary grades reserved almost exclusively for women teachers and the administrative positions almost exclusively filled by men. Student bodies were passively gendered at this time through the hierarchical gender examples that teachers and administrators provided, but they were also beginning to be actively, heterosexually sexualized, through the new social hygiene curriculum (Blount, 2005; Zimmerman, 2002).

*Fear of the Homosexual: 1920 to present*

After the 1920s, homosexuality became the symbol of everything un-American that had to be purged from the schools. For the most part, twentieth century history of sexuality and schools has been understood as the struggle between conservative, repressive forces that would keep (homo)sexuality out of schools, and the liberatory forces that would embrace tolerance of homosexual teachers and students in schools (Gibson, 1989; Lugg, 2003, 2005; Luschen & Bogad, 2003; Perrin & DeJoy, 2003; Zimmerman, 2002). In cases around the country, political involvement with leftist causes, communism, or suspicion of homosexuality could be used to expunge teachers permanently by denying them a license to teach (Lugg, 2003). Often gender non-conformity was seen as an indicator of deviant sexuality, and teachers who maintained same-sex sexual or intimate relationships learned to disguise their sexuality by conforming closely to gender requirements, especially in dress and comportment (Blount, 2005).

Except for a small reprieve during World War II, when shortages in all professions led institutions to not look too closely for gender and sexuality deviance, the 1930s and 40s are seen as a sexual backlash against the relative freedom of expression and sexual openness of the 1920s. The 20s had brought to the public discourse more explicit sexuality, in which the American public gained more knowledge<sup>3</sup> of what types of “homosexuals” there were<sup>4</sup> and their prevalence (Jones, 1997). In turn, the boundaries around affectionate, proper and sexual same-gender behavior became more solidified.

During the 1950s and 60s the fear of sexuality among youth, sexual deviance, and sexual predators increased (Blount, 2005; Zimmerman, 2002). Scandalous sexual assaults dominated the media, followed by the rounding up and institutionalizing of men who frequented spaces known for public sex between men, or the scapegoating of teachers who would suffer public detailing of their sexual lives and accusations of molesting youth in their care (Blount, 2005). These practices caused several teachers to lose their jobs, and others to flee from their smaller cities to larger metropolitan areas where their private lives could be conducted at a distance from their professional lives. Some of this fear was projected onto young peoples’ bodies through the struggles over sex education and its contents (Zimmerman, 2002), but the public vilification and denunciations at this time were limited to adults, with young people viewed as salvageable if they could be protected from the homosexual predator. Teachers who were

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<sup>3</sup> Katherine Bement Davis, in 1929, published her Rockefeller funded study called *Factors in the Sex Life of Twenty-Two Hundred Women*, in which 1000 married and 1200 unmarried college-educated women were surveyed as to their attractions. Half of the unmarried women reported having emotional relationships or sexual relationships with other women (Blount, 2005).

<sup>4</sup> The play “The Captive” in 1926 and 1927, Radclyffe Hall’s novel *The Well of Loneliness* published in 1928, and the 1931 release of the German film *Maedchen in Uniform* in U.S. cinemas all brought lesbians to the wider U.S. audience (Blount, 2005).

publicly denounced could have their teaching credentials revoked for life (Blount, 2005; Lugg, 2003).

Most histories of sexuality situate the struggles of the 1960s and the 1970s as liberation movements, when the bounds of sexual and gender repression are loosed and freedoms are gained by sexual minorities and women. Toward the end of the 1960s and into the 1970s, school policies began to be challenged by teachers protesting limitations that had been placed on their gender expressions and their sexuality. Emboldened by several social movements – including the Civil Rights Movement and the ensuing legislation and the Stonewall rebellion and gay liberation movement – same-sex desiring and gender-nonconforming teachers fought for more room in which to define themselves through the courts and identity organizing (Blount, 2005; D'Emilio, 1983). Within the national teachers' unions, teachers found support for employment discrimination cases on the basis of sexuality (but this support was not extended to trans teachers). At the same time, the larger gay liberation movement worked to have homosexuality removed from the list of mental disorders in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of the American Psychological Association (D'Emilio, 1983). Toward the end of the 1970s, communities and school boards became more willing to allow teachers who declared themselves non-heterosexual or transgendered to stay in the classroom.

Although many laws enacted by states during the late 1970s and 1980s were struck down due to their silencing effect on free speech,<sup>5</sup> politicians and activists continued their attempts to draw legal perimeters around schools to keep homosexuality

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<sup>5</sup> These included laws in California and Oklahoma that would preclude a teacher mentioning anything about homosexuality, or in any way endorsing homosexuality. In California, this was the Briggs Initiative (Blount, 2005).

out. Additionally, de-pathologizing gains made by removing homosexuality from the list of psychological disorders were undermined by the addition of a new category, Gender Identity Disorder, through which psychologists could diagnose children (especially boys) who displayed gender non-conforming (un-boyish) behaviors as at-risk for homosexuality, and treat them by teaching them proper gender behavior (Sedgwick, 1991). The conflation of gender non-conformity and same-sex sexuality persisted, endorsed by prominent psychologists and sociologists, and vividly alive in the public imagination. As late as 1986, a judge in West Virginia decided that a teacher could be fired because the community “perceived her as a lesbian,” (Krebs, 1985) based on the clothes that she wore and the way she wore her hair but not based on her sexual behavior or her self-identity.

Only when teachers began to advocate on behalf of students did the conversation about homosexuality in schools begin to change. In the early 1980s several organizations and actions led schools to start talking about lesbian and gay (Gibson, 1989; Project 10), and other sexually stigmatized<sup>6</sup> youth, such as those with HIV/AIDS. It was discovered that public sympathy could be swayed by the specter of dying teens and young adults. In order to avoid contributing to the ignorance, mistreatment and possible suicide or other causes of death of young people, educators and communities were willing to work to change education policies in some parts of the country (for example see the Massachusetts Safe Schools Program for Gay and Lesbian Students, <http://www.doe.mass.edu/cnp/safe/ssch.html>). Since then, students suing school districts

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<sup>6</sup> I am not conflating queer issues and HIV/AIDS. However, opening the discussion of HIV/AIDS in schools often initiated the discussion of LGBTQ persons. Currently in some sex ed curricula the only mention of LGBTQ persons allowed is in terms of AIDS or sexually transmitted infections (Perrin & DeJoy, 2003).

for failing to protect them under Title IX of the Equal Opportunity in Education Act have pushed policies to be more proactive and inclusive of both sexual identity and gender identity *among students* as a protected status ("L.W. v. Toms River Regional Schools, Board of Education," 2007; Lugg, 2003; "Nabozny v. Podlesny," 1996). However, the number of states that have changed their policies to protect employees, and thus teachers, on the basis of sexuality or gender identity remains small<sup>7</sup> (Lugg, 2006b). In large part the discourses of heteronormativity, gender normativity and sexuality as sex – and therefore private and out of bounds for teachers to talk about at school (Luschen & Bogad, 2003) – remain in place, and work to pathologize, stigmatize and organize lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, unmarried, and gender non-conforming lives and bodies in schools.

### *Sexuality Education*

From the beginning of the twentieth century schoolteachers were pressed into service to explicitly teach students proper gender and sexuality (Blount, 2005). These lessons did not always come in the form of sex education classes. In the early part of the twentieth century, schools separated girls into home economics classes where they learned sewing and how to cook “American” dishes, and boys into shop classes where they learned jobs skills (Reese, 1986). These classes emerged as part of the struggles over the curriculum (Kliebard, 1995) and the efforts to keep working class boys off of the streets and out of the job market, especially as jobs became scarce in the recessions of the 1890s, 1910s and 1929 (Lesko, 2001; Reese, 1986; Urban & Wagoner, 2000). They were

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<sup>7</sup> Catherine Lugg reports that six states (CA, MN, RI, NM, IL, ME) and the District of Columbia have laws that afford civil rights protections to lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered persons as of July 2005. An additional 10 (WI, MA, CT, HI, NJ, VT, NH, NV, MD, and NY) offer protections for lesbian, gay and bisexual persons (2006).

also part of the Protestant, middle class efforts to “Americanize” new immigrants from southern and eastern European countries who were considered unsanitary, uncouth and in need of manners and habits that would make them productive members of society (Reese, 1986; Spring, 2004). Starting with social hygiene and mental hygiene classes, students were taught to limit their sexuality to (heterosexual) marriages, although sexuality education at this time did not discuss contraception, desire or sexual acts (Zimmerman, 2002). The classes promoted the eugenics ideology of the times, suggesting that young people seek appropriate partners – of the same social class and race as themselves – who would maximize healthy procreation. These texts promoted the idea that the healthiest choice for women was to marry and have children, and that men should evaluate their genetic strengths before deciding to pass along inferior genes<sup>8</sup>. These efforts were not unique to the United States setting, but emerged as part of the “biopolitics” Foucault (1977, 1978) describes in Europe as arising in the sixteenth century in the form of the “art of government” as differentiated from sovereignty (Foucault, 1978/2003). As society transformed from local rule to larger governments, rulers became more interested in regulating bodies, marriages, births, deaths, and production to allow for the greatest prosperity. Foucault clarifies that these concerns did not emerge as a conspiracy of rulers to exert more control over individuals, but as society changed rulers needed to maintain their authority through their ability to raise an army, produce enough food, control the size of the population and predict growth in ways that would not lead to famine or disorder. In order to achieve this regulation, the family starts to be seen as the

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<sup>8</sup> This is from Janney, O. Edward (1914). *The Making of Man: The physiology and hygiene of sex for high school boys, their parents and teachers*. Baltimore, MD: Lord Baltimore Press, pp. 10-14 (cited in Blount, 2005).

“instrument” (p. 241) of population management in the eighteenth century. As such, new interest arose about how, at what age, and under what rules bodies were engaging in sexual practices and reproducing.

Education that explicitly deals with sexual desire and behavior, as well as contraception, has existed in schools since the middle of the twentieth century (Spring, 2004), and has also been used to reinforce binary gender roles and proscribe gender-bending behavior. In the 1960s, what have been described as culture wars (Zimmerman, 2002) erupted over the inclusion of sexuality in the curriculum. Sex education was blamed for sexual liberation among young people, which included a new openness about sex outside of marriage, homosexuality and birth control. Even though most sex education, including the materials of the Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States (SIECUS), was supportive of fairly traditional sexuality, it was blamed for the social changes happening in the public discourse about sexuality. Often the programs promoted monogamous sexual relationships and marriage, and opposed same-sex sexuality of any kind, but generally did promote a larger public discussion of healthy sexual relationships, within the discourses of psychology and population control, than had previously been socially acceptable (Zimmerman, 2002). According to accounts of this discussion, the very point was to disseminate the morality of the dominant classes, to encourage young people to accept these values as their own and to, in fact, discipline themselves (Foucault, 1976; Zimmerman, 2002). The critics, among them the John Birch Society and Christian Crusade (Irvine, 2002), opposed sex education for promoting a looser attitude about sex among young people and for usurping the family’s moral guidance of their children.

In 1981, communities, activists and politicians who opposed sex education, changing gender roles, and the secularization of society won an important victory in Congress with the passing of the Adolescent Family Life Act ("Adolescent Family Life Act (AFLA or Title XX)", 1981). AFLA focused funding on programs that promoted abstinence until marriage, encouraged young people to avoid sexually transmitted infections and HIV, discouraged teenage pregnancy, and required service providers to work with religious organizations in their geographic areas. It was controversial for crossing the boundary between church and state by promoting a single religious ideology in state funded programs. However, with some modifications in 1993 that eliminated religious references in sex education, it stood. In 1996 much more money was provided for education programs in the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (House of Representatives, 2002), part of the welfare reform acts. This act provides up to \$50 million annually for abstinence-only education, and is summarized by Perrin and Dejoy (2003) as stipulating that programs must meet the following goals:

1. It has as its exclusive purpose, teaching the social, psychological, and health gains to be realized by abstaining from sexual activity;
2. It teaches abstinence from sexual activity outside marriage as the expected standard for all school age children;
3. It teaches that abstinence from sexual activity is the only certain way to avoid out-of-wedlock pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, and other associated health problems;
4. It teaches that a mutually faithful monogamous relationship in the context of marriage is the expected standard of human sexual activity;
5. It teaches that sexual activity outside the context of marriage is likely to have harmful psychological and physical effects;
6. It teaches that bearing children out-of-wedlock is likely to have harmful consequences for the child, the child's parents, and society;
7. It teaches young people how to reject sexual advances and how alcohol and drug use increases vulnerability to sexual advances; and

8. It teaches the importance of attaining self-sufficiency before engaging in sexual activity. (Perrin & Dejoy, 2003)

Hotly contested in many eras, sexuality education reversed in the late 1990s and early 2000s many of the teachings favored in the early 1990s when comprehensive sexuality education experienced support in response to the HIV/AIDS crisis, and returned to an abstinence-based education policy endorsed by President George W. Bush and the national administration (Sen & Fellner, 2005). These policies included information that denied homosexuality as an expression of human sexuality and instead portrayed it as an illness or deviance. By insisting on abstinence until marriage in states where the right to marry is denied lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) persons, these policies and materials, according to the rhetoric of LGBTQ activists, effectively denied LGBTQ persons socially endorsed sexual expression for their whole lives (Planned Parenthood, 2007). This approach to sexuality education attempted to keep both students and educators unaware of the range of human sexuality, to limit what was sayable and knowable, and to produce ignorance and fear about LGBTQ students' and teachers' lives. Moral codes, inspired by formal religion and medical discourses shaped the rhetoric employed by schools to encourage adolescents to place their sexual desires along a specific track and instill a fear of diseases and of being labeled a social outcast, with the goal of compelling adolescents to abstain from sexual relations. This was the national sexuality education climate during the months of our research project. We anticipate that activism aimed at changing the national policy to include comprehensive sex education will succeed with the new administration. In addition to formal sex education curriculum, the discourses of sexuality and gender in schools are also influenced by the

language of “normal” sexual and gender identity development in the psychological literature.

### Sexual and Gender Identity Development

Sexual identity development models for non-heterosexual teens have been proposed by psychologists since the 1970s (Cass, 1979; McCarn & Fassinger, 1996; Rivers, 1997; Troiden, 1988). These models have primarily shown lesbian, gay, and more recently, bisexual, queer and questioning teens to suffer psychological problems as a result of their awareness of and inability to hide their sexuality. These findings have been used to create impetus for and urgency about services for LGBTQ teens in schools in the United States, and in some locations the validity of the scientific research has leveraged the force needed to create policy changes to make schools safer for non-heterosexual youth (Brown University News Service, 2003; Sadowski, 2001; Szalacha, 2004). Recently, the methodology for data gathering in these studies (such as using samples of youth that self-identify as LGBTQ, or youth already seeking psychological help) has come under fire, as have their findings, which portray LGBTQ youth as suicidal, depressed, prone to substance abuse, and the victims of regular harassment and violence at the hands of their peers (Diamond, 2003a; Savin-Williams, 2005). However, an understanding of this literature is necessary in order to understand the research upon which current school policies are based. Additionally, this literature has influenced the public discourse about LGBTQ youth, and informs public sentiment about them, eliciting both sympathy and loathing. A closer look at this literature allows researchers in this field to understand the discourses in place in schools, within which students are fashioning themselves as sexual subjects.

### *Sexual Identity Development Among Teens*

Adolescent identity development models often proceed from Erikson's (1950; 1968) lifespan model of identity development. Erikson starts with the notion of identity development through "identity crises" which become most intense during adolescence. "[Adolescents] strive to know and accept who they are, which involves trying to establish a positive sense of self and envisioning a future role for themselves in adult society. A virtually universal aspect of this self-definition process is adolescents' keen awareness of how others perceive them" (Sadowski, 2003). During this process the developing child either succeeds or fails and from this experience learns something about him/herself (Nakkula, 2003). Adolescence provides an opportunity, the "best last chance" (p. 13), to make decisions which will allow them to develop a healthy and positive sense of themselves and their abilities that they can carry into adulthood. Erikson's model proposes that the primary objective of the adolescent years is to create a self-understanding that is coherent and continuous. Part of this process is developing a healthy, heterosexual sexuality. As Erikson envisioned it, a homosexual identity was a desperate attempt to create a unified self out of a failed attempt to become heterosexual (Savin-Williams, 2005).

Psychological theorists that have come after Erikson have suggested less pejorative ways of understanding the homosexual identity process. The most well-known among these (Cass, 1979; Troiden, 1988) have suggested that adolescents go through a linear process of coming to understand their sexual attractions and desires, acting on those desires, understanding themselves to be not heterosexual, and finally declaring that identity to others and feeling proud to be homosexual. In less heterosexist examples

(Marcia, 1987), healthy sexuality develops out of experimentation and commitment, when an individual has allowed himself or herself to actively experiment with relationship and sexual choices and has chosen an identity that fits his or her needs and desires. A commitment to an identity is essential to this model, as it is with all the models of sexual identity development.

These models have been criticized for many of their assumptions. Researchers and theorists have pointed out that the models work best for boys, rather than girls (Diamond, 2004, 2005; Diamond & Savin-Williams, 2000; Tolman, Striepe, & Harmon, 2003). They also often don't create an option for bisexuality and rely on the idea of an integrated identity in one of two binary positions – heterosexual or homosexual (Diamond, 2005). In addition, many of the models proposed a unidirectional movement through the stages until the adolescent reached a proud sexual identity. Critics have pointed out that sexual identity is not fixed for life, especially for women (Diamond, 2005) and that sexual subjects may move in and out of identity categories all their lives, as many times as they take new lovers. Objections have also been registered to the fact that most of these models use a simple measure of sexual orientation (the gender that one consistently is in relationship with), rather than measuring sexual attraction and sexual behavior as important factors in the equation as well (Diamond, 2003b; Savin-Williams, 2005; Worthington, Bielstein Savoy, Dillon, & Vernaglia, 2002). These criticisms suggest that orientation, attraction and behavior might not all be the same, and an understanding of non-heterosexual behavior requires knowledge not just of sexual orientation and claimed identity, but also what kinds of attractions adolescents have and who they have sex with. In particular, it has recently been claimed that those who have

been the primary participants in psychological studies (for example D'Augelli *et al.*, 1998) of LGBTQ teens have been those who suffered inordinate psychological problems as a result of having a sexual identity ascribed to them by others based on their gender expression (Savin-Williams, 2005).

Studies of LGBTQ teens find they have higher rates of suicidality, higher rates of risky behavior, substance abuse and homelessness (D'Augelli, Hershberger, & Pilkington, 1998; Friend, 1993; Gibson, 1989; Munoz-Plaza *et al.*, 2002). These studies show that compared to all teens, these teens experience extreme oppression, sometimes even death, based on their (in)ability to convince their peers or others around them that they are adequately heterosexual. The researchers assert that students who do not face such dire circumstances still may experience a lack of adult support and peer closeness if they are hiding their sexuality “in the closet” and may not experience affirmation for their gender expression or love interest if they have revealed their sexuality. The teens often feel confusion about the messages they received during high school and describe their identity development “as a process characterized by varying degrees of denial and acceptance” (Munoz-Plaza *et al.*, 2002, p. 60).

Ritch Savin-Williams’ argument in *The New Gay Teenager* (2005) is that the focus on sexual identity as the marker of teens with same-sex sexuality (attractions, sexual orientation or behavior) is a faulty sampling strategy. The teens who come out during high school represent only a fraction of teens who are attracted to others of their same sex, who have sexual experiences with others of their same sex, or who would like to have a relationship with someone of their same sex. The other teens who exhibit these desires and experiences are not counted in surveys of LGBTQ youth, because that is not

how they identify. They may see themselves as straight (heterosexual) boys who just fool around with other boys, for example, or as a girl who happens to have fallen in love with her best friend, but who still would go out with a guy. They are not attracted to the identity that is represented by the words lesbian, gay, bisexual and they may not feel confused about their desires. Savin-Williams asserts that research on queer teens has focused exclusively on those who adopt an identity based on sexuality, and that these teens may be overrepresentative of teens who experience social violence and disaffection based on their sexuality. Teens whose gender expression is atypical and who experience harassment and bullying based on their inability to conform to gender expectations may be those teens who most come out in high school, in order to find support, or because they cannot change their image in order allow them to claim heterosexuality.

Savin-Williams' argument is interesting on several points. He points out that sexuality is more complex for adolescents (and adults) than the identity that they claim. He illuminates the falsehood of binary sexuality and promotes the idea of fluidity or gradations in sexual behavior, attractions and relationships. He furthers the understanding of non-heterosexuality along a continuum of normal sexual feelings and behaviors, countering the notion of heterosexuality as the norm and homosexuality as a deviant other. However, his argument is inadequate in some areas. He asserts that, "The culture of contemporary teenagers easily incorporates its homoerotic members. It's more than being gay-friendly. It's being gay-blind" (p. 197). When he waxes poetic in phrases like this, a reader would understand<sup>9</sup> that life is fine and easy for teens with same-sex

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<sup>9</sup> As readers may have when reading the Newsweek article that incorporated the findings of Savin-Williams in discussing the situation for non-heterosexual Christian teens in the South (Cloud, 2005).

sexuality. It sounds like they can find ways to express their sexuality among their peers and act on their desires without angst or danger. It presumes the need for policies protecting gay teens is over, that those impulses are outdated and that teens have taken care of their sexuality without adults even noticing. Yet even Savin-Williams' admits, "This is not to deny that some are ridiculed because of their gender expression. Or that they cannot openly date those they love most because same-sex dating in high school is still difficult for most" (2005, p. 219). These are pressing issues that the Resisting Regulation Research Team addressed as well.

### *Contextualizing Adolescent Sexual and Gender Choices*

Alternative models for sexual identity development that alleviate some of the regulatory pressure of the current discourses of sexuality involve a cycle of experimentation and evaluation for all young people. Some psychologists have recently suggested new models which examine both heterosexual identity development and non-heterosexual identity development (Diamond, 2003a; Tolman et al., 2003; Worthington et al., 2002). In this way, sexual identity development is scrutinized for everyone, not only for those considered to be non-normative, or deviant. Additionally, Diamond suggests that researchers may discover that there exists much more variation among heterosexuals and much more questioning, uncertainty, vacillating and experimentation than is observed when respondents to sexual identity development surveys are drawn from lesbian-, gay- an bisexual-identified groups. Worthington, Savoy, Dillon and Vernaglia (2002) suggest that it is necessary to understand identity development on the basis not only of an individual's understanding of his or her desires, behaviors and values, but also on the basis of a social identity, in which he or she chooses the social and political

position that subjectivity belongs to. These models offer a more contextualized version of sexual identity, which begins to look at the many elements involved in sexual behavior, attraction and self-labeling.

Tolman, Striepe, and Harmon's (2003) model of adolescent sexual health creates an ecological model of sexual identity construction, in which it is necessary to understand the functions of gender in order to understand an adolescent's stages of sexual identity development. Because the regulation of gender works differently on boys than on girls, and differently still on young people who feel as if they fit uneasily within the gender binary, the ways that young people negotiate their understandings of desire, intimacy, pleasure, attraction, and the ways they envision themselves as a sexual being are gendered. An understanding of normative masculinity, normative femininity and the varieties of transgressions and resistances that young people present, as well as the penalties for those transgressions and resistances are necessary in order to see the material consequences for sexual and gender choices.

Many scholars have also pointed out that identity formation models that presume universality are often posited on studies of White populations, and may not take into account the differences between races and ethnic groups (Conerly, 2000; Consolacion, Russell, & Sue, 2004; Crenshaw, 1994; Sears, 1995; Somerville, 2000). This may be especially true of sexuality, since sexuality has been used as a discourse with which people of color have been Othered – often named as oversexed and uncontrollable. The discourse about Blacks in the United States both emasculated Black men and made them into rapists of White women. Black women were both characterized as Jezebels, wanton sex-crazed women, or were characterized as manly, and therefore lacking sexual

desirability (Somerville, 2000). These racialized discourses have been used to justify social and political marginalization of Black Americans, persecution and killing of Black men, and the rape of Black women by White men. They have probably also contributed to different understandings of sexual identity development, sexual subjectivity discourses and gender performances among Black men and women. Gender and sexuality are understood differently among other ethnic and racial groups as well. Contextualized models which take into account social relationships and the sociocultural/sociopolitical context in which gender and sexuality are negotiated help to clarify the interconnections between race, ethnicity, gender and sexuality.

The examination of sexuality in adolescent development models, the further rooting the truth out of teens' lives by calling for research subjects who do not identify as gay but who have sex with, are attracted to, or desire members of their same sex, is a further incursion of the *dispositif de sexualité* (Foucault, 1978) in the lives of teens and, by extension, everyone. It represents the further normalizing, regulatory regimes stretching even further into the unspoken, behaved but not named, deviance from the normal identity development in order to further understand how and why development deviates in these ways, and in order to make development more effective and efficient. Always suspicious of psychology and the confessional practices that it uses, Foucault would see psychology's practices as eliciting sexual confessions from greater portions of the population.

Similar to the problems presented in the historical context, the understandings at work in the psychological literature present youth as either heterosexual or resisting a sexual identity, and fairly well-adjusted, or as subject to the homosexual identity and

label, and reflective of all the pathology and inhumanity that is embodied in the homosexual label in the discourse of sexuality. Either they disavow the label, and disavow the community, or they are pathetically suicidal and sick. This is no real choice for young people with sexual desires, attractions and behaviors that place them in a sexual category considered deviant (McWhorter, 1999). Even if their immediate community does not persecute them for their behaviors and desires, the rhetoric of politicians and religious leaders, as well as many segments of the population, continue to think of them as less human, less normal, Other. Resistance to a sexual identity label can only last for a certain amount of time. Because sexuality and gender are considered to be necessary knowledge about a person that must be revealed in order for the person to be known (Butler, 1993, 2004; McWhorter, 1999), no one can exist outside of these discursive categories without compromising their ability to have relationships with others. Eventually they will have to reveal their sexual desires, either claiming heterosexuality or homosexuality, or remaining silent about their non-heterosexual sexual desires, behaviors and attractions, silencing themselves and allowing an assumption of heterosexuality to be made about them. A new framework needs to be applied to our ideas about sexual and gender subjectivity among young people in order to see different choices – where young people are not forced to choose between a victim identity and no identity at all.

## CHAPTER 2

### **Methods: Understanding Discourses of Sexuality and Gender in High Schools**

As will become apparent in the subsequent chapters, sexuality and gender expression in schools and among young people has often been studied as a problem, as pathology, as deviance, and risky behavior. While all of these studies are valid in their presentation of unfortunate situations that young people find themselves in, I came to do this research project by questioning the picture of LGBTQ youth presented by the existing research as the whole story. My own experiences of sexuality and gender expression throughout my teens suggested that among the risk and pain, there was joy, passion, delight, pleasure and play. Sexuality and gender contain the possibility for great expressiveness and freedom, and I hoped that other young people were experiencing the same pleasures in their explorations and transgressions of boundaries as they claimed their own sexual and gender subjectivities. I began this research project to discover if the story is more complicated than previously described, and if there existed a better way to conceive of LGBTQ youth in schools.

In order to do the research on sexuality and gender in high schools that I envisioned I needed the participation of young people, high school students, about whom the research hoped to speak. The participation of young people was necessary not just as respondents to the questionnaires or interview questions, but also as designers of the research, as askers of the questions, as analysts of the responses, and as evaluators of the conclusions that were drawn from the research to verify that the adult researcher appropriately understands the data presented. In order to understand how young people

conceptualized sexuality and gender in their identities and in their daily lives, I needed to work with young people to begin to shape a research project that would address those questions.

The research questions I had in mind sought to understand the ways that students see discourses – language, policies, institutionally sanctioned behavior – concerning sexuality and gender deployed in schools, by the administration, teachers, texts and other students, as contributing to their construction and ongoing regulation as sexual and gendered subjects. I also asked how schools employ the discourses about sexuality and gender in the everyday life of the institution to create possibilities for sexuality and gender expression within sanctioned institutional contexts. To that end, there were several research questions that I hoped the project would answer:

1. What are the discourses about sexuality and gender that have currency in schools?
  - Which discourses are employed by the administration?
  - Which discourses are employed by teachers?
  - Which are used by students?
2. Do youth discourses about themselves as sexual and gendered subjects contest the “official” versions of adolescent sexuality asserted by sex education policy and documents, teacher preparation curriculum and materials, school policy documents and administration and teacher language, and popular culture? If so, how?
3. Do youth redeploy discourses in order to create spaces of resistance? If so, how?
  - What are the rewards and punishments for conforming or not conforming to heteronormative sexuality and binary gender in school?
  - How do students understand their agency to conform to, resist, or transgress sexuality and gender regulation?
4. Can reading student narratives about sexuality, gender and schools as a practice of the “care of the self” offer more interesting interactions between schools and students and among students and create previously unimagined relations?
  - Can schools offer students discussions about, examples of, or opportunities for practicing caring for themselves and others? If so, how?
  - Can schools reframe the normative languages and practices schools use to discuss and limit sexuality and gender, thus making visible the everyday, seemingly inconsequential ways educational institutions become sites for the reinforcement of heteronormative ideologies and practices that inhibit student learning?

Unlike the majority of research focused on LGBTQ youth, I explicitly did not focus my research questions and methods on explaining “why” some teens become queer, experiment with a variety of gender expressions or question their sexuality. In keeping with a theoretical lens that moves the focus away from the individual psychology and/or pathology of the student, the focus of this research is to understand how the discourses about sexuality and gender are deployed in different ways by different groups in schools, and how they are accepted or resisted. Additionally, and unlike previous research, I did not seek to understand how non-heterosexual or gender variant students can learn to get along better in schools or how schools could become places that tolerate LGBTQ youth. This new way of conceiving of sexuality research in schools sought to understand the interplay between expert discourses of adolescent sexuality and youth discourses of adolescent sexuality and how these discourses combine, contradict, compel, and capitulate in the processes that young people traverse as they come to think of themselves as beings with a sexuality and gender. In this way we were able to conceive of how LGBTQ students interact with their school environments, and to imagine ways for schools to address the harassment and violence that they witness directed at LGBTQ students. Teachers and administrators have reported feeling inadequately prepared or unauthorized to interrupt this kind of ostracizing they have witnessed between students, between teachers and students, and between teachers (GLSEN & Harris Interactive, 2008). This research will contribute to the conversation about heterosexism in school and approaches administrators, teachers and students can take to address it.

Because I structured this research as a participatory action (PAR) project, in which students work as co-researchers, it was not possible to know from the beginning

what student researchers would advocate as policies or practices that schools could undertake or if the results would necessitate changes in the lives of students or their families, schools and communities. According to the current research, however, it was known is that “official” teachings in school label queer youth as non-existent (Irvine, 2002; Sears, 2000), or as inappropriately gendered or misbehaving problems (Aleman, 2004).<sup>10</sup> A goal of this research was to offer alternatives to these “official” understandings of schools’ roles in sexuality and gender socialization.

### Participatory Action Research

Participatory Action Research (PAR) has been in use in development work and political activism in Latin America and Southeast Asia for a quarter of a century, although its application in education in the United States is relatively new. PAR comes out of traditions that seek to employ research for the purpose of creating social change (Hart & UNICEF., 1997; Lykes & Coquillon, 2006). The lineage of PAR that I am using builds on the work of Freire (1970) and strains of liberation sociology of American sociologists such as Jane Addams and Kurt Lewin (Feagin & Vera, 2001). It seeks to define social problems in conjunction with a community and to have the results of the research benefit both the researcher’s and the community’s goals. The researcher shares power with the research group, and asks all participants to actively partake of the leadership position in the research process. Because this research project is also theoretically grounded in the work of Foucault and Butler, Foucault’s critiques of

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<sup>10</sup> The current discourses about sexuality in schools are not limited to LGBTQ bodies. They also often do not consider girls, especially girls of color, sexual subjects except in the sense that they should avoid sexuality as much as possible (Sen & Fellner, 2005). Boys are sexual subjects, but this subjectivity often allows only for a conquest, notches on the bedpost, emotionally-limited kind of sexuality (Tolman, 1994).

modernist understandings of power were also applied to our PAR group's negotiations of power. In fronting Foucault's ideas, we acknowledged that we each had power that we could exert on the group, that our participation or non-participation were one way of exerting our power, that we could each resist one another, but that the power that we could each wield within the group was not equal or uncomplicated. In particular, as an adult, and the convener of the group, I had to be aware of my own power to force consensus or influence decisions in ways that were not reflective of the opinions of the group.

### *Theory of PAR*

This project is based on principles of PAR that come from a community organizing and critical sociology lineage. These include: researching for the purpose of improving social conditions, creating opportunities for authentic participation by the community in a reflective and cyclical process, collaboratively partnering for all phases of the research, building on strengths and resources within the community, producing knowledge and action for the benefit of all members, understanding social and power differentials within the group and working to empower all members, addressing sexuality from both positive and ecological perspectives, and disseminating findings and knowledge gained to all partners (McTaggart, 1991; The Examining Community-Institutional Partnerships for Prevention Research Group, 2006). PAR focuses on the local setting and how it interacts with theory and with the larger structural forces in place (Cahill, 2004, 2007; Fine et al., 2003). In this sense, PAR is perfect for this kind of project. The questions we asked existed within a setting of virulent national attitudes about teen sex, national policies requiring abstinence only until marriage sex education,

and rampant homophobic discourses deployed for the purposes of political gain. This project writes the subjugated knowledges of LGBTQ youth on their sexuality – voices that are seldom given public forum on the topic of sexuality, gender and schooling. Additionally, among the group of researchers, we created counter-knowledges of sexual subjectivity. PAR is interested in the local, personal knowledge that comes from lived experiences, and allows for analysis at multiple levels and through multiple lenses.

PAR offers the possibility of interrogations at various levels because of the intense work that the researcher does in community with the population that the research hopes to investigate. This work may include asking young people to design questions for data collection, discussing with young people the reports and research that have been produced to explain their behavior and classify their attitudes (Cahill, 2005), designing products of the research that will benefit the community of young people, or giving young people a forum to speak to responsible and responsive adults about their needs and concerns. As a result, the research has complex understandings of the positionality of the youth within the school environment, and understand the ways they make meaning from the situation, in addition to understanding the adult perspective on the situation (Talbert, 2004). PAR then, contributes to a more respectful interaction with young people, and allow them to shape the results, and in turn, shape the possibilities and freedoms in their identity searches. The levels that I anticipated we would interrogate in this research project were the program and policy level and the interpersonal level. I envisioned the program and policy level to be the macro-school level, which involves the ways that school personnel address issues of sexuality and gender in their language, in rules, in curriculum content and in the assumptions that the spaces and labels make about

the bodies using the spaces. The personal and interpersonal is the micro-school level, which includes the ways that young people create their own sexual and gender subjectivity in their own interactions with the discourses and in their interactions with one another.

### *Creating Our PAR: Recruiting the Team*

My PAR design included recruiting a team of non-heterosexual or gender non-conforming young people to work closely with me during the data collection and analysis process. This small group of young people (eight teens in total) met weekly with me from January-June 2008, and participated in two intense workshops. The recruitment flyer requested the participation by lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, or intersex (LGBTQQI) young people still attending high schools in New York City as researchers on a project to learn more about sexuality and gender in schools. Via the recruitment flyer<sup>11</sup> I offered snacks, transportations fees (\$4 metrocards) and a twenty dollar per meeting stipend to participating teen researchers. In exchange, teens were asked to sign up to attend weekly, ongoing discussions and writing workshops that would meet from January to June 2008. The flyer was disseminated in hard copy and electronically to after-school programs interested in questions of social justice and youth development. Where possible, I attended meetings of the youth in the after-school settings to describe the research and make a personal call for participation. Organizations including Global Kids, Inc., Urban Word NYC, The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender Community Center, Community Health Action of Staten Island, and Global Action Project received and disseminated flyers. Some of these organization partners also

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<sup>11</sup> The flyer can be found in Appendix A.

distributed the information to participating teachers in their programs. Teachers and principals with whom I had contact, personally or through the New York Collective of Radical Educators listserv, also referred students to the program.

Once a student received a flyer or my contact information, she or he would call or email me and we would make an appointment to discuss the project. I met one on one with each of the research team participants, and the parent of one team member, to discuss the level of involvement expected of each team member including the time commitment, to assess their comfort with writing and discussing the issues in their schools around sexuality and gender, to determine if they could get parental permission to attend the meetings and participate in a research project, and to introduce myself. It was important for me to describe to each student my interest in and experience with gender and sexuality regulation in schools, as well as to describe why I needed their help to do the kind of research I hoped to do.

### *Team Members*

In this section team members describe themselves in statements they wrote that locate them according to the identities they prioritize. Following the statement written by the young people, I have included notes about the schools they attend that help situate their conversations and comments within the text of the dissertation.

Ali Abraham:

I'm 18 years old, I attended high school in Queens at the time, and I identify as a gay male. I wasn't completely out of the closet and am still in the same situation. I am out to my friends, but not to everyone in my family due to religious and personal reasons. Being that I was born and raised into a Muslim family, it's quite

difficult to come out of the closet and be understood and accepted. I guess it varies and depends on what culture you belong to and how conservative to liberal your family is. Maybe if I was brought up in a liberal American family, my life would be completely different than it is now...I don't know. But I can't place the blame on my family, because they've always been there for me, and they can't change their way of thinking because they're not from here. I have accepted myself for who I am and can finally focus on my life: things such as college, my career and academic goals. Unfortunately, my identity will be a barrier and challenge I'll have to overcome in terms of coming out to my family. Eventually, I know the time will come...but there is no rush. Now as I am writing this "brief" blurb about myself, I'm getting flashbacks of that meeting I attended and how I've changed as a person from then to now. My time and contributions I could've made in that group were cut short because of several reasons, but I know there will be other opportunities and chances where I can have my voice heard, even if its a single sentence. Being president of the GSA did help me tremendously, both mentally and emotionally. I discovered things about myself I did not know existed. If its one thing a high school in NYC should have, its some sort of outlet for LGBT youth to go to for support...such as a GSA or student-led organization; it's imperative.

In short, "life" is tough for everyone, for some more than others, and it's much more vast than just a four letter word. Looking back at high school, I can say that I was lucky to be at my high school because it was slightly easier to be who I am, thanks to the support from faculty and my peers. However, I think it

also depends on the individual...that support won't just come to you. I had to run after it...I had to sacrifice time set aside for studying to create this successful "Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Curious Forum" and the outcome and hard work was VERY satisfying. Not every high school is the same in NYC, and not every environment is accepting.

Ali Abraham attended a large comprehensive high school with a diversity of students and clubs. The student population was 10% African American, 50% Latina/o, 25% Asian or Pacific Islander, and 15% White, with only 4-5 Native American students per year. Thirty-seven percent of the student population was eligible for reduced or free lunch. As he states in his biographical statement above, he was instrumental in creating the gay-straight alliance, which provided a supportive and politically active space in which he and 30-40 other students could work to challenge hateful and stereotypical attitudes in the school about LGBTQ youth.

Dylan:

I was a 17 year old, high school senior. I identify as a white, lesbian, German-American, woman.

Dylan attended an elite private day school in New York City. She was one of several students who were out at school, but the only one who was out to her parents among her friends. Her school did not allow identity clubs that might exclude some students, so disallowed a gay-straight alliance, but instead had one club that covered all kinds of diversity present in the school. It was both a support organization and an activist organization, working to educate other students about discrimination. The school's student population was 91% White, 4% Latina/o, 2% Black, 2% Asian and less than 1%

Native American. No information is available about the income level of students' families, or how many students had scholarships.

Jake:

Jake and Yajaira attended the same high school. It was one floor of a large, old high school building. Several other schools share spaces such as the gym, the cafeteria and the library with his school. The school is a transfer school that receives students who have not succeeded in their previous high schools and helps them, through alternative assessment and grading measures, to complete the work necessary and graduate.

Seventy-seven percent of students in his small school were eligible for free or reduced lunches. Three percent of students were Native American, 33% were African American, 54% were Latino/a, 2% were Asian or Pacific Islander and 8% were White. Students in this school asked teachers to address issues of sexuality and gender expression, and teachers responded by starting a diversity club. The club mostly focused on sexuality and gender issues, but also addressed race, ethnicity or religion issues, especially at the intersection with sexuality and gender.

Mikey:

Hi! My name is Mikey and I'm 17 years old. I like reading novels with queer characters and watching cheap infomercials. I am gay, but gay is not who I am. You can catch me with at least one headphone in my ear 95% of the time. The other 5% is spent with food in my mouth or a book in my hands. The kind of high school I go to is mostly filled with jocks and ghetto girls. It's not the most accepting of environments but I get by. But all in all I'm just your normal,

average, teenage, biracial, working class, gay boy with a lot more edge than you'll ever get used to.

Mikey attended a small school in a large building with several other small schools. He had transferred to this school because of its advertised focus on academics, but found it not very different from his former large comprehensive high schools, and as such he was disappointed. One hundred percent of students at his school were eligible for free lunch. The student population was 1% Native American, 32% Black or African American, 51% Latino/a, 13% Asian, and 3% White. Mikey and a his English teacher tried to start a gay-straight alliance at the school, but he reported it was poorly attended and after several meetings they gave up.

Sally:

For starters, “conventional” and I are like apples and oranges. I naturally take the norm and turn it inside out, only to challenge the average mind. In fact, anything able to provoke the narrow-minded individual to pull their own hair out in frustration is likely to make me quite proud. On a side note, I am an artist of all forms – music, visual arts, acting, etc. My name is Sally. I am a petite girl with such a huge brain (and heart) that my torso could potentially fall over. In addition to my warmth, I have a tendency to be honest, too honest. To others, it seems that I may have questionable morals and to me, I believe they just might be right. My actions are based on my hedonistic nature, whatever feels right to me is right (but then even if it feels wrong I tend to get into it anyway). I am a 16 year old philosopher stuck in a world a while behind, waiting for someone to catch up (or even pass ahead). I like to travel, or be a couch potato. I like to try new things

and stick with the old. Sometimes I like football and sometimes I like the Lifetime network. I love non-fiction and I love fiction and mythology. And I don't like apples or oranges.

Sally attended two different schools during the course of the research team meetings. She has low grades due to poor attendance at school, but keeps seeking an academically challenging and engaging program that will make her excited about going to school. The school she was attending at the end of the year was a large comprehensive high school near her house in Queens. The student population of the school was 100% eligible for free or reduced price lunch. They were 1% Native American, 54% Black or African American, 28% Latino/a, 4% Asian, and 13% White.

Sankofa:

I was 16 going on 17 during the research. I never thought that I, a 16 year old Haitian- American AG from Brooklyn could be a researcher. I never thought that I could make an impact on other LGBTQ teens by being a part of a research project. I was too used to being widely accepted in my tiny Afrocentric high school in New York City. I wasn't aware of the hardships other LGBTQ teens were facing in different high schools because I was so sheltered in my own. Being a part of this research changed my life.

Sankofa identified as AG, or aggressive, a term used in New York City to identify butch, African-American lesbians who often wear oversize, baggy jeans and shirts, baseball caps and sneakers. She was popular in her high school – her classmates encouraged her to run for prom queen or king, for homecoming king and for class president, although she resisted these overt challenges to the gender structures of the

school. Her small high school felt like a “close-knit family” according to students and to the official descriptions, where everyone knows one another’s name and where they fit in the school community. The students of the school were 80% African American, 10% Latina/o, 3% Asian, 1.5% White and .3% Native American, and 63% were eligible for free lunch. The administration and teachers actively pursue a culturally relevant curriculum that addresses African-American, Caribbean and Latino history and issues of race in the United States.

Tayla:

My name is Tayla. I'm 16 years old now and live in South Jersey. At the time of the research though I was 15 and lived in Queens. I was attending Catholic high school at the time as a sophomore. I am Ghanian (African) and Dutch.

Tayla attended a private, Catholic all-girls high school. The school demographics show the student population to be 70% White, 15% Latina, 12% Black, 2% Asian, and less than 1% Native American. No information was available about the number of students on scholarship or the income level of the students’ families. The student population numbers less than 400 students, and the school prides itself on its rigorous academic tradition. Tayla often found the racial and gender attitudes of her classmates and teachers to be oppressive, and most of her friends were people she met outside of school.

Yajaira:

My name is Yajaira and I’m a Sagittarius. I was a sophomore during the research project and 15 years old. I come from a Puerto Rican family, but we’re

also Black and Chinese. I'm bisexual and out to everyone. I live in the Bronx and go to school in Manhattan.

### *Developing the Team*

Following the initial meetings with prospective youth researchers, and with the signed assent forms from each of the participating researchers under the age of 18, I scheduled our first group meeting. Each youth researcher was to bring their signed parental consent form and come prepared to begin working on the project. The first meeting began with three youth researchers. I asked each of the team members present to think about peers that they might want to bring to the team, as well, hoping the student researchers would think that the work of the team, the results of the work, as well as the responsibility for the team, lay in all of our hands.

I wanted all the student researchers to believe that this project was *our* project. When I asked for participation by lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, questioning or otherwise non-heterosexual or gender non-conforming high school students in my dissertation research project which I called the Resisting Regulation Research Team, young people responded with their own concerns about their schools and other LGBTQ youth. We decided together to keep the name, and named our desire to understand better the various ways that people talk about sexuality and gender and to make spaces in high school for others to express non-conforming sexualities and genders with less danger or ridicule. The youth researchers had already fought some of those battles, and wanted to educate others so other students would not have to fight the battles again and again. The young people arrived at the research team with their experiences in schools, research and analytic skills, and knowledge of the media landscape, of the negotiations needed in

different social spaces, and of the complexities of identities and relationships. I brought knowledge of what the existing research said about non-heterosexual and gender non-conforming youth in urban schools, research skills and material resources to make our meetings possible, such as university space and fellowships which allowed me to pay the youth researchers<sup>12</sup>. We all wanted to describe more fully the experiences of young queer people across New York City's high schools and the definitions young people are giving sexuality and gender expression within those environments. In order to coalesce into a working body, we started with exercises designed to help us get to know one another and also to help us begin talking about the sometimes difficult topics of sexuality and gender.

### *Writing*

Over the first six weeks of our meetings, our typical schedule included a writing activity in which we would respond to a question about the meanings and understandings of sexuality and gender in our schools, a reading and discussion of our writings, a presentation of material from research or newspaper articles, and an exercise. The first few questions I created to start us talking about the assumptions and concerns that had inspired my research questions. However, after the first two discussions, the questions arose from listening to the recordings of the meetings and were questions that had arisen during the conversation but that had not been resolved or even discussed due to the often competing conversational agendas. The first writing assignment involved writing a letter to another member of the group as if that person would be coming to the letter-writer's high school, introducing the new student to the "safe" and "unsafe" areas or crowds in the

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<sup>12</sup> This research was generously supported by the Joan Heller-Diane Bernard Fellowship in Lesbian and Gay Studies and a Doctoral Research Grant from the CUNY Graduate Center.

schools, indicating if a teacher or administrator could be counted on for help and assessing the overall climate of the school for LGBTQ youth. Other questions we wrote about and discussed included:

- What is gender? What is sex? What is sexuality? How do you use these words?
- What is the relationship between gender expression and sexuality?
- It's \_\_\_\_\_ to be gay. Explain.
- What would you want to tell teachers about LGBTQ youth? What would you want to tell straight students? What would you want to tell other LGBTQ youth?
- What are the stereotypes of gay men? Lesbians? Bisexuals? Straight people?
- What makes a school tolerant, inclusive, or accepting of LGBTQ youth?

I recorded our meetings each week, and from the recordings I created lists of ideas and beliefs that seemed to emerge from the conversations. Together we began organizing the themes from our experiences into a list of common attitudes and perceptions in high schools about non-heterosexual sexualities and non-normative genders. Each week we would look over the list together, discuss the inclusion or exclusion of items from the list, vote on the most important, and reorganize the statements that were repetitive or unclear.

### *Activities*

I used activities to introduce the teen team members to theories about the socially constructed nature of gender and sexuality. One exercise involves placing our bodies on a gender continuum represented by a line of tape on the ground, long enough for the whole group to fit on it. One end of the line represents ideal femininity – which we named Barbie. The other end represents ideal masculinity – or G.I. Joe in our case. With these ideals of gender in mind, we each had to measure our gender expression against the ideals. We moved from place to place on the line to show how we have each used different gender expressions for different purposes in our lives – for expressing the gender we want to be recognized as, for expediency, for acceptance or for mobility in

society. This exercise allowed us to see gender as not fixed in our bodies but as performed for different purposes, as negotiated between the subject and her interlocutor, and as contextually and historically specific (Butler, 1990).

Another activity, in which we categorized the stereotypes of sexualities, naming the physical and behavioral characteristics that define gay men, lesbians, bisexuals, trans people, and straight people, allowed us to see the historically contingent nature of these categories as well as the reliance on gender expression for coding the categories. We drew the lines for each category, including heterosexual (“straight” or “normal”), and noted where the categories ended. The arbitrary nature of these categories, as well as their uses to define behavior as acceptable or unacceptable became clear as we worked through our chart of sexuality categories (Foucault, 1978).

Table 2.1 How Do You Know Someone Is Gay?

<b>Girls</b>	<b>Boys</b>
Short hair	Wears pink
Extra ear piercings	Feminine (tight) clothes
Shape up (close cropped hair at neck)	Eyebrows plucked
Baggy clothes	Show feelings
Play sports, especially basketball	Like <i>American Idol</i> , <i>America's Next Top Model</i>
Has tools	Interest in fashion/like shopping
Watch <i>The L Word</i>	Wear Bakers shoes
Hang out with lesbians and boys	Not athletic
Walk with hips forward	Soft or high voice
No bra	No girlfriend
Feminist	Hang out with girls
Wear men's clothes	Talk like Valley Girl
No makeup	Walk with hips/swishy
Hairy legs/armpits	Quiet
Wear boots	Feminist
Wear du-rag or fitted (baseball cap)	Metrosexual
Wear dreadlocks	Wear makeup
Wear labret/eyebrow piercing	Wear tongue/industrial piercing
Big hands	Shave legs

Table 2.2 How Do You Know Someone Is Bi?

Bi girls look like straight girls
Bi guys look gay
Bi girls like femmes (girls who look feminine)
Flirty, sensual
Bisexuals have a lot of relationship drama
Bisexuals are just curious

Table 2.3 How Do You Know Someone Is Straight?

<b>Boys</b>	<b>Girls</b>
Likes sports	Tight clothes
Is tough – no feelings	Long hair
Always hitting on girls	Concerned about fashion/looks
Gay-basher	Not into school
Not into school	Curious about lesbians
Don't want to be near gay boys	Might be straight even if tomboy
No flexibility in gender presentation	

These lists showed us the ways we each signal our sexuality to others, or read sexuality on others' bodies, through gendered behavioral and appearance markers. In this exercise we began to have a more clear analysis of our own gender and sexuality fashioning, the ways that gender and sexuality are used together to require “appropriate” behavior and language from boys and girls in school and to delimit the boundaries of heterosexuality and masculinity and femininity.

*Reading and Text Analysis*

We read and coded newspaper articles from the New York Times from two moments in recent New York City history in which the place of sexuality and non-conforming gender expression made front-page news – the introduction of the Children of the Rainbow curriculum in 1993 and the opening of the Harvey Milk High School as a regular high school in the New York City Department of Education. I chose these two moments for the ways that they polarized public discussion about teens, sexuality, gender, gender expression and schools into concise arguments. The writers of the articles, editorials and letters to the editor were all passionate about their cause and represented many of the public beliefs about sexuality, gender and schools that often remain unstated and assumed at other times. These two moments in time, 10 years apart,

gave us many points of view from various speakers on the appropriateness of content that addresses homosexuality and gender non-conformity, and allowed us to see the changes that happened in those 10 years, and those that did not. We also discussed popular culture, such as television and music, and the depictions of LGBTQ persons that can be found there<sup>13</sup>.

For all of these data sources we categorized the statements and claims made by the writers and speakers as performing gender and sexuality in specific ways, and as patrolling the boundaries of normal by assuming that the readers of the texts would hear and believe what the writer claimed. For example, in the newspaper articles, each time we found a sentence or paragraph describing separate schools for LGBTQ youth – either for or against it – we would highlight it in orange. Then we grouped all the statements about separate schools together and summarized the arguments. At another time, we took all of our summary statements and coded them according to Foucault’s categories of regulation of sexuality (Foucault, 1978). Here a statement might pertain to psychological health, physical health, morality or pedagogy, or reference several of these categories at once. Within each of these categories, the statement could either describe a positive value judgment or a negative value judgment. With these categories we began to understand the ways that statements about sexuality and gender expressions can compel certain actions. The statements – either the words or the behaviors described by the words – have power, and through this categorization we could see their power clearly. These sources of data gave us a rich archive of the discourses young people encounter as they are forming their sexuality and gender subjectivities.

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<sup>13</sup> See appendix B for a list of the newspaper and popular culture sources.

### *Critical Decisions/Critical Dilemmas*

The power to see the assumptions within statements about sexuality and gender as just one epistemological approach, just one ordering of the world, also helped us to begin strategizing about other ways to think about these constructs. One goal of our research together, that we articulated early in our work as a research group, was to deconstruct for ourselves the language of immorality, disease, pathology and victimization or predation that accompanies many popular and some scholarly representations of sexuality – and not just homosexuality (Blount, 2000, 2005; Duggan, 1990; Duggan, Hunter, & Vance, 1993; Lugg, 1998, 2003, 2006a, 2006b; Luschen & Bogad, 2003; Zimmerman, 2002). We hoped that young people and those who work with them could begin to see sexuality and gender expression as creative elements in one's performance of selfhood, culturally and historically constructed, and not representative of some inner nature, but a chosen self-representation that is an act of agency that young people engage in. This is contrary to many messages about young people and sexuality and gender expression – in which young people are described as under the influences of peer pressure and hormones, and as unable to control their bodies (Real Reason, 2008).

One way that young people assert agency in terms of their identity is through language. Among young people there are many words to describe gender expressions and sexualities. I like to use the word queer, both for the way that it disrupts prescribed categories of gender and sexual behavior, and for the way that it is non-specific enough to be inclusive of many people who are otherwise subdivided by language based on their gender performance or usual attractions. However, the youth researchers felt that other young people would not be responsive to the word queer. We considered using other,

more specific and less “academic” language to describe sexuality and gender identities, but not everyone felt they would all be understood by all young people. The youth researchers felt other youth would, even if they didn’t identify with the terms, respond better to lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans, and would understand better who and what we were asking about. Therefore, in talking about our questions and other research that has been done, we use the terminology LGBTQ (or LGB, LGBT, or LG, where appropriate). These are not necessarily terms that we use to describe ourselves to one another or to ourselves, nor do the boundaries and definitions of these terms conform to those that someone in another generation, geographic location or socioeconomic demographic might use. They are, as we discovered in our work, historically, geographically, demographically contingent, and new vocabulary is constantly evolving to more precisely define identities.

We understood that by using these words – lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, curious – we were engaging with a history, discourses, and theories about who the bodies are that inhabit the spaces created by the words and the social categories and behaviors that are already ascribed to those bodies. As Foucault points out in *The History of Sexuality*, before the creation of the category homosexual, people engaged in same-gender sexual acts and did not understand themselves to belong to a non-heterosexual sexuality. Sexuality as an identity is sometimes understood to be a determining force, a limiting factor or a necessity. We use the words loosely to describe students who may engage with these histories, discourses and theories themselves, or may not, and who may consider themselves as embodying a manifestation of the identity, or may not.

These epistemological discussions helped us define our stance, our politics, as sexuality researchers. Although I brought my political stance and agenda to the team, our space was a negotiated space in which, in order to maintain the participatory nature, everyone's opinion mattered and needed to be heard. We operated by loose consensus, in which discussions often ended in voting to decide the next steps and the resolution of the discussion. Our critical decisions helped us to focus more clearly what had been undefined or murky in previous discussions, and let everyone air their views on the topic. We learned from one another, and grew as a team.

#### *Method of Analysis of PAR Work*

Our conversations and writings from the group meetings were collaboratively coded over the course of the creation of the Queer Q Sort, our primary data collection instrument. During that period, we made several lists of themes from our discussions which we subjected to scrutiny and questioning. During several of these sessions we eliminated statements that were not really reflective of our experiences, questioned one another about what we really meant by a word or a statement, and clarified our ideas. We also got a chance to teach one another about our experiences.

In addition, these conversations detail how we each create ourselves, within our context, as subjects that can be recognized as sexual and gendered beings. For Foucault, each of us fashions a sexual self in order to ethically engage sexually and to meet our emotional and physical desires. These sexual selves are formed through a process that is both ethical and esthetic. Ethically, we must measure ourselves against the rules and regulations of our social situation, the moral imperatives about sexuality that exist within our peer, religious, ethnic, cultural, racial or gender groups. We decide which of these

moral mandates is important to us, which we feel we must follow either because they resonate with our own desires or because the risks of not following them are too great. We decide what groups we will belong to, what friends we will have, what behaviors we will engage in and what stories we will listen to and tell. Esthetically, we also decide what parts of our physical presentation will represent our ethical decision to the rest of the world. For teens this may involve modest dress, body building, or eye-catching makeup. We decide what kind of a life we want to have, and we set out to build it in our intimate relationships. We search for others, both friends and lovers, who will help us nurture the qualities in ourselves that will help us be the person we want to be.

Our conversations and writings describe how we invert, reclaim, reject and in fact, queer, the regulations around sexuality and gender expressions in order to understand who we are, and to claim our desires. The conversations and the analyses of the writings serve as a final check on the meanings of the findings of our research. They will give context to numbers of respondents and to pictures of our schools. They will fill out the stark outlines of understanding that we have with stories, events, perspectives and people.

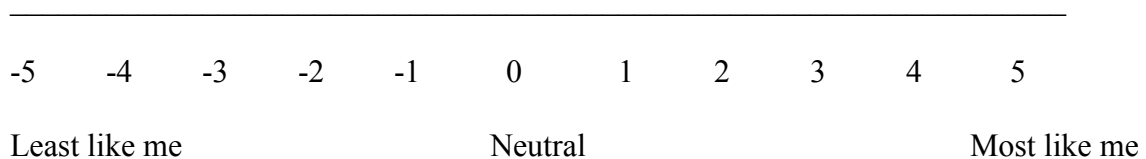
### Creating Our Survey Instrument

Using the data from our own writing, our research and coding of the newspaper articles, and popular media such as songs, interviews and movies, we created a large list of statements that described ideas or behaviors in schools related to sexuality and gender. We included ideas that personally were hard for us to give voice to, such as “Gay boys are disgusting” and “LGBTQ people can’t go to heaven.” We also included some ideas that may seem unexpected based on research that has been done about LGBTQ youth,

such as “Being LGBTQ is fun” and “Most LGBTQ students go to school with no problems.” We debated including so many negative statements, and about including ideas that we deemed ignorant, but ultimately decided that we needed to have them all represented because of their prevalence in the discourses that had come from the discussions about schools and in the news sources and popular culture. The total list of 84 statements gave us many ways to ask how LGBTQ youth exist within their schools and how they create their LGBTQ identities within the existing discourses.

We all wanted to speak to other youth about these statements we had come up with. We thought about doing a survey. I argued against a survey, since we had so many statements that we wanted to ask about. I thought an 84 item survey would be much too long for teens to complete, even though surveys are easily portable and lend themselves to spontaneous data collection which would have served us well. We thought about doing interviews. Again we questioned how would we ask people about all of the statements that we had compiled. I introduced a method called the Q sort. In a typical Q sort we would write the statements on cards and have students sort them on an axis from “most like me” to “least like me.” It would look something like this:

Figure 2.1 Sort Line



The youth researchers, however, challenged the method and recognized that it would not answer our questions about students’ schools. We could see that this method would be

interesting for understanding other youth's ideas about sexuality and gender, but would not inform us about how their school communities support their ideas or if the students were struggling every day to hold their ideas against the grain of their school community. We struggled to find a scale that would provide more complete answers.

### *Theory of Q methodology*

Q methodology has been around since 1935, when a letter by William Stephenson describing it was published (Stephenson, 1935). Stephenson's version was a form of communication theory (S. R. Brown, 1996) in which Stephenson modified R methodology. R is used to understand psychological traits across a population. Stephenson developed Q as a way to measure opinions or subjectivity across a population rather than psychological traits (Brown, 1996). Q is a procedure for the study of narratives, discourses, identities, and other forms of subjectivity. Stephenson wanted to understand how a population's ideas and perspectives varied according to the situation they were in, or their context. Q methodology is based in Concourse Theory of Communication, in which the collection of thoughts, ideas, statements and behaviors about a topic are said to equate to the concourse on that topic. Brown calls these the "vectors of thought" on a topic.

Q provides an operation for sorting these statements or vectors of thought. The operation is usually a question – such as “What do you think about sexuality and gender in schools?” The sort will contain several different ideas about the topic. Each of these ideas may be divided into subcategories as well. If we had limited our study to answering the question above, that may have looked like statements about psychological well-being, statements about physical well-being, and statements about morality, using

Foucault's categories of society's treatment of sexuality (1978). Then we could have subdivided those categories into statements that were positive and statements that were negative. In this way the Q sort would tell us what kinds of subjectivities – that is, what ideas and opinions about sexuality and gender, within a specific contextual situation – exists for the students doing the sort.

When there is more than one respondent for a Q sort, the “factors” to which Q methodology leads represent different subjectivities about the same event or topic. That means that similarities between sorters can be used to understand the ways that a population generally thinks about a subject – to see what are the main groups. Because each statement is ranked against other statements, and because each sorter ranks several statements, this method provides the researchers with a rich understanding of the prevalence of discourses and the ways discourses are enacted and deployed from a relatively small sample of participants (J. Barry & Proops, 1999). Based on the questions in the previous paragraph – the sorting operation – we would have known one or the other of the two things we wanted to know. We could have known what the students who did the sort for us thought about what is said and done in schools to address sexuality and gender, or we could have gotten their perceptions of the attitudes in their school communities about sexuality and gender in schools. In order to know both, however, we had to adjust the sort to our own needs.

### *Our Q Methodology*

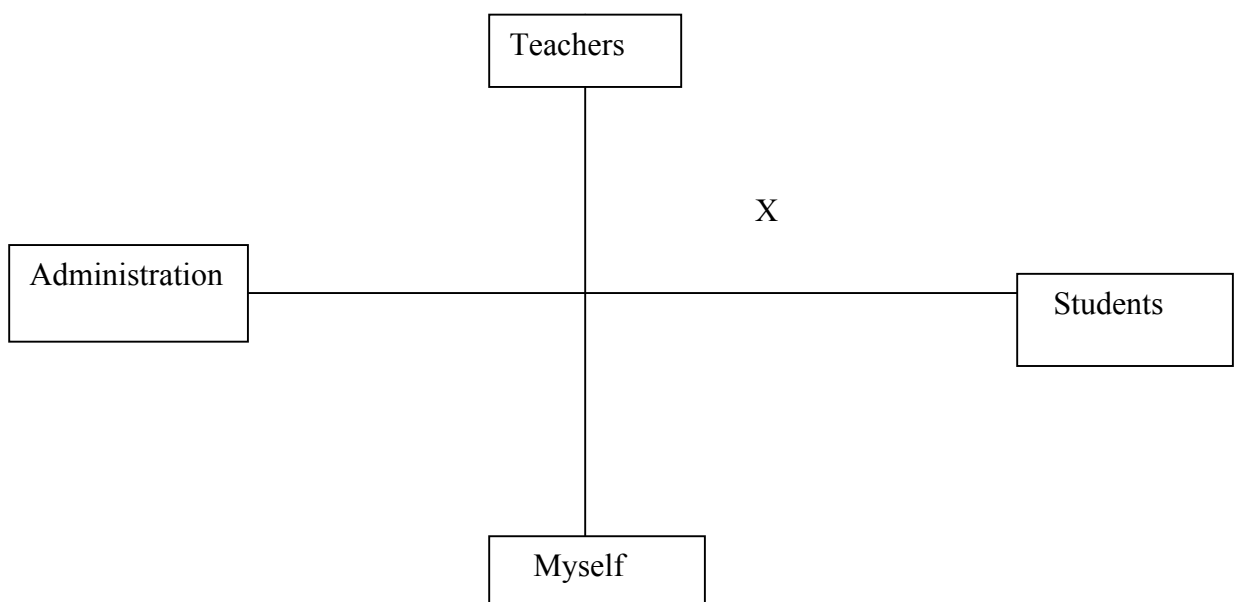
Our form of Q is a method of *conscientização* in Freire's language, or critical consciousness (Freire, 1970), in which we can have conversations with students about ideas that are circulating in their high schools and perhaps to make space for them to

think about sexuality and gender in schools differently. It allowed us to share our ideas with our friends and colleagues and challenge some dominant ideas as well. Our Queer Q Sort is a compilation of many statements about sexuality and gender in schools, some that conform to the official knowledge that may condemn non-heterosexual sexuality as pathology or inappropriateness, and others that defy that stance and express the joy and freedom that we find in expressing our sexuality and gender. As other students read through the statements and sort them into categories, the process may have confirmed their resistance to some ideas and supported their agreement with others – in the face of their school peers’ or authority disapproval. We wanted our sort to also be a place to encourage other LGBTQ youth to become politicized about injustices and oppressive actions of schools, to ask for more from their school, to feel that they deserve more than just tolerance.

Foucault is interested in seeing within a certain time period and geographic location, what are the discourses that circulate about a topic. In this case, we asked, what are the discourses in circulation about sexuality. The spectrum of discourses included not just those official discourses – the safe sex materials or the sex education manual, the parental talk about teens’ sexuality or the official school, psychological, medical, or moral talk about what is right and wrong in terms of sexuality. Discourse also includes the secrets whispered between friends, the rebellious stances, the bold statements and the locker room talk. We tried to include discourse – both verbal statements and statements representing behaviors – in our Q sort, in order to understand what the relationship is between LGBTQ youth in New York City high schools and discourses in circulation in that setting.

*Testing out different versions.* As we worked through how our sort would be executed, we tried several versions of the sorting grid that the statements would be sorted into. First there were the two axes – so we would be sorting statements into poles, where each pole stood for a group in school and would be the place from which a discourse seemed to emanate (See Figures 2.5 below). In this version, we imagined that statements could be placed on the poles to mean that the discourse was believed and used by that group of people. For example, if other students believed that LGBTQ people could not go to heaven, but that teachers and administrators did not hold that belief, then that statement would be placed squarely on the word “students”. However, if both teachers and students exhibited that belief, then the card for the statement could be placed between “students” and “teachers” (X). In this way, I thought we would be able to understand the complexity of the way discourses circulated in schools, and how the beliefs of one group could shape the discourse in schools.

Figure 2.2 Sort Grid I



My assessment of this arrangement, however, turned out to be wrong. As soon as the youth researchers began trying to sort the statements thinking about their own schools, we realized this version was an exercise in frustration. It was impossible to group the statements in this way. For some statements they wanted to say everyone believed them, and for some to say that no one believed them, which was impossible in this configuration. Also, some portion of each of the groups (students, teacher and administrators) believed many of the statements, but not necessarily everyone within the group, so we remained unable to sort the statements. We regrouped and strategized about how we could sort the statements in a way that would cause less frustration.

Version two of the sort grid adds categories into which the statements could be sorted. We added the categories “Everybody” and “Nobody” and some additional groups and tried our new sort to see if it was less frustrating.

Figure 2.3 Sort Grid II

Myself	Supportive Teachers	School Policy	Popular Culture	Everybody
My Friends	Administrators/ Principals	Other Students	Community	Nobody

Although this version solved the problem of having an Everybody and Nobody category, it did not solve the other problems. There were still differences within the groups. For example within Administrators/Principals there might be an assistant principal who is very supportive of the LGBTQ youth in the school and a principal who takes every opportunity to express her belief that homosexuality is an inappropriate topic for high school students. As we reflected on the problems of this grid for sorting, we realized that

what was most important to us was not so much *where* or *who* the discourses come from, as our previous grids had asked, but *how prevalent* they are, how much of the school population believes them, and how much each student respondent’s beliefs agree with or diverge from those of the school population.

*What we really wanted to know.* With the help of our PAR mentor, Michelle Fine, we finally found a sorting grid that made sense and categories into which we could confidently place our statements. We ask the question “How many people (students, teachers and administrators) in your school believe...” and sorters sort the statements across the grid first, from Nobody to Everybody.

Figure 2.4 Queer Q Sort Grid

	Nobody	A few people	Less than half	Half	More than half	Most people	Everybody
I don’t believe	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
Sometimes I believe	H	I	J	K	L	M	N
I believe but I don’t want to/don’t like it	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U
I believe	V	W	X	Y	Z	AA	AB

Then they move each stack of cards to the top of the grid, and sort down each column, to answer the questions about their own beliefs. This arrangement solves the major difficulties we had with the other sorts. First, the students doing the sort don’t have to say which group holds the belief, just what portion of the school’s population. That way, the believing group can be made up of teachers, students and administrators, and even

oneself, without causing the sorter conflict about where to place the card. Second, it helps the sorters think about their school climate separate from their own beliefs. A problem we encountered in the previous versions was that some students would reject a statement altogether if they did not believe it, and not want to attribute it to any of the groups in the school. In this new sort format, sorters can say which statements they reject, so they can also claim the beliefs for others in their schools, where appropriate. It lets the sorter recognize even statements that they rejected in the previous versions of the sort for being “stupid,” “ridiculous” and “wrong” beliefs. In this version sorters could claim that the belief existed in their school, but disavow their own belief in it.

The sorting asked a snowball sample of LGBTQ (or non-heterosexual and non-normatively gendered) students to sort the 84 statements into the grid. Twenty-one students completed the Queer Q Sort. Of those, 7 identified as gay, 4 as lesbian, 5 as bisexual and 5 as questioning/curious. Racially and ethnically the students identified as Dominican, Latino, Italian, Black, African-American, Ecuadorian, Puerto Rican, Egyptian, Latina, mixed race, Japanese, and Caucasian. A few came from homes that are middle class or even well-off, and one student lived in a group home, but most were somewhere in between. They represented public high schools in Manhattan, Queens, Brooklyn, Staten Island and the Bronx.

#### *Method of Analysis of the Queer Q Sorts*

We then struggled to understand how to analyze the results of this sort. While we knew that it asked the right questions, we were not sure how to understand its answers. We tried looking at the statements that were sorted into each of the boxes, and seeing how much overlap there was between student sorters. That was too much information to

make sense of, and too many categories to think about. Then we tried to divide the boxes into six categories and look at the prevalence of statements. We looked at it like this:

Table 2.4 Queer Q Sort Analysis Attempt I

Less than half in my school believe and I don't believe	Half or more in my school believe and I don't believe
Less than half in my school believe and I sometimes believe or believe but don't want to/don't like it	Half or more in my school believe and I sometimes believe or believe but don't want to/don't like it
Less than half in my school believe and I believe	Half or more in my school believe and I believe

This structure helped us to begin grouping the statements together and to come up with commonalities between students and between schools. It still seemed to give us information that was not relevant or that was too fragmented. When we tried to draw conclusions from it we fell into a confused silence. We had a moment of panic when we thought that maybe our data would mean nothing to us.

Then, while we were debriefing a student who had done a sort, one youth researcher and I looked at the participant's paper on which we had written down her responses, and listened to what she told us about her school. It looked like, by the way her answers were grouped on the page, that she felt fairly comfortable in her school, that it was easy for her to be out, and that most students in her school did not express prejudice about LGBTQ students. This matched her description of her school, and a light bulb came on in our heads about how to analyze the data. We would look at the sorts to divide them by the layout of the statements on the page. We would make two categories – those whose responses matched their school's attitudes, and those whose responses varied from their school's attitudes. Suddenly we could look at all the completed sorts

and begin to see patterns. Because we had gathered demographic data about the sorters we could see if one category of sexuality or gender identity has a different experience of school policies and practices than other groups. Based on these Queer Q Sorts, we categorized the respondents into two groups – those that felt more belongingness in their schools, and those with less belongingness.

This sort format clearly shows how students are supported by their school environments and how much they have a sense of belongingness. For sorters who have many of their responses in boxes A, B, and C and in boxes Z, AA, and AB share many of the same beliefs as most of the people in their school, and therefore probably feel a strong sense of belonging in their school. Students who group many of their responses in boxes V, W and X and E, F and G feel that their beliefs run counter to the majority of other students in their schools, and this probably gives them a strong sense of being a loner and an outcast, or makes them feel they have to hide their identity within the school setting. To some extent this dissonance or resistance is also exhibited by students with most of their responses in boxes in the “I believe but I don’t want to/don’t like it” line. If most students don’t believe something, and the sorter believes it, even if she doesn’t want to, then she, like the sorter with most responses in boxes V, W, and X is at odds with most of the other students in her school. If she believes it but doesn’t like it and most of the students in her school believe it, she may be looking for evidence that most people in her school community have it wrong, and expressing that her experiential knowledge is different from the accepted knowledge about that statement.

In order to begin to understand the prevalence of attitudes and beliefs, or discourses, in the schools we tabulated the statements in the school by the student’s level

of belongingness. That is, we added together the responses in the More than half, Most and Everyone columns for the Low Belongingness respondents, and compared what their schools' populations believe to what they believe. The same was done for the High Belongingness group. This gave us a picture of the ways that the attitudes of the school population impacts the beliefs and the belongingness of the LGBTQ students. Additionally, we wanted to understand if LGBTQ students' beliefs were different by their level of belongingness in their schools. In other words, if a school's population felt very negatively about LGBTQ people, would it be harder to not internalize those negative feelings and to think more negatively about LGBTQ people, or sexuality and gender expression, in general? Finally, we looked at the respondents' beliefs by their proclaimed identity. We wondered, would gay boys feel differently than lesbians or bisexual boys or girls about homosexuality, other LGBTQ youth or school? Our analytical schema allowed us to answer these questions in Chapter 4.

From here we began to see which attitudes were prevalent among the respondents, and know more about the ways students form their beliefs in schools in relation to their peers. We documented what most students who identify as LGBTQ believe and what they don't believe, and saw how their schools' discursive environment plays a role in their beliefs. And we suggest ways that schools can help build acceptance and resilience for all genders and sexualities in their spaces.

### Mapping School Spaces

In addition to the sorts, the student researchers also created maps of the discursive spaces in their schools, which pointed to the spatial locations of sexualities and genders in the school. The researchers were prompted to show where different sexualities and

gender expressions could be spoken, performed or acknowledged in the school, and where they could not. The mapping exercise took place near the end of the data collection period. The youth researchers had been, by this time, listening to several of their peers sort the statements into categories and express their perceptions of their schools. Each youth researcher had completed a Queer Q Sort him or herself, and had participated in the beginning of analysis. In this data and theory rich moment, students created visual representations of the discursive forces in their schools. These maps represent the struggle for space, for expression, for safety, for support and for freedom that LGBTQ students engage in at school each day.

### *Theory of Sexuality and Space*

The study of space and bodies relies on the concept of “embodied space.” Embodied space includes the “disparate notions...of the body as a physical and biological entity, as lived experience, and as a center of agency, a location for speaking and acting on the world” (Low & Lawrence-Zuñiga, 2003, p. 2). In this construct, spaces are imbued with meaning, and bodies that exist in those spaces acquire those meanings within the social setting. In schools, spaces defined as serving LGBTQ students and as for LGBTQ students are heterotopic (Foucault & Miskowiec, 1986) in Foucault’s terminology (Rasmussen, 2006a). By heterotopic, Foucault means these are spaces of “deviation,” (Foucault & Miskowiec, 1986, p. 25) where those who are not considered normal are placed by society. Foucault cites prisons and psychiatric hospitals as examples. An example of heterotopic space in schools is one to which a person is relegated involuntarily or to which it looks like there is free and voluntary entrance, but

certain rules or codes must be followed in order to be allowed to be there. The space, which seems like an entrance, is itself an exclusion (Rasmussen, 2006a).

Not all of the sexual and gendered spatial labels in schools are about LGBTQ students, however. Spaces are gendered as girls' or boys' and women's and men's rooms, for example. The whole school population is divided and asked from the first day of kindergarten to line up in gendered lines (Chesir-Teran, 2003). Locker rooms, workout rooms and gender segregated classrooms, while normatively gendered, may become homoerotic spaces in which heterosexual boys are allowed/required to look at and touch one another's bodies to emphasize their masculinity (Pascoe, 2007). Other spaces may become known as places in which sexual acts happen. These spatial labels require certain behaviors in certain spaces, which may not be allowed or even known about in other spaces in the school. Spaces create subjects and subjects create spaces. This interaction of space and subjectivity is embodied in sexuality and gender expression in schools.

#### *Method of Analysis: Reading the Maps*

Five youth researchers completed maps, and each map artist then led a discussion about the spaces depicted in the map. In these discussions, the research team members "read" the maps to the creator, saying what they saw depicted there, and their impressions were confirmed, their questions were answered and their assumptions were either affirmed or corrected by the map's artist. I kept field notes of these discussions, and they were recorded as well. In some maps this exercise revealed that sex acts happen in the school, and the students realized that certain spaces are coded among their peers to mean that those who enter those spaces engage in certain behaviors or claim a certain identity.

Although these codes were known by the researchers, they had not demarcated the spaces so clearly in their minds until the mapping exercise, and the process of explaining the map to the other researchers, revealed it to them.

The maps tell us how discourses work in spaces. Because spaces are discursively coded in specific ways, students who exist in those spaces are subject to those codes. In that way, certain spaces in a school building can be “safe spaces,” for LGBTQ identities, and some spaces can be “unsafe.” These spaces are not necessarily the spaces designated by the adults in the schools, or those with the rainbow stickers on the windows. They may, in fact, exist despite the adults in the area, though many times an adult can create a space where acceptance for many kinds of gender expression and sexuality flourishes. A commonality in the research team member’s experiences told us that English teachers often create a classroom where sexuality and gender are less regulated, where acceptance and freedom of expression can thrive. This belief was so strong that we included this assumption in our sort cards, although we also assumed that it would not be the same in every school. While not everyone identified the English teacher as the one with the “safe” classroom, almost all of the respondents could identify a teacher within whose room everyone was welcome, and under whose watchful eye harassment and belittling would not happen.

The maps are coded for the types of activities, behavior, language and bodies that exist in those spaces. They show not only that certain types of bodies exist in certain locations in schools, more than in others, but also that schools are spaces teeming with sexual activity. Some of this sexual activity is the sexual harassment that is documented in Pascoe’s work (2007), in which boys routinely sexually interpellate girls as objects of

their sexual desire, and challenge one another to be adequately masculine. Some of the sexual activity involves heterosexual “public displays of affection,” which are tolerated by teachers to a certain extent. Some of them are queer contact, either furtive or blatant physical expressions of attraction. Documenting the sexual activity taking place in schools, especially the same-sex physical sexual touching and kissing gives this research another way of triangulating the discourses about sexuality and gender that exist in schools, and the sexual subjectivities that young people are creating within them.

### Conclusion

This participatory action research project involved LGBTQ high school students at every step: in the creation of the data-collection instrument, in the sample selection, in the definition of the epistemological stance of the research, and in the analysis of the results. The youth researchers continue their political activism around gender equity, LGBTQ student rights and anti-racism. We continue meeting as a group, too, and reading and writing together about sexuality and gender in schools. Subsequent chapters will focus on our findings from this research, specifically on the identities that young people claim and the freedoms within them; on the spaces of sexuality and gender in schools and the fluidity or rigidity of the boundaries of those spaces; on the role of belongingness and safety in the school community on student learning; and on the educational implications of the continuing process of becoming a sexual and gendered subject.

## CHAPTER 3

### Theorizing Sexuality and Gender

Learning about theory in the research team meetings offered the youth researchers a chance to bring their already formed critiques of and agreement with the discourses of sexuality and gender and engage in dialogue with one another about the truth of various ideas. As Foucault made clear in his genealogy of sexuality (1978), mental health, physical health, and morality overdetermine conversations about homosexuality, so much so that it is hard to conceive of a person who engages in same gender sexual acts or claims those desires without psychological, medical and moral discourses coming to mind. For youth and schools, I would add safety to that list of discourses. In all of our research discussions about sexuality and gender in schools, the question of safety inevitably arose, often prompted by the research we read about LGBTQ youth and schools, but also often introduced into the conversation by one of the youth researchers or myself. As I write this dissertation, I must engage the conversation of safety in order to justify the importance of this work for urban school leaders, urban students and teachers and for education generally. Implicitly or explicitly I must answer questions about this research: What does your work have to do with student safety? How does it impact students' school attendance, homework and test scores?

In our research team meetings we struggled with the meanings of homosexuality and gender transgression, their relationship to one another, and the connections for students between these identities or performances and school experiences. In one exercise we each named three words that came to mind when I read a prompt; in this way

we shared with each other the ways concepts and ideas have been linked for us through our experiences. The exercise (Brick, 1989), which comes from a curriculum to help teachers add non-heterosexual people to sex ed lessons, asks:

1. What are the first three words that come to your mind when you hear the word homosexual?
2. Think back as far as you can. What were the major messages you received about homosexuals or homosexuality?
3. What are three ways you think life is different for people who are homosexual or bisexual?
4. What are three ways people who are LGBTQ can find support?
5. What are three concerns people have for LGBTQ youth?

Some columns have only three answers because there was overlap among the youth researchers answers, some have more variety:

Table 3.1 Three Words Chart

<b>Three words about homosexuality</b>	<b>Three messages you get about homosexuality</b>	<b>Three ways life is different for LGBTQ people</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gay</li> <li>• Faggot</li> <li>• Drama/scandal</li> <li>• Rainbow</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It's not normal</li> <li>• Abomination/sin/immoral</li> <li>• Genetic</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discrimination, i.e. workplace</li> <li>• More options for lovers</li> <li>• Harder to find partner</li> <li>• People hate you who don't know you</li> </ul>
<p><b>Supports for LGBTQ youth</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• GLSEN, The Door, LGBT Center, HMI, LGBTQ youth programs and orgs</li> <li>• Mother/family</li> <li>• Teachers, including gay teachers</li> <li>• Friends</li> <li>• Music</li> </ul>	<p><b>Concerns about LGBTQ youth</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Future, kids, marriage, relationships</li> <li>• STDs and HIV</li> <li>• Depression</li> <li>• Violence</li> </ul>	

Already it becomes clear that safety, mental health issues, medical issues, and morality leap to mind when students imagine the discourses around homosexuality and LGBTQ students. Also, students referenced signifiers used to make visible the LGBTQ

community, such as rainbows and fashion. In these ways they tell how they are already engaging with larger, national discourses of sexuality and gender expression.

Mikey explained his inclusion of the word “scandal” in the list of words about homosexuality,

Yeah, like, it always...It always results in something...Cause like, about every time someone's like “I'm gay” it's always like “[shocked intake of breath], you are gay?!” Right? Some lady...My mom's friend was talking about being gay, and I'm just like, “[scornful sharp breathing out] I don't even know you, lady.” She's just like “Are you the gay?!” And I'm just like “I'm not the gay, but OK.” That's a lot of pressure for one guy! I'm not the gay. But OK, yeah, I'm gay.

Negotiating the space between claiming an identity and having it define him is a daily occurrence for Mikey and for other LGBTQ youth. This resistance to subjectivation by discourses of sexuality, while claiming sexual and gender subjectivity frame the design of the research protocol for interviewing other youth and also our conversations with one another in our research meetings. Theory was woven through the process of the Resisting Regulation research project.

### Theory in Research Design

I started with the belief that young people were making ethical and political decisions by coming out, stating non-heterosexuality or performing gender transgression, and were remaking the political landscape through their acts, making space not only for their own sexuality and gender expression, but more space for other students as well. In other words, I believed as LGBTQ students demand space for their sexualities and gender expressions in schools, other students who do not identify as LGBTQ are able to examine their own sexual and gender practices and make ethical decisions about themselves as well. As the Resisting Regulation Research Team began working together, theory was significant in our understanding of how sexuality and gender work in society as

organizing structures. Early in our meetings we began talking about Foucault's (1977; 1978) and Butler's (1990) ideas, which we found helpful for explaining how young people interact with norms of sexuality and gender in contingent and contextualized ways. They have helped us think about the discourses around sexuality and gender with a more historicized and complex lens and about our own subjectivity within those discourses. Foucault's sense of ethics allowed us to think about ethical personal resistance to power/knowledge as a political act, a resistance to being perfectly classifiable, perfectly comprehensible, perfectly known (Hofmeyr, 2006).

Using these theories to focus on the categories into which sexuality has been placed and the social and cultural forces that create gendered/sexed subjects, allowed us to examine heteronormativity, or the ways in which heterosexuality is constructed as the normal, with the unspoken, unacknowledged and silenced non-heteronormative sexualities serving to reinforce the validity of the "normal" category. Questioning heteronormativity allowed us to question pedagogical practices and curriculum content that has been framed as "normal", historical, age-appropriate, and in the interest of the students (Epstein, O'Flynn, & Telford, 2000-2001; Kumashiro, 2000; Rasmussen, 2006a, 2006b; Rofes, 2005).

We started from the position that sexuality is an expression of oneself, a search for physical pleasure and a way of relating, and that gender is a way of presenting oneself in the world. These bodily expressions can take many forms, even within the circumscribed possibilities of any temporal moment. Like queer theorists, we don't think there is something wrong with our desires or our gender expressions. As such, sexuality and gender are not viewed in this project as something to be tolerated, but as a way that

young people who are high school students seek to form themselves as ethical subjects. An ethics of sexual subjectivity motivates the readings of sexuality and gender discourses in schools and informs the policy changes that will be suggested by our research. This lens provides an opportunity to look at sexuality and gender within schools not as a “problem” or a “risk-factor” for students, but as a way for students to fashion themselves and relate to others.

### Concepts and Critiques of Queer Theory

As we started working together as a participatory action research team, we reviewed the key concepts from Foucault and Butler that would be the foundation for the study. I proposed these concepts and theorists because they seemed useful to me in thinking about how young people construct their sexual and gendered identities within contemporary culture. These ideas, which start from the premise that gender and sexuality are not universal, biologically rooted categories, but instead are socially and culturally produced, give latitude to researchers to understand the variety among youth in sexual and gender attitudes and help to explain how identities both are formed by culture, media and institutions, and how individuals can resist the regulation of their identity in certain ways by transgressing boundaries and claiming deviance. Following the social constructionist move which showed gender and sexuality categories to be socially created and culturally contingent, queer theory demonstrated how these negotiated categories are reworked and restructured in each encounter, constantly being perfected, adjusted and refined. The presumed binary categories of biological sex, gender and sexuality are disrupted in the writings of Foucault (1978) and those who come after him. No longer is the ontological status of the male or female body secure. The many possibilities for

bodies outside of the two normalized categories are explored, as are the discursive powers that place ambiguously gendered bodies into one of the binary categories.

*Michel Foucault*

Foucault helped us to understand, in concrete terms, the ways that bodies, expected gender behavior, expected sexual behavior, social roles and identities have changed and categories have been created in different eras. In a conversation about our assumptions, I asked two of the research team members, “Before you were out – so think back to as a child, maybe before you thought of yourself as gay (I don’t know how long you’ve thought of yourself as gay, but...) before you thought of yourself as gay – and you thought about gay people, what did you think about? What did they look like in your head? Yajaira answered, “Like, the opposite sex. Like if it was a girl, and I thought she was gay, I thought she looked like a boy. If it was a boy, and he was gay, I thought he looked like a girl. ‘Cause that’s how you see it, like on comedy shows.” Dylan challenged that impression, saying that her experiences with LGBTQ people in her life as a child helped her form a more varied impression. “Yeah, like, honestly, I’ve been...Like there’s always been gay people around me all the time. Like, my mom’s best friend when I was younger was like... out, gay woman, and she was Puerto Rican...No, she’s not, she’s Dominican.” She countered the stereotypes in the media that might lead young people of color to believe that LGBTQ people are White<sup>14</sup>. Each of us experienced his or her own “aha” moment when we realized that even very basic categories in the current

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<sup>14</sup> Recent coverage of the Proposition 8 ballot measure in California revived this stereotype once again, pitting LGBTQ activists against communities of color (<http://www.indybay.org/newsitems/2008/11/08/18549628.php>). For analysis of the “theorizing” of queerness as a “white disease” see Johnson and Henderson (2005).

era, such as anatomical male and female, have not always been taken for granted in European, Christian culture. These moments helped to destabilize for each of us the “naturalness” of these categories.

According to Foucault (1973/2003, 1977, 1978), the body came to be understood differently in the modern era with the Enlightenment and the rise of objectivity and observation as part of medical practice. In medicine, prior to the rise of the modern era (end of the eighteenth century) the body was conceived of as very similar for both women and men (Foucault, 1973). The differences were described mostly in terms of function, what the body could do, rather than in form or essential parts. A woman was a woman because she could bear children rather than because she had a certain anatomy. The anatomical differences between men and women, and the “normal” and “abnormal” iterations of that anatomy, had not yet been delineated as the critical mark of sex difference. During the Enlightenment, with the increased reliance on observation, anatomical exploration and knowledge creation through repeated observations of the same phenomenon to understand the usual range or appearance, the body came to be seen as normally constituted in certain ways with variations coming to be understood as abnormalities. The world of humans could be decisively divided among women and men and those persons born with undifferentiated or out-of-range anatomical parts could be medically fixed to fit within the normal categories.

As humans came to understand themselves as subjects in the Enlightenment, they saw themselves as limited by or tied to the materiality of their bodies and their goal was to rise above their hungers, passions and feelings through rationality (Foucault, 1973a, 1973b). Rationality became the basis for governing structures, too, giving rise to

“biopolitics,” which Foucault (Foucault, 1977, 1978) describes as beginning in the seventeenth century in Europe. As society transformed from local rule to larger governments, rulers became more interested in regulating bodies, marriages, births, deaths, and production. Foucault clarifies that these concerns did not emerge as a conspiracy of rulers to exert more control over individuals. As society changed, governments needed to be able to raise an army, produce enough food, control the size of the population and predict growth. As such, new interest arose about how, at what age, and under what rules bodies were engaging in sexual practices and reproducing. Foucault is critical of this “disciplining” of the body. He criticizes medicine, psychology, and religious morality for the limitations they place on the gender and sexual expressions of the body, and demonstrates the contingency of “natural” bodies, “natural” sexualities, and “natural” gendered positions in society. Human understanding of each of these has changed radically in different eras, in a discontinuous movement that Foucault does not describe as progress.

The concept of biopolitics is useful to us for understanding the centrality of the construct of marriage and family relations in the current era, and the various ways different cultures structure them. For example, when talking about the debates about gay marriage and the support and disapproval of it among people who identify as LGBTQ, biopolitics helped us understand that marriage is not just a nice ceremony that family and friends attend to celebrate love. It also functions to record for the state the relationships in which people are having sex with one another, the legitimacy of children and the claims to property that people can make. A macro-level concept like biopolitics helped us to understand how cultural forces could be arranged and levied to support family

structure and marriage, and to keep those who did not participate in heterosexual, nuclear, socially approved versions of them from gaining the benefits they confer. Clear benefits and losses maintain, not the sanctity of the institution of marriage as is often referred to in the media, but the economic and social ordering power of these structures. It was an easy leap from this understanding to a structural analysis of gender in schools and the work that schools do to support heterosexuality. Biopolitics helps us link the local, individual oppressions and resistances to larger structures.

Foucault describes discourses that create the categories in which human activity can be understood and known. As with biological sex and the medical establishment, the categorization of sexuality into heterosexual (normal) and homosexual (abnormal or pathologized) limits human subjects' knowledge of themselves and their desires. It is impossible for a subject to know him- or herself except through the discursive lens of the era and the culture (Foucault, 1977). "Discursive knowledge regulates, among other things, what can be said and done, what constitutes right and wrong, and what counts for knowledge in the first place. In short, discourse establishes and controls knowledge" (Dimitriadis & Kamberlis, 2006, p. 113). However, within discourse, the subject can resist various subjections and through resistance and transgression can push the boundary of possible subject positions. One is limited by the materiality of the time and place in which one lives, but within that time and place one has choices about acceding to or resisting sexual and gender regulation.

### *Judith Butler*

The primacy of biology in creating gendered presentations and positions in society has also been questioned by queer thinkers. Judith Butler changed the way that

postmodern thinkers understood the “natural” gendered behavior that people in different bodies exhibit (Butler, 1990; Butler & Salih, 2004). Butler (1990) claims that gender is a performance that the subject is required to repeat over and over in interactions with others, and through this performativity the body is structured and the self is created by gender. “There is no gender behind the expressions of gender...identity is performatively constituted by the very ‘expressions’ that are said to be its results” (p. 25). Although a subject is created by the expressions of gender, subjects are not limited to this performance. In fact, since no one can perfectly perform gender, and since gender has to be renegotiated and reiterated in each interaction, the agency of the subject is apparent (Butler, 2004). Each subject performs gender to a greater or lesser extent in conformity with society’s gender expectations.

Butler is invaluable for thinking about gender. Her construction of gender as performativity illuminates the ways that assumptions, proscriptions, and mandates about certain bodies become regulated by norms until bodies are unthinkable without those gendered performances – they are illegible if the parts do not match the actions, gestures, words and attitudes (Butler, 1993, 2004). Gender as a normative discourse is intimately interwoven with sexuality in the policies, practices, spatial arrangements and interpersonal relationships in schools (Youdell, 2004), as will be shown below and in subsequent chapters. Transgender youth, no matter what their sexuality, must be taken into account in research on discourses of sexuality in schools because the gender discourses and the sexuality discourses are implicated in one another and because they are deployed with intent by those within institutions in positions of institutional power in

order to compel adherence to both sexual and gender norms (Butler, 1999; Epstein & Johnson, 1998).

### *Critiques of Queer Theory*

Queer theory then offers a chance to not pathologize or make abject the queer student body, but rather to examine the processes of schooling – pedagogy, curriculum, spatial enforcement, socialization and interpersonal relationships – to see how they can be changed. Within this process it is possible to ask what changes would be desirable, and to request more than just a liberal equality for LGBTQ students. But many theorists have critiqued the ideas of queer theory as inadequate and depoliticizing. Particularly in terms of race, scholars have critiqued queer politics and queer studies for prioritizing sexuality as the primary axis of difference, over all others. Additionally, queer theory is often thought to involve the destruction of the subject, and to generally be disembodied and to ignore the material circumstances of various subject positions.

As can be seen in the description of the ways queer theory has been used in education below, when scholars examine educational settings using queer theory they have focused on sexuality, or sexuality and gender, to the exclusion of all other social locations. This universalizing of a hetero/homo binary, which queer theory then proposes to deconstruct, ignores the ways that the centrality of sexuality to a subject's understanding of herself may be mediated by other factors that in some settings may be more pressing or more salient. It overlooks the experience of most people that they sometimes exist in normative identities and sometimes exist in non-normative or abject position, in other words, how one is sometimes the oppressor and sometimes the oppressed. Very few people exist exclusively in one category or the other, depending on

the social context. As Cathy Cohen asserts, “It is my argument... that one of the great failings of queer theory and especially queer politics has been their inability to incorporate into analysis of the world and strategies for political mobilization the roles that race, class and gender play in defining people’s differing relations to dominant and normalizing power” (C. J. Cohen, 2005, p. 42).

Queer politics and queer theory, as often advanced by academics and activists alike, may use sexuality as the primary or only axis of oppression around which to organize or theorize. This may be a valid organizing tool for White, gay men of middle class or upper class backgrounds, who feel that the primary reason that they are excluded from the power and privilege of other middle class White men is their sexuality. However, other non-heterosexual or non-normatively gendered people may experience marginalization because of their sexuality, but in other settings may be marginalized because of other aspects of their identity such as race, class, gender, or ability (Carbado, 2005). Therefore, organizing in a straight versus queer dichotomy may serve to isolate those who experience oppression on other axes from communities that provide necessary supports and recognition (Johnson & Henderson, 2005).

A second critique of queer theory describes it as disembodied and immaterial (Green, 2007). In his critique, Green faults queer theory for dismissing ontology and instead theorizing discourse and language. A subject fails to achieve an identity performance, and so never achieves a self. In this construction everything defaults to discourse, identities remain unstable and unachievable, and performativity is play, meant to destabilize all categories, which Green sees as anarchy. Sociologically, this would seem to make studying sexual identity groups, for example, impossible because the group

would be forever contingent and the identities only contingently held by populations (Gamson, 2000). Green asserts that this causes methodological dilemmas for researchers, who risk reifying categories by studying them, or creating social categories by studying subjects based on the identities they claim for themselves (Green, 2007). This “radical subversion” strain of queer theory, seeks to “disrupt the normalizing tendencies of the sexual order, locating nonheteronormative practices and subjects and subjects as crucial sites of resistance” (Green, 2007, p. 28).

I assert that queer theory does not require these limitations. It can be used in very critical and intersectional ways, as in the theorizing of Latina/o queer culture (Rodriguez, 2003), in critiquing racism (McBride, 2005), and in analyzing the sexual identity alliances in mixed race and class school environment (Bettie, 2003). Rodriguez, for example, uses a queer framework to destabilize geography, language and identity, “because the very disciplines that divide Latin American from North American, music from literature, politics from performance, or queer studies from Latino studies have been based on paradigms constituted through our marginalization” (2003, p. 30). Queer theory offers her the chance to create “subjects-in-process” (p. 31), who contextually and momentarily inhabit subject positions, which, when focused on, may prohibit the focus on other subject positions that also exist, but give a picture of a possibility. In this queer imagining, for examples, organizations can use queerness for political, anti-racist, anti-poverty inclusion of its “membership.” Within this larger membership, contingent groups can come together for political actions or services to meet a specific need.

Like the machas and the jotos interpellated in the mission statement for the Proyecto ContraSIDA por Vida referenced by Rodriguez (pp. 50-52), the young people

working as researchers in the Resisting Regulation Research Team spoke of the recognition to be found in being called fags, AGs, bisexuals and queers that they experienced among their friends and classmates. Being recognized in their sexuality and gender presentations marked a very significant moment and created among young people a sense of community. “Like they would call me a ‘AG’ and my girlfriend a ‘femme.’ Like, we put labels on ourselves...And I like the word lesbian, it like, tickles me” (Sankofa). Finding a space within the social space of her school and the non-heterosexual and gender non-conforming group of AG (aggressives) girls she spends most of her social time with, Sankofa embraces a label that marks her as gendered butch, sexually attracted to girls and a person of color. Although this label does not define her entirely, she appreciates the intersections of her identity that it references and recognizes. Young people’s understandings of the intersections of identity communities often reaches beyond the official presentations of them by curriculum or popular culture (Driver, 2007; Loutzenheiser & MacIntosh, 2004).

### Queer Theory In Education

Prominent scholars in education have explored queer theory’s application to education (Birden, 2005; Blackburn, 2002; Dilley, 1999; Epstein et al., 2000-2001; Kumashiro, 2000, 2001; Letts & Sears, 1999; Loutzenheiser & MacIntosh, 2004; Quinlivan & Town, 1999; Rasmussen, 2004, 2006a, 2006b; Rofes, 2000, 2005). Most uses of queer theory in studies of education policy and practice focus on understanding heteronormativity and disrupting identity categories. As a response to some of the essentializing tendencies of lesbian and gay studies and earlier women’s studies, queer theory questions the categories of the subjects of its studies – even as it seeks to say

something about those persons and about the material conditions of being viewed as belonging to a marginal category. As Gamson notes, “Queer studies is largely a deconstructive enterprise, taking apart the view of a self defined by something at its core, be it sexual desire, race, gender, nation or class” (2000). In this section, I will present some of the queer theory arguments used by education scholars; I will also lay the groundwork for how I will use this theory in this study.

### *Heteronormativity*

Heteronormativity is “the view that institutionalized heterosexuality constitutes the standard for legitimate and prescriptive sociosexual arrangements” (Ingraham, 1994). This normalizing process means that children grow up assuming that heterosexual relations are the only or the primary means of adult family life (Warner, cited in Quinlivan & Town, 1999). “Like the air that we breathe...It is with us from the day of our birth, and evidenced though the division of the world into male/female, boy/girl, and the belief that “normal” sexuality is heterosexual. (Quinlivan & Town, 1999, p. 510) Heteronormativity creates a silence around queer lives. Heteronormativity also requires that bodies perform gender according to specific requirements. Boys and girls who do not or cannot perform their gender appropriately may be classified as psychologically sick or damaged and are subjected to reparative therapies (Sedgwick, 1991). In this way heteronormativity constructs heterosexual desire and continues its hegemony. Heteronormativity is at work in schools in many obvious ways. Teachers divide students into gender-segregated groups at every grade and level. After-school dances and mixers teach students the roles of dating and courtship (Lesko, 1996b, 2001). Sexuality in schools is highly regulated, with clear boundaries about when, where and how touching

and even looking can happen (Fields & Tolman, 2006; Fine & McClelland, 2006; Pascoe, 2007).

Heteronormativity in schools creates silences around non-normative sexuality. Heteronormativity may structure interpersonal relationships by creating assumptions among students and between teachers, administrators and students that “there are no gay people here” (Burrington, 1998). These assumptions are reinforced if teachers and administrators can not claim non-heterosexual or non-normative gender identities in the school (Lugg, 2003). Additionally, spaces such as locker rooms and bathrooms labeled with gender specific signage, and pictures of heterosexual couples designate legitimate bodies that may use those spaces, and render bodies that do not fit in those categories illegitimate (Chesir-Teran, 2003). Policies may or may not provide protection and recourse to students who are discriminated against based on actual or perceived queerness. Students feel pressure to conform to the language norms that include anti-gay slurs and heterosexual and gender normative behavior (Pascoe, 2007). Even when schools address policies toward language and physical harassment they often continue to reproduce heteronormativity in these less overt ways (Chesir-Teran, 2003).

Similarly, curricula that do not include references to non-heterosexual persons, or obscure sexuality when authors or historical figures known to have same-sex sexual relationships may make students who claim non-heterosexuality feel isolated. Silences about the queer lives of teachers, students and figures that appear in the curriculum, as well as silences about any sexuality besides heterosexuality, effectively work to keep some students from finding a way to act on or talk about their desires (Quinlivan & Town, 1999). When queer lives do appear in school lessons, too often pedagogical

conversations elide the differences among people with non-normative sexuality. This form of additive multiculturalism reinforces stereotypes that non-heterosexuality is raced White and does not appear in communities of color (Kumashiro, 2000; Loutzenheiser & MacIntosh, 2004). Even in a school known for its tolerance, teachers and administrators, in the name of support for the students, advise students not to declare their sexuality but to keep their options open (Aleman, 2004). Possibly in conjunction with this practice, teachers do not add materials or presentations to their lectures that would give students an opportunity to discuss homosexuality as part of the class work. Even when students verbally challenge teachers to provide content that addresses homosexuality and defy gender normativity, they often are not provided a framework within the curriculum to deconstruct the heteronormative and binary gendered discourse (Aleman, 2004; Kumashiro, 2001; Rofes, 2000).

By focusing on the categories into which sexuality has been placed and the sociological forces that create gendered/sexed subjects, queer theory has allowed educational researchers to examine the ways in which heterosexuality is constructed as the normal with the unspoken, unacknowledged and silenced non-heteronormative sexualities serving to reinforce the validity of the assumed category. By questioning heteronormativity, queer theory has given researchers a way to question pedagogical practices and curriculum content that has been framed as “normal”, historical, age-appropriate, and in the interest of the students. Giroux calls these ideologies the curriculum’s “hidden meanings, structured silences, or unintended truths,” and adds that these must be interrogated if education scholars want to get beyond simple additive

multiculturalism and disrupt the structures that maintain historic inequalities in education (Giroux, 1997).

### *Identity Categories*

In working for the disruption of simple identity categories, queer theorists deconstruct organizing around identity as a way to advocate for change in schools (Birden, 2005; Rasmussen, 2006a). Civil rights groups and others who practice politics based on identity categories have seen identity organizing as instrumental for achieving political change, and necessary for mustering enthusiasm and energy needed for an often long and difficult fight to upset the balance of social relations. Why then would queer theorists argue against it? Queer theory challenges the essential bases of identity categories. For example, queer and poststructuralist theories say there is no such thing as the essential base of gender that draws the boundaries around gender beyond what our discursive understanding has decided is a woman and a man, and which bodies are neither woman nor man (Butler, 1993; Fausto-Sterling, 2000). When basing political movements in identity categories, those lines that separate insiders from outsiders to the category become hardened and codified. Because movements have to specify for whom they are advocating and who will receive benefits, members or leaders of the movements must decide on a cutoff point and erect artificial boundaries around socially constructed categories.

One essentialist move often made in schools is to advocate on behalf of LGBTQ students and teachers on the basis of essentialist arguments, calling LGBTQ persons “victims”. Rasmussen has argued against an essentialist identifying of LGBTQ students as victims who need safe spaces in schools. She describes spaces in schools that are

defined as serving LGBTQ students and as for LGBTQ students as heterotopic (Foucault & Miskowiec, 1986) in Foucault's terminology. "Utopias permit fables and discourse: they run with the very grain of language and are part of the fundamental dimension of the *fabula*; heterotopias desiccate speech, stop words in their tracks, contest the very possibility of grammar at its source; they dissolve our myths and sterilize the lyricism of our sentences" (Foucault, 1973, p. xviii). Language is heterotopic when there is no site in which the various ideas or concepts can be imagined together, that is, on the same "table" (p. xvii). This mixing of elements that don't belong together is what results in "monstrous" (p. xvi) language. Foucault also defines several ways in which spaces may be heterotopic. Heterotopias were once sacred spaces, in which individuals experiencing bodily changes and changes in status were removed to allow them to go through their crisis away from their daily lives. More often, now, heterotopias are spaces of "deviation," (Foucault & Miskowiec, 1986, p. 25) where those who are not considered normal are placed by society. Foucault cites prisons and psychiatric hospitals as examples. An example of heterotopic space in schools is one in which a person is relegated to involuntarily or to which it looks like there is free and voluntary entrance but certain rules or codes must be followed in order to be allowed to be there. The space, which seems like an entrance, is itself an exclusion (Rasmussen, 2006a).

In Rasmussen's description, this heterotopia could include LGBTQ students being excluded from spaces in schools even without declaring themselves LGBTQ, based on the assumptions that other students make about them (Human Rights Watch, 2001). Also, students who are non-heterosexual and non-gender-conforming, but who do not conform to the standards of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or queer identities may be

excluded from the spaces that are created by schools to protect them (GLSEN & Harris Interactive, 2005; McCready, 2004). Finally, school administrators who decide that LGBTQ students are a ‘disruption’ to the order or discipline of the school, or who decide that queer students’ behavior is ‘inappropriate’ or puts them in danger may decide to remove the student to a more safe environment. This kind of ‘safety transfer,’ which Rasmussen mentions and which students may experience in New York City high schools, abdicates responsibility for addressing the heterosexism in the schools and removes the student against whom malice or violence is directed. LGBTQ students are then quietly excluded from their regular schools in the name of their “protection.” The political moves based on identity that gain students “safe spaces” in schools also work to control their gender expression and sexuality and to confine them to certain understandings of their desires and their subjectivities.

Queer theory has been used in education research to counter these spatial enforcements that students may encounter in schools (Mayo, 2004; Rasmussen, 2006). One argument against them is that they enforce an essential definition on the sexuality of students. In other words, identity politics has at its roots an assumption that students who are LGBTQ are different in a way that they cannot change – they are born that way or otherwise essentially gay and Other (Rasmussen, 2004). The qualification for protection by schools from harassment, bullying and name-calling often requires that students must claim the ‘naturalness’ of their queerness (Rasmussen, 2006). School policies and practices reflect the belief that young people do not have sexual subjectivity, dismissing student desires as either inappropriate displays of sexuality or inevitable and something that the student cannot help being. LGBTQ students must be served by the school in

some way, because they cannot *be* otherwise, meaning they must be recognized as legitimate students and eligible citizens (Butler, 2004). However, in the current structure the deviance and pathology becomes located in the body of the student, not in the school or the heterosexual students. The problem is identified, and if it cannot be concealed or normalized by the LGBTQ students, then the student is removed from sight for her inappropriate behavior<sup>15</sup>. In order to better understand the complexity of sexuality and gender discourses in schools, education researchers must move beyond the single dimension of creating physical safety for queer bodies in schools, and must begin to think about how teachers, administrators and students can acknowledge sexual and gendered subjectivity within the spaces of schools.

#### Beyond Homophobia and Heteronormativity

Butler and Foucault offer to the education researcher even more radical possibilities for rethinking sexual subjectivities in schools. Foucault examines the way that subjectivities emerge within the discursive constraints of an era. In his archaeologies and genealogies he is not reporting on the official knowledge that existed within an era, but he digs deeply in one moment in time to resurrect the multiple, conflicting and complex knowledges that coexist simultaneously. His model of searching for subjugated knowledges (Foucault et al., 2003) is employed here as a way of allowing students to speak of themselves as sexual subjects. For the most part, students do not have an opportunity to speak of themselves as sexual subjects in terms of the official discourses

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<sup>15</sup> Ann Ferguson in her book *Bad Boys* (2000) describes a similar removal of Black boys from classrooms for misbehavior, which denies them educational opportunity and often puts them on a path to dropout, a path many LGBTQ youth who experience harassment in schools find themselves on as well. The removal processes that keep special education students out of sight in schools have been described in similar manner, as well (Skrtic, 1995).

of schools about sexuality, to an adult audience. However, they do speak of themselves as sexual subjects among themselves. This research documents some of the discourses that youth use when speaking of themselves as sexual subjects, and creates a forum in which they speak back to the taken-for-granted notions of teens and sex. Teens fashion themselves as sexual subjects within the existing official discourses: medical, religious, psychological, moral. For Foucault this is an ethical practice and a way of seeking freedom (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1983). Foucault's model of "care of the self" will be used to understand the ways that youth fashion themselves as ethical sexual subjects.

For Foucault, the care of the self involves four aspects:

1. "determination of the ethical substance": or, how an adolescent determines which part(s) of the self must be ethically and sexually controlled;
2. "mode of subjection": or, the adolescent's experience as ethically obligated, as a subject of the ethical rule. This may be the "expert knowledge" or institution's influence over the individual's practices;
3. "elaboration of ethical work": or, the ways the individual works on him/herself in order to make the self ethical. This includes physical and mental techniques that the adolescent uses to produce a specific sexual self;
4. "telos": or, what sort of person does the individual strive to be as a result of the work on this specific part of the body. This part may include the desire to be "pure" or "healthy". Foucault calls this a "mode of being" (Foucault, 1985, pp. 26-28).

The purpose of unpacking the techniques of self that adolescents use to produce their sexual selves is not to produce more "knowledge" or generate a more precise science of adolescent sexuality; but to witness the various ways that the sexual body can be utilized to create multiple selves, to notice the historical and cultural contingencies of sexual practices, and the instability of the individual subject. In short, to open alternative spaces for other ways for human beings to relate to each other; to dispel, or reverse views that certain sexual practices are more humanistic, natural, and healthy. This view implicitly

challenges epistemological claims that sexual practices reflect a “truth” about an individual person by describing the techniques individuals use to produce a sexual self, and by comparing these practices with others.

Foucault suggested in an interview, later titled, *Friendship as a Way of Life* (Foucault, 1997a) that being homosexual is about creating new spaces for the emergence of subjectivities; for alternative ways of experiencing ourselves and each other. He also proposed that the care of the self involves fashioning oneself in relation to others. “And by ‘ethics’, Foucault means the relation one has to *oneself*” (McHoul & Grace, 1995, p. 24). This view offers a different way to think about “educating” sexually maturing young people, specifically about caring for the self and caring for others, in a balance with finding the sexual behaviors that allow the young person to negotiate and fashion oneself. His view also provides a way for us to reconsider the policies that guide sex education in secondary schools in the United States.

Butler complicates Foucault’s schema with the intersection of gender and sexuality. Within Foucault’s elaboration of the care of the self and the contemporary conflation of sexuality with gender expression is the suggestion that one’s choice of gender presentation is itself an ethical decision about sexual subjectivity. A sophisticated understanding of gender is necessary in the current era and in the spaces of schools, where gender is often the key to “passing” successfully in school or to being harassed every minute of every day. Many students in a pilot study (Linville, 2008; Linville & Carlson, forthcoming) reported that students in their schools play with both sexuality and gender in their search to define themselves as sexual subjects and to declare their ethical substance. Butler’s conceptions of gender and its contingency – the ability of various

bodies to transgress gender boundaries – allows for a richer elaboration of the ethical substance and the ethical work that young people engage in to fashion themselves as the sexual subjects that they would like to be.

Foucault conceptualized two kinds of knowledge: the *savoir* and the *connaissance* (Foucault, 1973). Foucault says, “By *connaissance* I mean the relation of the subject to the object and the formal rules that govern it. *Savoir* refers to the conditions that are necessary in a particular period for this or that type of object to be given to *connaissance* and for this or that type of enunciation to be formulated” (1973, p. 236). The *savoir* is the official knowledge, the “expert” knowledge, the knowledge that gets the media headlines and the formal introductions. *Savoir* in the case of sexuality and gender in the United States in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century makes claims about finding a gay gene (Bailey et al., 2000), about the hormonal and psychological bases of homosexuality (Ellis & Ames, 1987), and about the “incomplete” or undistinguished genital formations of intersexed persons (Göllü et al., 2007). It includes the religious discourses about the morality of sexual practices, lifestyles and natural forms and uses of bodies. *Connaissance* is the “everyday” knowledge. It is, in the terms of the quote above, the relation of adolescents to their sexuality, their knowledge of who they are in terms of sexuality, and within the official discourses which shape society’s understandings of how it is possible to be sexual, to be a sexual subject.

In order to begin to question the position of sexuality and gender in schools today, the Resisting Regulation Research Team had to ask about the purpose the discourses about sexuality and gender serve in schools. Why are schools in the business of creating gendered and sexualized subjects, in a particularly heteronormative way? How have

schools been implicated in the changes that have occurred in society in the sexuality and gender discourses, and in what ways do schools act as productive spaces in which the possibilities for gender and sexuality are tried out, acquiesced to, resisted or transgressed? School is one of the confessional institutions in Foucault's descriptions of power and knowledge and their creation and deployment in society. In order to create the kinds of subjects that society desires, certain institutions produce those types of subjects – such as schools and gendered, heterosexualized boys and girls. The institutions create the knowledge of these ways of being, not by repressing talk of sexuality and gender, but by multiplying talk. In a Foucaultian history of the sexuality and gender in schools, these historical moments would be questioned not for who and what was repressed at the moment, but for what type of subjects the discourses at work in schools created, and what purposes in society (economic, political, religious) those subjects served. This has been done somewhat by the historians that have explored the history of sexuality in schooling, and can be used to give us a more incisive look at who/what subjectivity is produced by the discourses of the current era.

#### Our Contestations with Theory

As demonstrated by the Collective of Researchers on Educational Desire and Disappointment (CREDD), in the dissertation of Eve Tuck, young people who work as researchers in participatory action research projects do not simply absorb the theory they are introduced to as part of the research project (Tuck et al., 2009). They also theorize from their own experiences and understandings of the world, and push back against the assumptions the theory makes. This speaking back to theory exemplifies theoretical innovations that are adopted by the research team to make theory more responsive and

relevant to the various communities for which it claims an explanatory value. This disentangling will be explored in chapter six, when I talk about how young people fashion themselves as sexual subjects within the discourses of sexuality and gender found in schools.

As a PAR team we had different investments in the theory. For me, my engagements with queer and post-structuralist feminist theory had allowed me to feel more at home in my body, more entitled to claim my membership in the communities with which I wished to affiliate despite my obvious (to me) failings in terms of the “natural” attributes of members of those communities. Deconstructing the boundaries of identity categories, such as women, lesbians, dykes, queers, working class and middle class helped me feel more at home in my body, more able to examine my desires and self expressions, less bound to denying my tastes, interests and past in order to fit into my claimed identity of today. I have felt empowered to not be limited by the expectations of gender, sexuality, class, race and respectability that I grew up with. For these very personal reasons, I have believed in the explanatory power of queer theory and post-structuralist feminist theory. I know, however, that my expectations and limitations are different than those imposed on non-heterosexual and gender non-conforming youth growing up in various communities in New York City. Proper femininity, a strong construct I grew up with, is outlined differently for working class girls and middle class girls, different for urban girls than for suburban or rural girls, and different for White girls than for Black girls, or Latinas, or Chinese, Indian, Pakistani, Korean, Russian, or West Indian immigrant girls. Within these named nationalities, there are differences by ethnic, religious and class groups, as well, about the proper roles for girls and women

within the family, and about proper masculinity for boys, in public, and in relation to individuality. I could not apply my own “liberation” through queer theory to the youth I was working with without asking them for feedback on the process, without understanding which assumptions of the theory worked and which did not. This is part of the project of this research.

In my experiences working in the public library and visiting classes in local public and private middle and high schools, I thought teens were finding spaces between and on the edges of hegemonic discourses of sexuality and gender in which to fashion themselves as sexual subjects. In my conversations with LGBTQ youth, it seemed they were actively engaging with their formation as sexual subjects, seeking information from various sources and points of view, and performing gender in the way that best met their needs. The theoretical ideas that I had encountered in Butler and Foucault supported these ideas and challenged me to think about gender and sexuality as culturally constructed, historically specific, and interpersonally negotiated. Specifically, the theories of Butler and Foucault allowed me to see and hear in young people’s words and actions something different than the taken-for-granted readings of adolescent sexuality in the United States.

The young researchers involved in the team were already negotiating the categories that structure their material experiences and existence long before I met them. Race, class, gender, gender expression, sexuality, ethnicity and immigrant status were all recognized as identities that could impact their lives, but not necessarily natural categories. Attitudes and beliefs of parents, peer groups, and communities are understood to be historically situated and in some cases produced by the dominant groups

in society for the purposes of maintaining an underclass, a marginalized group that can be denied access to goods and services won by one sector of the community. For example, experiences with race in other settings, the Caribbean, Africa and South America, has given several of the youth researchers a perspective that allows them to understand that “race” as it’s configured in the United States is a particular organizing system that orders society in particular ways, but that it is not universal, and that race works in different ways in different settings.

Additionally, our conversations about class and how it is usually assessed or defined in social science research led us to conclude that there was no easy classification system for all of us around class. Home ownership is usually a marker of class, as is the number of toilets (or sometimes sinks) in a house. In New York City, however, most people do not own their homes, and some of the richest are renters. Additionally, parent job titles that are working class jobs may let people live in neighborhoods that are more well-resourced and attend better schools than children with parents in similar jobs in other neighborhoods. Individual access to better schools and therefore higher education is not solely dependent on economic resources, but also language skills, social networks and transportation. Some neighborhoods are just too far away for students to travel to the schools of their choice, and some two-parent working families don’t have time to take their children to schools far away from home. As a group we did not settle on a satisfactory way to assess our own classes or to ask other participating students about the class of their households. Therefore we will talk about class, but will not definitively state the boundaries of the classes that students represented in the data. We will talk about the resources, generally speaking, that young people in New York City have

available to them, and those that are more difficult to access in a dense urban area with overloaded infrastructure and institutions.

On sexuality and gender categories, we agreed as a team to use language that refers to the identities lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer or questioning (LGBTQ) in asking our questions and in outreaching to other youth. Young people who do not use these identity labels, even those who might call themselves “straight but I mess around with [same gender],” were invited to participate if they self-identified as someone interested in questions about sexuality and gender in schools. As researchers we identify with the labels above in so much as it is politically expedient and useful for us to use those labels, but we do not have fixed boundaries that we associate with them. In particular, our conversations about bisexuality were difficult. We had several bisexual girls as members of our group. Mixed feelings about the authenticity of the bisexuality of everyone who claims it, the reliability of bisexuals as political allies in a struggle against heteronormativity, and the commitment of bisexuals as same-gender lovers all created a lively conversation about creating community across difference. We all come with different sexual histories and used those trajectories to talk about sexual fluidity, desire and relationships.

Similarly, we spent several sessions talking about gender and the way we present ourselves as gendered in the world. In particular, we discussed the ways gender has changed for each of us in our lifetimes, and how we have felt compelled to conform to gender standards in various settings or various times. Each of us chronicled our interactions with gender and sexuality, noting how we felt about gender, what felt “right” and “wrong” about gender, and how we longed for access to entitlements of another

gender. We acted out gender roles and performances, in order to see how gender could change within different interpersonal interactions, and evaluated the believability of our performances. We discussed the role of gender in relation to sexuality, noting that gender can be an expression of sexual desire, desirability and sexual role, and that it can also signify other meanings not directly related to sexuality.

Our contestations and clarifications of categories as a research team allowed us to envision the various ways these categories work in our lives to encourage access, to limit participation, to define membership and to privilege us in different settings. We used this knowledge and experience to frame our work on this project.

## CHAPTER 4:

### Queerly Belonging: LGBTQ Youth and Safety in School

In this chapter we engage with questions of safety: What kind(s) of safety are LGBTQ youth asking for? What do school administrators, teachers, and communities ask for in exchange for granting LGBTQ youth safety? Is safety enough? This chapter will discuss our analysis of the Queer Q Sorts and triangulate the discourses that our snowball sample of students find in their schools with discussions from the research meetings with the youth researchers. I will show how the research team selected questions about safety to be included in the Queer Q Sorts from the document research we conducted of newspaper articles and research reports about LGBTQ youth and schools. I will also describe how we read the sorts to visualize students' sense of their school's climate about issues of sexuality and gender. Then I will present data gathered from our Queer Q Sorts that reveal our sample of students' interactions with discourses about safety and feelings of belonging in their schools. We found that students expressed concern about safety as avoiding physical and verbal violence *and* safety as getting access to reliable, comprehensive and accurate health information. In the discussion, I will argue for reframing the discourse of safety to imagine a more comprehensive sense of belonging as a means to evaluate students' experiences in their schools where they are perceived as different on the basis of sexuality or gender expression.

#### Do We Need to Talk About Safety?

In many of our research meetings the question of safety in schools organically surfaced as a topic or concern in the writing exercises, in the discussions facilitated by me

and in the side conversations that erupted over current events and popular culture.

Although the youth researchers often denied the need for concern for their physical safety – at least, not more than any other student in their schools – they raised the issue of verbal slights and outright attacks that they might experience on a daily, weekly or random basis. These were not always framed as safety issues, but the emotional impact of the verbal harassment was palpable in these conversations, and the youth researchers often reported that they had sought intervention on the part of a teacher, administrator, or other students on their behalf in response to the incident.

In our first research team meeting, three youth researchers attended. They wrote letters to one another describing the climate in the school for LGBTQ youth, as if they expected an LGBTQ student to arrive at their school as a new student soon. I asked them: “Imagine you just met someone you know identifies as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning and they will be starting at your school next week. Describe your school to the person – what’s good about it and what’s not so good – especially from the point of view of sexuality and gender expression. What does the person need to know about your school?”

The youth researchers letters are excerpted below. In them, they describe for an imaginary new student the school’s climate as it relates to gender expression and sexuality. In these descriptions, in the first meeting, the discourse of safety already emerges in the youth researchers’ descriptions of their school. Although they feel safe in their schools themselves, they understand that it may not be a safe environment, physically or emotionally, for another student, depending on how resilient that student is in the face of subtle verbal jeers or outright verbal attacks, how willing the new student is

to fight to protect his or her image, and how able the new student is to overlook the ignorance that other students present.

Ali assured a new student coming to his school,

As far as the faculty in my school, overall the teachers are very dedicated, always helpful, and willing to help. With all the positive things being said about [it], there is also those who are ignorant and express their utmost dislike towards LGBTQ individuals. There will always be a student or a staff member who will make a disparaging remark. It's up to you not to let it get to you. Overall, I have to say, [my school] is a very accepting, warm, friendly environment to be in.

Ali took it upon himself to “not let it get to” him, to feel proud of himself and confident in the desires he feels and the pleasures he enjoys. He was proud to claim a gay identity in school, even if he received “disparaging remarks” about it, and organized to start a student club to provide support to other LGBTQ students and to provide leadership and activism in the school to educate other students about sexuality and gender expression. This type of club is necessary, according to Ali, in order to provide the support network LGBTQ students need, and to leverage pressure on teachers and administrators so that they will intervene to keep a random disparaging comment from becoming everyday harassment or violence against LGBTQ students.

Mikey is more critical about his school.

First of all, as open-minded as it seems to be in the catalog, there are very few teachers who will actually help you if it's something regarding sexuality where you're being harassed. These teachers are Miss English, Mr. Guidance Counselor, and Miss Principle Principal. They've got your back, if anything. Let's hope it doesn't get to that point. But the students aren't exactly homo-friendly, either. They'll pretend to be OK with it, only to turn around to talk smack. Your peers are the most closed-minded, ignorant, hypocritical people you can find. Not all of them, as of course I'm not, and K, and C, and E, and L are also very cool people. You can confide in them. Just stick by my side and you will soon learn the ways, young gay grasshopper.

In terms of numbers and actual support, Mikey and Ali's situations are very

similar. In each school, there are a few teachers who can be counted on to help if “it’s something regarding sexuality where you’re being harassed.” Mikey strategically points out exactly who those teachers and administrators are, and also cautions against naively believing that any or every teacher or principal will come to a student’s aid in cases of harassment. He also is critical of the students, who pretend to like him to his face, but then speak negatively about his sexuality and gender expression behind his back. Mikey trusts a small group of people in his school, which includes students, teachers and an administrator, but he understands that this small group can not insulate him from the indifference and outright hostility he sometimes feels from the rest of the school community.

Sankofa’s letter about her school is more positive, and she is generous in her descriptions of her peers’ attitudes.

[The school] is a pretty close-knit community, and almost all the students are open-minded. You’ll run into a lot of bisexual and curious females, but don’t let them distract you from your school work. If you ever have a problem, you can go to almost any of the English teachers, especially Miss [W]. [The school] is a small school and because of this, everyone knows everything. So, when you first arrive, you will hear students say, “Did you see that new kid? I think he’s gay” or “The new girl, she looks like a boy” but they don’t mean anything by it. Like I said, this is a small school, so students and even teachers will talk until they get used to you. The students who are out are few in number, but they will welcome you and help you adjust to [the school].

Sankofa references a clear LGBTQ community within the school, the “students who are out.” These students recognize and affiliate with one another, even without a student club within which to organize. The LGBTQ students, especially the girls, experience a certain amount of desirability and exoticism among the rest of the girls in the school, many of whom identify themselves as questioning, curious, or even bisexual but are not part of the core group of “students who are out.” Sankofa warns a new

student not about the harassment she might experience, but about the attention she might receive as a new bisexual or lesbian girl in her school. This attention might distract her from her school work. The English teachers in particular will help students resolve disputes or problems, although both teachers and students will “talk” about a new student, trying to understand where she fits in the social circles of the school. This talking risks making a new student feel too exposed and vulnerable under the scrutiny of the community’s eyes, but Sankofa claims that the intent behind it is benevolent, with everyone watching to see how and where the new student will find a supportive group with which to associate. Although Sankofa’s school does not have a student support group she describes it as a “close-knit community,” which she says makes it hard for students to isolate or harass anyone. Everyone is welcome in and takes part in the school community.

In each of these schools there is a network of some kind for queer youth that helps them to find a community of friends, and which keeps them from feeling isolated in their school. In each of these settings, the network works differently. As we discussed what the youth researchers had written about their schools, we concluded that at Ali’s school, the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Curious Forum works to provide an institutionally sanctioned space for the students, a place they can name and mark out as safe, with official mentors, advertisements in the school newspaper, posters on the wall, and a hierarchy of command to follow in cases of bias incidents. Although the other youth researchers did not agree that their schools needed similar spaces, Ali reasserted later, “I think even though there isn’t a need, I think as long as you have a gay-straight alliance and students know that there is a club, it makes a difference. Just knowing that

there is something out there. Even though if you have five people show up to your daily meetings. As long as there is something, you know it makes it a whole lot different...”

He maintained the value of making a club official to create the political support for stopping harassment and violence, as well as for creating spaces where queer and gender non-conforming can be performed and spoken freely.

In Mikey’s school, the boundaries of the safe group are much less solid. There are a few students who will stand with you in the halls, a few teachers who will respond if you complain, but no official spaces that are marked off as safe spaces and, as Mikey puts it later in the conversation, “It depends on when you get there...It’s a day to day thing”. Some days Mikey’s school feels pretty welcoming to non-heterosexual and gender non-conforming folks, and some days it feels very hostile and dangerous. Mikey wishes for the support of an official structure, such as a gay-straight alliance, and tried to start one the previous year with an English teacher, but attendance was very low. Mikey’s feels a GSA will never be supported in his school by the students, because the power of heterosexism is so strong that students will not want to cross the line to officially stand with the out gay students. The political position of supporting LGBTQ youth in the school is precarious, and spaces for queer and gender non-conforming bodies can not counter the dominant heterosexism of the school.

Sankofa’s school feels safe to her at all times, and she does not worry about LGBTQ students feeling left out of anything. She thinks that there are places for everyone to fit at her school, regardless of sexuality or gender expression. There is room for her to express her opinions about homophobia in her ethnic and racial community, to talk about gender issues in the after school club for girls, and out teachers who provide

role models for the AG girls from within the African American and Caribbean community. These resources within her community make it a place where “Like, everyone intermingles with each other, so it's not really that serious.” However, she admits that sometimes LGBTQ students need to be prepared to fight to defend themselves, as students do in Ali’s and Mikey’s schools. She tells a story about her cousin’s experience when she first arrived at the school as a ninth grader, “The girl was making a comment like "oh, you dyke" and my cousin's like "I don't like you. It's not every female that I look at that I like." And they got into a fight, and my cousin beat her up.” As both Mikey and Ali asserted, LGBTQ students still sometimes face situations in schools in which they must verbally and physically defend themselves.

From these starting positions, of various experiences at school and also various beliefs about how a school community should welcome LGBTQ students, we began gathering evidence of official beliefs and practices related to LGBTQ youth and schools through primary document analysis. In the research meetings, we broke into groups of two or three and read newspaper articles about the introduction of the “Children of the Rainbow” curriculum in 1992-1993 and the change in status of Harvey Milk High School in 2003 from a site for alternative education to a regular transfer school within the New York City Department of Education, in addition to reports about abstinence-only sex education and LGBTQ youth harassment in schools. The youth researchers were shocked to find statements such as “In such activity body openings are used in way for which they were not designed” in sex education materials referring to anal sex (Siegel, Sherwin, Samach, VonGutfeld, & Harris, 2007) and a description of the “Children of the

Rainbow” curriculum that described it as “dangerously misleading lesbian/homosexual propaganda” when its critics found three passages that offended them (Myers, 1992).

In several of the documents, the homosexual became “monstrous,” (Foucault & Miskowiec, 1986) a threat to the children of New York City, and created an intense battle in the local media about what can be spoken in schools, whose bodies deserve an education or even physical safety in schools, and about what it is appropriate to teach children about sex and at what age. The term “appropriate” can censure for many reasons, without specifying exactly what the speaker disapproves of in the content of the curriculum. For example, *The New York Times* quotes a professor of early childhood education stating, “It is inappropriate for 6-year-old children to impose on them material about lives they are not experiencing,” referring to curriculum content that asks teachers to introduce the concept of families with two same-gender parents through children’s books (Barbanel, 1992). This expert might be uncomfortable with the content of the curriculum because psychological development models that say that children that age do not have the abstract thinking skills yet to understand concepts that are beyond their experiences, for example, but she might also be referring to morality codes that condemn people who engage in homosexual behavior, or myths that fear that children hearing about any sexuality, including homosexuality, will be so curious about it they will have to try it, regardless of the moral codes they have been brought up with (Real Reason, 2008). This kind of censure demands agreement without giving reasons for the stance it takes, subtly shaming speakers who might contest concrete arguments but who find no stance from which to counter an assertion about “appropriateness.”

In a similar use of “appropriate,” on March 31, 2009 a student was sent home for wearing inappropriate clothing to a Florida school. The paper reported,

Marion County Schools spokesman Kevin Christian said school administrators are permitted to call a student out on his dress if they feel his clothing is “inappropriate,” meaning it “disrupts the school process.” In the Marion County Code of Student Conduct, the handbook overseen by a committee of parents, principals and a rotating School Board member, it's plainly stated students must dress “in keeping with their gender.” (Lee, 2009)

For educators in this case anything that would disrupt the school process can be removed from the school, even though the clothes this student wore would have been seen as appropriate if his gender were understood to be female. We discovered that too often the term “appropriate” is used to cover heteronormativity, based on a set of rules that is so deeply held it is hard for the person to even articulate.

The Research Team also analyzed primary documents such as the HIV/AIDS education curriculum (New York City Department of Education, 2005), as well as reports and newspaper articles critical of sex education under Title XX (Fine & McClelland, 2006; Perrin & DeJoy, 2003; Planned Parenthood, 2007; Sen & Fellner, 2005; Siegel et al., 2007). Although sex education was not the focus of our inquiry, it became apparent during the research meetings and newspaper article analysis that LGBTQ people and homosexuality almost never enter a classroom discussion, unless the discussion is a sex education lesson, or as a distraction tactic of a student meant to make the class laugh, humiliate a student, or unnerve the teacher, amplifying the lack of safety by maintaining the heterosexist beliefs that queerness is always about sex, so needs to be relegated to separate spaces. Even in “sex ed” lessons, the LGBTQ people most often mentioned

were men who have sex with men and spread HIV/AIDS<sup>16</sup>. The stigmatized category “men who have sex with men,” the increases of HIV and AIDS cases in young, urban populations and the lack of information in school about sex, sexuality, gender identity, relationships or partner or domestic violence, left young people in the research group feeling overwhelmed about addressing attitudes about sexuality and gender in schools. Attempts had been made in schools to address questions of safety, but no discussion opened the possibility of disrupting heteronormativity or binary gender roles and expressions, and some members of the research team felt that it was not necessary to push their fellow students and teachers (and other adults in their lives) out of their comfort zones about sexuality and gender in schools, as long as students’ physical safety could be assured. How much can and should we ask for became an open question in our research meetings.

A distinction among the discourses about safety that I did not anticipate in designing my research questions differentiated between safety as the physical or emotional safety of avoiding harassment and violence and physical and sexual safety of knowing how to be sexually healthy. As a consequence of the poor sex education youth have received in NYC high schools, the youth researchers repeatedly pointed out that many New York City teens do not know how to protect themselves by engaging safely in sex, by which they mean having reliable knowledge about the possible dangers, including diseases and violence, and how to navigate possible illnesses and risks (Kramer Bussel,

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<sup>16</sup> New York City Department of Health issued a report showing rates of HIV infection decreasing city-wide except among young men and women ages 13-29 (*HIV Epidemiology & Field Services Semiannual Report*, 2008). These age groups (13-19 and 20-29) of young urban men of color have sometimes been categorized in the media as men on “the down low,” a phenomenon attributed to African-American and Latino men who have girlfriends or wives, do not identify as gay or bisexual, and have sex with men (Chan, 2008; Denizet-Lewis, 2003).

2005). They may engage in unsafe sex, become victims of sexual violence, or find they have no reliable adult supporters from whom to get guidance as they explore their sexuality and gender expression, because they receive no education about sexuality and gender, or because the information they receive seems unreliable and irrelevant.

ProjectDISH researchers, a Youth Participatory Action Research group working in New York City, conducted youth focus groups that reiterated the need for more and better sex education, and asked for authoritative, meaningful information about sexuality, gender (broadly – including gender roles in society, gender expectations and gender expressions) and relationships (Ruglis, 2009). This conversation emerged several times during the research meetings – for example, when the youth researchers showed me sexuality and gender expression information they seek on the Internet, when discussing the lessons one youth researcher received as training to be a peer health educator, when confronting the misunderstandings peers approached youth researchers about – until we agreed that a discussion of safety must include the concept of sexual health knowledge.

We formed our list of statements and behaviors that represent sexuality and gender discourses by extracting sentences and ideas from the print sources that seemed to represent an idea that we have encountered about sexuality, gender expression, or the intersection of those ideas with education. A full list of the statements we compiled can be found in Appendix C. We categorized the statements by what kind of a claim they made about sexuality and gender, using Foucault's schema which identifies discourses of sexuality and gender in fields of knowledge: psychological knowledge, medical knowledge and moral knowledge. Table 4.1 gives an example of the way these categorizations were used by the research team to analyze the meanings of various

statements and behaviors we found that address sexuality, gender and schools. These categorizations helped the youth researchers and I understand the ways that various discourses attempt to regulate bodies in various ways – through references to physical health, through references to mental health, through references to morality, and through references to pedagogical expediency. I will explain further how we demarcated these categories below. We then marked which of these statements pertain to issues of safety, and which would be considered positive statements – or those that do not stigmatize sexuality and gender expression – and negative statements. The list of statements that include safety discourses appears in Table 4.1 below.

Table 4.1: Safety Discourses

Statements	Field of Knowledge	Positive/Negative
Schools should be changed to protect LGBTQ students from bullying.	Psychological	Positive
Segregating LGBTQ students from other students creates intolerance among both gay and straight people.	Psychological	Positive
GSAs or other clubs for LGBTQ students make school safer for all students.	Psychological	Positive
Teachers are not reliable supporters of LGBTQ youth.	Psychological	Negative
LGBTQ youth are harassed or beat up in schools.	Psychological	Negative
LGBTQ students are discriminated against no matter what.	Psychological	Negative
Bullying and homophobia exist in just about every high school.	Psychological	Negative
It's much harder to be trans than to be gay, lesbian or bisexual.	Psychological	Negative
LGBTQ students face hatred.	Psychological	Negative
LGBTQ students will face discrimination.	Psychological	Negative
LGBTQ people have a harder life.	Psychological	Negative
Gym is an unsafe place at school.	Psychological	Negative
Public high schools can be unfriendly and scary, especially for LGBTQ students.	Psychological	Negative
LGBTQ students need separate high schools so they won't get beat up or harassed.	Psychological	Positive
Students should not be separated on the basis of race, gender or sexual orientation.	Psychological	Positive
LGBTQ people are visible by how they look.	Medical	Negative
LGBTQ people should be viewed as real people, to be respected and appreciated.	Psychological	Positive
The English teacher's classroom is the safe place at school.	Psychological	Positive
For schools to be accepting of LGBTQ youth they should teach about LGBTQ people and issues in all subjects.	Psychological	Positive
Teachers give support for LGBTQ students.	Psychological	Positive
Most LGBTQ students attend school with no problems.	Psychological	Positive

Table 4.1: Safety Discourses (cont.)

Schools should allow gay couples to go to dances and the prom	Psychological	Positive
Teaching about homosexuality is dangerously misleading because it is an unacceptable lifestyle.	Moral	Negative
Not all LGBTQ people are the same.	Psychological	Positive
There is more than one way to get HIV/AIDS.	Medical	Positive
High school students should get information about sexual health.	Medical	Positive
It should be mandatory for junior high and high school students to have an HIV/AIDS curriculum.	Medical	Positive
New York City teens are at a higher risk of HIV/AIDS than other teens.	Medical	Negative
Homosexuality is an inappropriate topic for high school classrooms.	Psychological	Negative
Gay people spread AIDS	Medical	Negative
Gay sex isn't real sex, it's perversion because it uses body parts for things they were not intended for.	Medical	Negative
Homosexuals, bisexuals and drug users are most likely to get STDs/HIV/AIDS	Medical	Negative
A positive attitude toward gay people in the curriculum threatens the family and marriage.	Moral	Negative
LGBTQ people have sex all the time and are obsessed with sex.	Psychological	Negative
It is appropriate for middle and high school students to discuss society's treatment of homosexuality.	Psychological	Positive
LGBTQ students should be provided with more information about sex and health issues.	Medical	Positive
Sex and sexuality is always going to be a sensitive topic for children and teens.	Psychological	Negative

Statements labeled “psychological” referenced discourses that concern the mental health of a young person, who would feel like she is accepted, that she fits in, that she or her family is “normal.” Statements labeled “medical” referenced discourses that pertain to the classification of bodies that Foucault described (1973a) which make physiological characteristics of the body visible and understandable as belonging to the range of

healthy or unhealthy. Statements labeled “moral” referenced classification that seemed to stem from religious beliefs. Although each of these statements could have several meanings, and in the research meetings we disentangled the many classifications that each statements could represent, for the purposes of this table I have limited it to the most prominent meaning the youth researchers identified. The classifications of the statements as negative or positive came from the research team’s subjective decisions about the impact the statement would have on our feelings of belongingness in the school community. The 37 statements above which overtly reference safety discourses comprise nearly half of the total statements the research team compiled and included in the Queer Q Sort. Safety comprised a huge amount of the discourse about sexuality and gender expression in schools.

Students feel unsafe in schools when discourses that label them unhealthy, immoral, crazy or inappropriate dominate the discursive environment. In the analysis below, I show that in schools where a majority of students believe negative statements, LGBTQ students feel less belonging and feel the impact of a lack safety identified in the above statements by the research team. The negative statements above define LGBTQ bodies as dangerous, unwelcome, diseased and different in ways that make them expendable as members of the community (Butler, 2004; Pascoe, 2007). Teachers and administrators can address these discursive practices as a way to disrupt student harassment and violence.

#### Analyzing the Queer Q Sorts

The most important differences among students that emerged from the Queer Q Sorts (see Chapter 2 for explanation of the method) allowed the research team to see how

a student felt he or she belonged in the school community, and how that belonging correlated with dominant discourses about sexuality and gender in the school and the student's own identity and beliefs. We wondered, for example, if in schools where LGBTQ students felt less belongingness, the students, teachers and administration would espouse negative discourses about sexuality and gender identity which would make a student feel unwelcome. Also, would girls, lesbian or bisexual, find it easier to belong in a school community than gay or bisexual boys because discourses would be directed more negatively at boys? And would questioning or curious students exhibit the same beliefs as students who had claimed identities such as lesbian, gay and bisexual?

### *School Climate*

Striking differences appear in the discursive environment that students find in schools. Students who feel a stronger sense of belonging in their schools, based on the distribution of responses in the Queer Q Sort and verbal confirmation upon completion of the sort, all report that at least half the people in their schools, including students, teachers and administrators, believe "LGBTQ people should be viewed as real people, to be respected and appreciated." This contrasts sharply with students who feel less or no belonging in their school, who all claim that half or more people in their school believe "Homosexuality is wrong," "LGBTQ youth shouldn't touch or kiss in school," "Gay people spread AIDS," "Gay sex isn't real sex, it's perversion because it uses body parts for things they were not intended for," and "Gay boys are disgusting." The overlap of negative discourses in schools where students feel less belonging gave the research team concrete ideas about which beliefs persist and cause LGBTQ youth to feel unwelcome or harassed in schools. By contrast, in the schools where students felt a strong sense of

belonging, the overlap in the content of the discourses of sexuality and gender was much less, but negative discourses were also less present.

Table 4.2 Prevalent Discourses by Belongingness

High Belongingness	Low Belongingness
All gay boys are feminine	Segregating LGBTQ students from other students creates intolerance among both gay and straight people
Bisexual girls are sexy	Families reject LGBTQ children
LGBTQ people should be viewed as real people, to be respected and appreciated	Homosexuality is wrong
LGBTQ students should be provided with more information about sex and health issues	If you have sex with someone of the same sex/gender, you must be gay
Bisexuals have more options for romance	LGBTQ youth shouldn't touch or kiss in school
Bullying and homophobia exist in just about every high school	Gay people spread AIDS
	Gay sex isn't real sex, it's perversion because it uses body parts for things they were not intended for
	Bisexuals will go out with anyone
	Gay boys are disgusting
	LGBTQ people have sex all the time and are obsessed with sex
	All gay boys are feminine

The shaded boxes in Table 4.2 represent prevalent discourses, meaning half or more of the people in the school believe, that the research team identified as specifically addressing safety issues. These discourses represent ideas that address specific material conditions of LGBTQ youth bodies in their proximity to peers who may verbally or physically attack them, or address stereotypes of LGBTQ sexuality that describe it as perverted, unnatural and diseased. In this table we see that the number of negative and demeaning ideas about LGBTQ youth and non-normative gender in schools where

students feel low belongingness is double the negative discourses that are prevalent in schools where students feel high belongingness.

However, other discourses are also prevalent in the schools that students attend. For students with both high belongingness and low belongingness, hegemonic sexuality and gender discourses maintain that “All gay boys are feminine.” These statements describe the tenacity of masculinity by reasserting that masculine-appearing boys or men must not be gay (Pascoe, 2007). In the prevalent discourses in the schools, boys’ bodies are regulated more severely, and discourses directed at gay and gender non-conforming boys are much harsher, calling them “disgusting.” The same kinds of linking of sexuality and gender for girls were not so prevalent. Statements like “Lesbians want to be men and dress like men” and “Girls who play softball and basketball are lesbians” were not found to populate the discourses of sexuality and gender expression about girls in schools. Most student sorters also showed confusion and lack of familiarity about trans students, claiming that no one in their schools identified as trans. Gender non-conformity for boys *always* reads among peers in these high schools as homosexuality. LGBTQ youth sorters resist these discourses labeling gay boys disgusting and realize that their gender expressions do not always correlate with sexuality, but feel that this recognition has not permeated their peers’ understandings. LGBTQ students, in fact, resist many of the hegemonic discourses about sexuality and gender found in high schools, and push for more space for their bodies and expressions among peers and from teachers and administration.

Foucault describes these classification systems around gender and sexuality as functioning to order and regulate bodies in ways that makes them governable (Foucault,

1977). In schools these systems work to make bodies behave in expected ways – boys will be boys and will be allowed to act in ways that preserve a hegemonic gender hierarchy, and girls will also act in ways that maintain the gender and sexual relations required by heteronormativity. In these systems, sexuality remains invisible and unproblematic as long as it proceeds toward teen heterosexual dating, heterosexual marriage and child-bearing at the acceptable ages. When bodies engage in precocious sexuality (Walkerdine, 1997), non-heterosexual sexual behaviors (Foucault, 1978), and gender transgressing behaviors (Butler, 1990), they become visible and problematic for institutions charged with teaching and regulating these categories.

### *Student Sexual and Gendered Subjectivity*

Because our Queer Q Sorts asked LGBTQ high school students about the discourses of sexuality and gender in their schools on two axes, we have data about students' own beliefs about these knowledge regimes about sexuality and gender as well as their beliefs about the climate in their schools. We again use our schema that identifies discourses on safety in two categories to understand students' responses. Those two categories are: safety as a right to be in school without physical or verbal violence and safety as the right to accurate and reliable information about health and sex.

*Safety as avoiding physical and verbal violence.* Although the sample of students who completed sorts is too small to divide into subcategories for analysis, looking across the population gives an idea of how young people become sexual and gendered subjects within the discourses of sexuality and gender in schools. Themes in student responses emerged across the sorts. Student sorters generally agree that schools need to be changed to protect LGBTQ students from bullying and harassment. Even if they are not

experiencing harassment themselves, they understand that other students are harassed in schools, sometimes physically, and think that schools need to be held responsible for protecting them. However, student sorters reject the idea that LGBTQ youth should be segregated from other teens. No one believes that LGBTQ students need separate high schools so they won't get beat up or harassed.

Most student sorters agreed that part of the solution to making schools more accepting of LGBTQ youth should include teaching about LGBTQ people and issues in all subjects. When probed further about this question, student sorters often attributed their peers' and teachers' negative reception of LGBTQ youth to ignorance. They hoped that discrediting some of the negative stereotypes about homosexuality and LGBTQ people would allow their peers and teachers to see them as members of the community of school, deserving of the same opportunities, educational and social, that other members of the community enjoyed. As one youth researcher summarized, "I mean, [it] would inform the whole student body about what being gay really means, what homophobia is, you know what... Stuff like that. I think people would be better-informed if there were something like that." Student sorters hoped that more information would counter the negative ideas, moral, psychological and medical, that their peers and teachers have about homosexuality and create acceptance for LGBTQ youth to be out and visible in schools.

In adding queer lives to the curriculum, teachers and administrators should use the opportunity to question the binary categories of sexuality and gender. Students believe that "not all LGBTQ people are the same" and that these identities historically and geographically have differed. They would like peers to understand that same-gender sexual behavior happens and has happened in many contexts, and that it has been

tolerated, accepted, necessary or disapproved of in different moments in different places. They would like to challenge the idea that queer lives are new, or faddish, or unnatural by showing that the dominance of heteronormativity is recent and unstable, and that there are many options for sexuality and gender expression available.

Students overwhelmingly did not think that gay-straight alliances were necessary to accomplish greater acceptance in schools for LGBTQ youth. Some worried that a GSA would make students who did not want to identify as LGBTQ too visible and cause other students to interrogate their sexuality, or allow disapproving teachers to identify students for harassment they may have suspected of being LGBTQ. They also felt that sexuality and gender expression might not be the identity that a student thinks of as primary, and a GSA might not serve students with complex identities. Girls, too, more often felt they had a robust and exciting social life as a part of a strong group of lesbians in a school, and did not feel a need for a social support group. Interestingly, of the small number of students who agreed that GSAs make schools safer, all but one were gay or bisexual boys. It seems possible from this data and the findings from my pilot research conducted in 2006, that boys feel more isolated and alone in schools, where they are the only boy who claims a non-heterosexual identity or dares to exhibit a non-normative gender expression. As seen above, the social penalties for boys' transgression of sexuality or gender boundaries are stronger than they are for girls in New York City high schools, and these limitations may create a greater need among boys for community and support in schools.

*Safety as getting information about health.* One way youth resist official discourses that frame them as risk-taking or hormone-driven is to ask for more and better

health and sex education (Irvine, 2002). Youth researchers seek health and sex information online, but admit that they sometimes have difficulty distinguishing reliable information from unreliable, and lies from truth. They feel uneducated and confronted by many conflicting truths about sexual health, identities and gender expression. As an example, high school age youth are taught in sex education, by national mandates, that it is best to wait until marriage to engage in sexual intercourse (Perrin & DeJoy, 2003). At the same time, reports document that 82% of adolescents will have engaged in sexual intercourse by age 20, an age at which very few of them will be married (Haffner, 1995). Young people recognize the hypocrisy in this policy and the ways that teachers and administrators must offer only partial information and politically distorted truths in order to comply with a policy that imposes Christian moral codes.

LGBTQ students completing the Queer Q Sorts thought that high school students should get information about sexual health, it should be mandatory for junior high and high school students to have an HIV/AIDS curriculum, and LGBTQ students should be provided with more information about sex and health issues. More specifically, students believe that sex education should make clear that AIDS can be contracted by many populations and spread through heterosexual sex, as well as homosexual sex. They also agreed that young children could learn about families with same-gender parents and middle and high school students should discuss political and social issues that include questions of sexuality and gender as part of their coursework.

As several students pointed out when discussing their answers, currently their school offers no sex education, or offers only a one-day presentation on how to wear a condom, “the old lady with the banana and a condom” as one youth researcher recalled.

Students demand sex education, as argued before, because they think schools are the places where they should get educated about how to make good decisions in life, and be introduced to the knowledge they will need to engage with in order to live a good life. By refusing to educate them about sexuality and gender issues, schools are leaving them ignorant, and are just as responsible as when they allow racial or economic segments of students to receive an inferior education. Students who get a better education also get better sex education (Fields, 2008). New York City students need and are asking for better sex education too.

These results are complex and sometimes contradictory. LGBTQ students want their peers to get more information about sexuality and non-heterosexual and gender transgressing behaviors and identities. At the same time, they worry that social and political organizing of LGBTQ students in the school might bring too much attention to those students who fit uneasily within gender or sexuality norms, but do not wish to identify as non-heterosexual or non-normatively gendered. By increasing the information about LGBTQ people, youth hope that the power/knowledge balance will shift their direction, leaving out of favor those who disparage non-heterosexual and gender transgressing identities as abnormal and sick in the public consciousness and making those attitudes untenable. At the same time, an increase in information about non-heterosexual and gender transgressing bodies may make these bodies more visible, as happened in the early part of the twentieth century when fictional lesbians made love and sex between women visible and conceivable for a much wider audience. It is unknowable which identities would become reified and further regulated through increasing

knowledge about sexuality and gender in educational content, and how that would impact bodies and pleasures of young people in schools.

Our data tells us that the dominant discourses in schools differ, and these differences can create different circumstances of belongingness in which LGBTQ youth are creating their sexual and gendered selves. Additionally, some youth reach outside of their school network for support in other locations – after school programs, family, and friends outside of school and find a sense of belonging there that can compensate for difficulty in school. One thing that stands out as very significant, however, no matter what the student’s school situation, is recognition. LGBTQ youth can find safety and belonging in their school if they can get recognition from an adult in the school and a few of their peers. Having their chosen sexual and gendered self welcomed into the school in an affirming way, even if only by a few people, appears to make a big difference for youth. In this way, students’ sexual and gendered selves are able to “be,” to exist in schools, and this is what is necessary for LGBTQ youth to be served by these institutions (Butler, 2004).

### Reframing Safety as Belongingness

As a research team we knew that within schools homosexuality has primarily been studied as an issue of harassment and safety. Knowing the statistics and having read the opinions and policies about LGBTQ youth in schools, we needed to resist further solidifying the taken-for-granted answers about young people, sexuality and gender and listen to the unexpected responses. We needed to be able to see both how young people resisted *and* conformed to official and peer discourses about sexuality.

Although school boards and administrations have embraced gay-straight alliances

(GSAs) as the answer to the problems of harassment and homophobia, students responding to our sort, for the most part, did not advocate for a GSA as the way to change their school because they worried it would not be an effective political organization for changing the school climate or because they feared students would avoid affiliating with a club connected with LGBTQ youth to avoid being outed or suspected of queerness. Research in favor of GSAs claims that through advocacy work in schools among teachers and students, straight and LGBTQ youth members of gay-straight alliances have worked to transform attitudes about sexuality and gender among the wider school community (Kosciw et al., 2008; Mayo, 2004). This work has been shown to make schools physically safer environments for all students, regardless of their gender identity or sexuality, because it reduces sexual harassment and gender-based slurs heard in the school. Specifically, the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) has shown that GSAs in schools correlated with less harassment of or assaults on students perceived to be LGBTQ. The students in these schools felt safer, and therefore missed less school and felt a greater sense of belonging in their school (Kosciw et al., 2008). In another example, Szalacha (2004) and Sadowski (2001) separately have reported positive results of Massachusetts Safe Schools Program, which provides in-service training to teachers in Massachusetts' public schools and statewide support for schools starting GSAs. Any school can request the trainings, which are suggested but not mandated by the state. Students in these schools report less harassment and feel more confident about getting support from teachers. Teacher support is imperative for creating a climate where students expect that their sexuality or gender expression will not make them vulnerable to physical and emotional violence (Kosciw et al., 2008; Szalacha, 2004).

This advocacy for student groups and teacher training has advanced simultaneously with legal decisions and some state policy decisions to protect students on the basis of sexuality and gender expression. Currently there are 11 states that protect students on the basis of sexual orientation (California, Connecticut, Iowa, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New Jersey, Vermont, Washington, Wisconsin) and, of those, seven protect students on the basis of gender expression (California, Iowa, Maine, Maryland, Minnesota, New Jersey, Vermont<sup>17</sup>). Two of these states have been the sites of important legal decisions in which school districts have been held accountable for not protecting a gay and gender non-conforming student at their school ("L.W. v. Toms River Regional Schools, Board of Education," 2007; "Nabozny v. Podlesny," 1996). These policy and legal acts have been very important for moving the discussion from one of special accommodations for problem students who refuse to conform, to one of equal rights to clubs and to school spaces for all students. Still, LGBTQ students and their allies encourage us to look more closely at the attitudes and behaviors of all students when seeking to increase acceptance and integration of non-heterosexual and gender non-conforming youth.

#### *What's Wrong With Safety?*

The discourse of safety relies on a liberal equality for all students that claims that all students are the same and needed to be treated equally. However, many scholars in education have asked us to rethink equality as the framework for schools to address sexuality and gender expression (Epstein & Johnson, 1998; Kumashiro, 2000; Rasmussen, 2006a; Rofes, 2005). Engaging in a simple equality discourse asks only that

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<sup>17</sup> This information comes from <http://www.glsen.org/cgi-bin/iowa/all/library/record/2344.html?state=media>, Accessed March 20, 2009.

LGBTQ students be treated the same as heterosexual students, without challenging the basis of heteronormativity in the school, unsettling the hierarchy between masculinity and femininity or creating spaces where other identities can emerge. That is why schools can claim tolerance for LGBTQ youth and still demand that trans students conform to binary gender, in the name of creating a safer environment for the trans student and the other students (Aleman, 2004). GSAs present the opportunity for students to be excluded while being given equal space, by isolating the expressions of gender non-conformity and non-heterosexuality to one classroom or to after-school hours (Burrington, 1998; Rasmussen, 2006a). GSAs can also become spaces that exclude students and where students might not find support for their expression of sexuality and gender, or their concerns about race, class or other identities they claim (Birden, 2005; McCready, 2004; Rasmussen, 2006a). And, as becomes clear in looking at the sort data and listening to transcripts, bisexuals and trans students may only fit uneasily within a group organized around lesbian and gay sexuality issues, and group leaders, both students and teachers, are often unprepared to deconstruct the divisive stereotypes and prejudices students under the banner of LGBTQ may have about one another (McCready, 2004).

An example of how equality offers weak protections for LGBTQ students and others suffering harassment in schools, under No Child Left Behind legislation, one way of ensuring equality is to offer students a “safety transfer” (Rasmussen, 2006a). School administrators or teachers who decide that LGBTQ students are a “disruption” to the order or discipline of the school, or who decide that queer students’ behavior is “inappropriate” or puts them in danger, may choose to remove the student to a safer

environment. The New York City Department of Education website advises parents and students,

A safety transfer removes a child from an unsafe situation. Parents cannot select a specific school for placement. Placement is made where a seat is available. The parent and student must set up a meeting with a Principal's designee (from the sending school) to apply for a safety transfer ("DOE Fact Finder: School Transfer Request," 2009)

LGBTQ students are then quietly excluded from their regular schools in the name of their “protection.” As long as students are provided with a “safe” alternative within the school district, the individual administrators, teachers and students who allow harassment and violence against LGBTQ students to occur can continue without addressing the problem within their school. The problem remains in the student’s body, to be removed from the premises, and does not have to be addressed within the attitudes of the school’s population.

Reexamining sexuality and gender belonging requires deconstructing many of the taken-for-granted, common-sense approaches to subject matter and content in school coursework and policies, in order to examine why we value certain knowledge, experiences and approaches more than others (Kumashiro, 2000, 2001). Because equality does not differentiate between the power of hegemonic discourses and resisting discourses, claims made by oppressed groups looking for access and visibility can be appropriated for use by those seeking to maintain dominance. The safety discourse has begun to be used by straight, Christian students, who claim they need to be safe from the influence of LGBTQ students or immoral teachings in their schools (Kumashiro, 2008). While these approaches have not gained legal standing yet in the courts, this approach has been taken as far as the United States District Court in Kentucky by a group of

parents ("Morrison v. Board of Education of Boyd County, Kentucky," 2006). Simple safety is not enough to ask for. We must ask for more.

### *How Belonging Offers New Freedoms for Students*

For LGBTQ youth, school is often assumed and shown to present experiences of significant adversity or trauma. Each youth researcher had stories that demonstrated ways they had overcome adversity to express their sexuality and gender in the ways they choose. The research that we read and coded about LGBTQ youth, including a pilot study that I conducted in 2006, suggests that even in schools where tolerance is considered to be relatively high by the teachers and the non-queer students, some students continue to use language such as “fag” and “that’s so gay,” demand normative gender behavior from their classmates, assume that heterosexuality and normative gender are more normal and right, and speak of queerness and gender variance as deviance and pathology (GLSEN & Harris Interactive, 2005; Human Rights Watch, 2001; Linville, 2008).

Expecting the resilience of individual students to resolve the problems of harassment, violence, dropout and educational failure of LGBTQ students avoids the imperative to interrogate school personnel and school structures on the ways they continue to allow these results and places the burden on students to be the agents of change. Debold, Brown, Weseen and Brookins (1999) emphasize that “the implication and endpoint of such individually based conceptualization and measurement become the search for a ‘cure’ to apply to children suffering from the extreme stress generated by a profound lack of resources rather than for ways of addressing those inequities more directly.” Hearing name-calling, being asked to defend one’s dress or relationship, being

expected to keep silent about one's desires or relationships, or experiencing physical threats causes LGBTQ students unnecessary stress and denies them resources other students in school profit from. An important resource students may find in schools is community – with other students and with adults who become significant supports in their lives. Students who mistrust their teachers and peers, as Mikey does in his description of his peers above, in order to protect themselves from harassing or derisive comments, lack the opportunity to find a community in which they thrive socially and academically.

A school community that promotes belonging by LGBTQ student members creates opportunities for students to bring their full selves to school and find recognition. In the case of Sankofa's school, she finds belonging among her peers and teachers because she is recognized as an aggressive lesbian Caribbean Black girl who dresses handsomely in masculine clothes, who confronts racism, sexism and homophobia, and thinks deeply about her school assignments and political issues. She is not limited to her sexuality or gender identities, but these are important elements in her understanding of herself, and are accepted and appreciated by members of the school community, both peers and teachers. She experiences tolerance, but not warm acceptance for her sexuality and gender identities at home, and sometimes experiences harassment or violence on the street for appearing as an aggressive lesbian. In school she finds recognition for the many intersections of identity where she exists.

Sankofa's school demonstrates important ways a school can invite LGBTQ youth to be legitimate members of the community. Teachers who know her and her interests invite her to speak to other students as a leader. Her peers suggest she should run for

homecoming queen, or king, to challenge the assumptions about those categories, and because they think she would win. She knows teachers in the school with whom she can discuss racism among lesbians, sexism and homophobia in Black and Caribbean communities, and the difficulties of living at the intersection of those identities. She feels confident that if she experiences racism, sexism or homophobia in her school, a forum to discuss the problem can be created and the discussion will be taken seriously by adults and students. A school that fosters belonging allows for differences within community and encourages students to be their multiple identities. It doesn't ask them to be non-heterosexual to the exclusion of all other identities.

As a research team, we understood our data through the concepts of resistance, resilience, and recognition. These youth researchers have developed ways to express the gender and sexual subjectivities that they desire to present *and* to move within school spaces mostly without encountering danger. They have found those allies, both adult and peer, who will nurture their choices and recognize the self that the LGBTQ youth present to the world, acknowledging the sexuality and gender choices and responding positively. They have mapped the territories they must traverse and found safe passage for themselves, without denying themselves some of the delicious risks of pursuing crushes and inevitable heartbreaks. They have resisted internalizing messages that tell them they are ugly, sick, sinful, unwelcome and wrong.

### Conclusion

Like the students in the studies reported above, some students report that a GSA has improved or would improve their sense of belongingness in their school. Many of the boys who answered this way expressed an interest in meeting other boys with whom they

could discuss issues and be friends. Participating girls did not express a need for a GSA nearly as much, but also reported that they had a large social network of lesbian and bisexual girls as friends, and they did not find themselves socially isolated in schools. Girls more often claimed that their friends were a mixed group of LGBTQ and straight students, both boys and girls, while gay boys often had straight boy friends and girl friends in school. Girls found it easier to find a sense of belonging in schools than boys did, in part because there are more girls who are claiming non-heterosexual sexualities and creating a community of girls within schools who support gender transgressing and sexually experimenting girls, and because the boundaries of heterosexual masculinity appear to be more rigidly enforced by boys in schools in New York City.

The regulation of gender and sexuality works to maintain structures that allow some bodies more freedom, safety and pleasure than others. The most intense scrutiny focuses on the bodies that exist in positions with great freedoms – if those bodies step out of the already expansive boundaries they are accorded they challenge systems of classification and categorization in ways that less important or less powerful bodies do not (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1983). Our data supports this claim in our finding that girls' expressions of sexuality and gender are less regulated, as long as the foundational structure of heterosexuality and the sexual availability of girls for boys was not disrupted. Boys' disruption of sexuality and gender categories, however, almost always challenged heteronormativity in ways that made other boys uncomfortable and sometimes angry. Exposing the unnatural, unstable and performative nature of masculinity destabilized structures that maintain boys' power and freedom, and threatened to transgress hierarchies that allow for unquestioned privileges. LGBTQ youth work at these junctures

with their bodies, their actions and their words, reminding others that their identities are also contingent, historical and produced.

Almost all the students agreed that segregating students based on sexuality, race or gender creates misunderstandings and intolerance. They advocated for schools' role in creating social spaces where students from different backgrounds can meet and learn to work with, appreciate and accept one another. In the next chapter I talk about spaces in schools where students can encounter new ideas and advocate for political goals.

## CHAPTER 5:

### Spaces of Sexuality and Gender in Schools

In this chapter I argue that schools are public spaces for the public they serve – the students of that school. Access to public space and the public forum is necessary for diverse groups to access justice in a pluralistic society (J. Jacobs, 1961; Young, 1990). Hegemonic discourses have remained uncontested by denying certain bodies and voices access to public spaces (Katz, 2006; Spain, 1992). It is therefore important to examine not only the language and behaviors that circulate in schools about sexuality and gender, but also to visualize the ways the discourses manifest in the spaces of schools and impact the movement of bodies. I used a mapping exercise to allow the youth researchers to show one another and me the ways the discourses we had talked about appeared in their school setting. Three major themes emerged upon describing the maps for one another and discussing as a group what we saw represented: school spaces are sexualized as well as gendered, creating spaces where sexuality and gender can be spoken allows students to examine their desires and pleasures, and adults can create a public forum for justice about sexuality and gender identity.

This chapter will explore the meanings of public spaces and public forums, in particular in the ways scholars have theorized that gender, sexuality, and safety are created or regulated in public spaces and public discourses. This will frame the discussion of the spatial distribution and significance of sexuality and gender in maps that student researchers created of sexuality, gender, and gender transgressing behavior and discourses in the school buildings. The maps triangulate our findings on safety in schools

from the previous chapter, and clarify how a school can be both safe enough, and also sometimes dangerous or uncomfortable, or how a school can represent the student's best option, even when it is not ideal. In these maps we begin to see, in embodied ways, students' resistance to negative hegemonic discourses in schools, their strategic use of supports and role models, and the creative ways young people enact their desires in school spaces.

Creating maps of the school spaces in which members of the research team daily exist excited the researchers from the beginning. I introduced the idea of mapping in our first research meeting together, and all of our subsequent discussions of activities for the project included maps of the sexualized and gendered spaces in schools. I described the identity maps that students had made to describe their identity as Muslim-Americans (Fine & Sirin, 2007; Zaal, Salah, & Fine, 2007), mapping of the central square to understand the ways urban residents use public spaces (Low, 2000), and educational maps (Tuck et al., 2009). We were also inspired by work done by William Leap and Alan Hersker (1996), in which they asked gay men in Washington D.C. to map the "gay city" by showing the routes through the city that took them to important gay landmarks and community events. In a similar manner, the youth researchers were very excited to show one another where they sat, ate, made out, flirted, felt good, hid, found time to talk and felt uneasy in their schools. They also thought about their movements through the school and talked to one another about how they navigated the different spaces. Rather than draw maps at the beginning, we decided to save it till the end of the process – in this way we would work to identify and classify the discourses, then, with them in mind, the youth researchers could draw more detailed visual representations of the schools. The

maps created a more concrete representation of the discourses circulating in the schools, the locations for freedom and the locations of danger in the schools, and provided a new lens through which we could see the material impact of these discourses on the bodies of students. They also provide a lens for us to examine the effectiveness of policies and their enactment in spaces in order to provide emotional and physical safety for students.

In the public spaces of schools, some discourses of heterosexuality are designated as age-appropriate and innocent (Lesko, 1996a, 1996b, 2001), and some discourses of sexuality and gender and gender expression, often including homosexuality and trans expressions, are considered inappropriate, dangerous or off-topic, and so are censored (Epstein et al., 2000-2001). This censoring of discourse in the public space renders some bodies unspeakable, and therefore misunderstood, discriminated against and silenced in the public arena of the school community (Aleman, 2004; Epstein et al., 2000-2001). Research on LGBTQ youth has often assumed that these students cannot hear or speak their point of view in school, and so must hide who they are in order to belong to the school community, or must opt not to belong (Aleman, 2004; R. Barry, 2000; Epstein et al., 2000-2001; Jackson & Hendrix, 2003; Leck, 2000; Letts & Sears, 1999; Loutzenheiser & MacIntosh, 2004; Luschen & Bogad, 2003; Miceli, 2005; Munoz-Plaza et al., 2002). The spatial enforcement of sexuality and gender has been shown to powerfully impact the safety and social standing of women and LGBTQ persons in communities (Burrington, 1998; Crenshaw, 1994; D'Emilio, 1983; Katz, 2006). Students, too, recognize the ways the discourses that circulate in school spaces about sexuality and gender impact the safety and social standing of LGBTQ youth, gender non-conforming students, and girls.

## Public Spaces and Schools as Public Space

The value of public spaces generally presented in social theory is in providing areas in which people from different social locations can gather together and ideas can circulate (Burrington, 1998; Delaney, 2003; J. Jacobs, 1961; Katz, 2006; Spain, 1992; Young, 1990, 2000). It is often assumed that they are designed to offer free, open access to everyone, without requiring an invitation, an entrance fee, a schedule or an introduction (Young, 1990). Public space is necessary for building community, particularly in urban areas where all the inhabitants of a municipal area do not know one another and do not necessarily work in the same neighborhood where they live (Jacobs, 1961). In public spaces, it is assumed that all members of the community can access and use the space, that no groups' entrance is barred based on their group identity. Additionally, there is no required activity for using the space. For example, access is available to a park, even for people who are not playing basketball. In fact, many activities can take place simultaneously in the park.

That is not to suggest that behavior is not controlled within the public space. Certain behaviors are discouraged, others are encouraged by the arrangement and messages of the space (Conlon, 2004). The public space user is interpellated by signage, lists of rules, unspoken etiquette transmitted by other users, and the presence of many other people with expectations of what will happen in the public space. These "eyes" (Delaney, 2003; J. Jacobs, 1961) on the public space are what are supposed to make public spaces safe in large, urban areas, such as New York City.

Within public spaces, strangers may meet one another and share brief encounters of spontaneous help or friendliness which make the urban area feel less anonymous and

isolating (Delaney, 2003). Delaney calls these exchanges “contact” moments of unplanned encounters that arise from the situation presented, and they are characterized by their lack of self-interest. The parties may freely give of help, information, money, consolation or support without expecting anything in return, in fact, often without even knowing the name of the other person. In public spaces and in these contact moments, residents of a city may meet others who are not like them in terms of class, race, profession, ethnicity, religion, gender and sexuality, and have the opportunity to interact without prejudice. Although not all random encounters in cities have such beneficent consequences, they offer the possibility of pleasures (Delaney, 2003; Young, 1990). They are vital to the project of living in multicultural areas and getting along, rather than retreating into closed enclaves of “sameness,” never venturing out to meet the stranger who might change one’s trajectory or open one’s mind to new ideas (Ruddick, 1996).

Public spaces also serve as a forum for ideas. The ideal of the right of free speech guarantees the rights of citizens to hear ideas presented and to evaluate them in a public forum. Ideas that find believers or backers have the opportunity to become values, beliefs, and systems. Ideas that can be kept out of the public forum, isolated as fringe, private, or immoral, cannot receive a public hearing and remain silenced. Because these ideas cannot even be broached in public they never get a forum in which their merits can be discussed. Speakers of silenced topics must breach the rules of polite conversation, pushing forward their agenda against formidable, if unspoken, opposition (Burrington, 1998). Keeping certain ideas out of public space effectively isolates their speakers as extreme.

Spatial segregation is one of the mechanisms by which a group with greater

power can maintain its advantage over a group with less power. By controlling access to knowledge and resources through the control of space, the dominant group's ability to retain and reinforce its position is enhanced...Spatial barriers become established and then institutionalized for reasons that have little to do (manifestly) with power, but which tend to maintain prevailing advantages. (Spain, 1992, pp. 15-17)

As Spain points out, the reasons articulated for the interdictions on speaking certain topics may be framed as less about keeping certain persons out of power, and more about appropriateness, and subjects that can be spoken and acts that can be performed in public. For example, by labeling homosexuality as always referring to sexual acts, discussions of homosexuality are often framed as inappropriate for school, especially among younger children (Myers, 1992). In the case of homosexuality in schools, however, the issues may also be about keeping irresponsible and dangerous bodies out of spaces, and when pushed communities often will say that they wish to keep homosexuals away from children, in order to keep children safe from being recruited into an immoral lifestyle. "To ensure these conditions, a vocal minority that is irresponsible, unrestrained, disorderly and self-centered must bend to the will of the majority and to traditional values" (Burrington, 1998, p. 124). In the case of LGBTQ students and schools, representations of queer bodies and ideas is necessary in order for young people to speak their desires and experience various pleasures, including having their identities recognized.

Iris Marion Young advocated that "the critical activity of raising issues and deciding how institutional and social relations should be organized, crucially depends on the existence of spaces and forums to which everyone has access. In such public spaces, people encounter other people, meanings, expressions and issues which they may not understand or with which they do not identify" (Young p. 240). For Young this

constitutes the realm of politics, which must be available to all groups in order for society to work toward a form of justice that allows for differences among strangers, for example, people who live together in large urban areas. We use these ideas of public space, public forums, and politics to think about the ways students, teachers and administrators of various identities can exist together in schools and the kinds of political activism and shared knowledge that must occur in order to create institutional or educational justice for all students.

### *School as Public Space*

School is not a public space in the absolute strictest sense, but can function as a public space for its public, the students and teachers who belong to the school community. In this community forum, some interactions are prescribed, through lesson plans and curricular goals, but some interactions, both in classrooms and in the more casual spaces of the school such as the cafeteria, the halls and after school clubs, allow for more spontaneous contact. In particular, public school spaces become places where students and teachers from various backgrounds and educational expectations come together to learn to work with one another. In highly tracked schools students may be kept mostly segregated by class or race during the curricular day, but may interact between classes, during lunch, or after school (Carter, 2003; Galletta & Cross Jr., 2007). In these moments schools can fulfill the function of teaching students to live in a diverse society.

It has been suggested that schools are incubators of culture (Bourdieu, 2000), where students' sense of civic engagement and political involvement are learned (Loutzenheiser & MacIntosh, 2004; Rasmussen, 2006a; Russell, 2002). In this structure,

students learn to engage politically while they are in school (elementary, secondary and tertiary institutions), to petition for their rights, to argue their points, to understand the history and social structures of the culture and engage within them (Loutzenheiser & MacIntosh, 2004). The word citizen presents challenges for researchers working in an urban area with many immigrant students in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, but for the purposes of this discussion, I define it broadly as persons engaged in the workings of the institutions that affect their lives, responsible to others in the community they belong to and active for rights and liberties of others and self. This is a noble goal for education, and one that is not always, or even often achieved, especially for poor students and students of color. However, imagining schools as a space that *should* be working to teach these skills and entitlements to students, we asked the question, what conditions are necessary for students to feel they belong to and thus have a say in their school community? “Before we can aspire to the title ‘citizen’ we must be regarded as worthy even to try, and this means that we must be allowed simply to be, to exist as part of the public landscape upon which citizenship is enacted, to circulate in public life freely and unmolested, and to be granted the same standing or status, recognition and respect as our peers” (Burrington, 1998, p. 129). As Burrington suggests in her analysis of the public discourse around student activism to start a gay-straight alliance in a Salt Lake City high school, students in the school and LGBT adults in the city were denied access to citizenship by being denied access to public life when they were constructed as different and dangerous. “Both access to public discourse and access to public spaces create the territory within which a political geography of citizenship can be written” (p. 130). Again, if we imagine that the

role of citizen should be equally available to all students in schools, then access to public discourse and public spaces must also be available to them.

*Gay Straight Alliances as Political Organizations*

Within schools gay-straight alliances (GSAs) may provide access to the public space for students who claim the identities represented by the GSA. Mayo finds in her analysis of the impacts of GSAs on both school cultures and student subjectivities that,

...as they are working together, these students are more aware of how different identities potentially clash with one another. Additionally, as they face obstacles within the school setting, they become more aware of the political stakes in improving the school climate for others. Because these alliances require difference, they maintain their ties through an ethical curiosity, not only of what others who are different might be like, but what it might mean to be different than one is at the present. (Mayo, 2004, pp. 27-28)

In her conception of the GSA's importance, she identifies several positive outcomes for both LGBTQ students and the school community. GSAs provide spaces in which students can organize for political activism within the school and their larger community for LGBTQ rights, and safe spaces in which they can challenge one another's definitions of LGBTQ identities and their stated political goals. In other words, these spaces provide opportunities for non-heterosexual or gender non-conforming students to speak to one another about the primacy of sexuality or gender or both in their own sense of subjectivity, and to work together toward political goals identified by the group – to present a united political front to the school and larger community. Mayo also describes the GSAs that she worked with as spaces of contested definitions of sexuality and gender, as well as other axes of identity. Students in these spaces work across differences to find common political ground and define political goals that will create greater justice for their members in schools.

However, other researchers on GSAs have contested their ability to engage with differences, and have also criticized the marginalization within the larger school community that GSAs sometimes represent (Rasmussen, 2006). Spaces in schools that are defined as serving LGBTQ students and as for LGBTQ students may be heterotopic (Foucault & Miskowiec, 1986) in Foucault's terminology. By heterotopic, Foucault means these are spaces of "deviation," (p. 25) where those who are not considered normal are placed by society. A heterotopic space in school could exclude LGBTQ students from spaces in schools based on the assumptions that other students make about them. Also, students who are non-heterosexual and non-gender-conforming, but who do not conform to the standards of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or queer identities may be excluded from the spaces that are created by schools to protect them. School administrators or teachers may remove students against whom malice or violence is directed. LGBTQ students are then quietly excluded from their regular schools in the name of their protection.

Race is another way that GSAs may divide rather than include and protect students in schools. Although Mayo's research shows that students may become critical about racism and the work of race in schools when engaged in the work of the GSA, McCready (2004) points out that in schools with students from many racial backgrounds students of color may feel that belonging to a GSA would separate them from their racial identity group. Using the notion of "fictive kinship" described by Signithia Fordham, McCready understands the decisions of students of color as based on their need to belong to a racial or ethnic identity group that may define homosexuality as Other. Similarly, the agenda of the GSA in the school he studied defined race as beyond the scope of its

political action. So the space of the GSA was racialized as White and the spaces of color or Blackness were sexualized as heterosexual. In the cases of the students McCready interviewed, the students chose to belong in the heterosexual spaces of color, rather than in the White non-heterosexual spaces.

### *Theoretical Reimaginings*

Queer theory has been used in education research to counter these spatial enforcements that students may encounter in schools. One argument against them is that they enforce an essential definition on the sexuality of students. In other words, identity politics has at its roots an assumption that students who are LGBTQ are different in a way that they cannot change – they are born that way or otherwise essentially gay and Other (Rasmussen, 2004). The qualification for protection by schools from harassment, bullying and name-calling often requires that students must claim the naturalness of their queerness (Rasmussen, 2006a). Schools reflect the belief that young people do not have sexual subjectivity, dismissing student desires as either inappropriate displays of sexuality or inevitable and something that the student cannot help being. However, it is possible to imagine heterotopic spaces as “a place where the subversion of normalization can occur” (Burrington, 1998, p. 130). This is how Mayo imagines the political work of GSAs as well, as places where students can form alliances regardless of their exact location on sexuality or gender scales, or even if they refuse to locate themselves, to ask questions about the intersections of identity and work to make schools more welcoming to all students. Burrington (1998) reminds us, as well, “It is one thing for marginalized groups to fashion a space in the world in which to empower themselves and create a sense of community together, but it is quite another for the marginalized to be forced into

the periphery of public life” (p. 130). We keep this in mind as we read the maps of school spaces created by the youth researchers. We remember that LGBTQ students must be served by the school in some way, because they cannot *be* otherwise, meaning they must be recognized as legitimate students and eligible citizens in the political landscape of the school (Butler, 2004).

### Analyzing the Maps

The mapping exercise was completed with the youth researchers after working together for five months, participating in research meetings, discussing about social theories, and conducting the Queer Q Sorts with other teens. Five youth researchers completed maps, and all five of the maps are presented in this chapter. In this section I will narrate the drawings and labels in the photographs of each of the maps and then “read” them as we analyzed them together as a group in our research meetings. This will give the full context of the maps as they were described by their creators and discussed in our analysis meetings. In the next section I will elaborate on the themes found across the maps about school spaces, sex in schools, and the roles of adults in schools to teach about sexuality, gender, relationships and identity and connect these with other data.



Figure 5.1: My Gay School by Sally

*Narration of Sally's Map*

The picture shows three floors of a school with a student standing outside. Sally, the bisexual girl student is labeled “Me” and “Only pro-gay outside of school.” Inside school, she has labeled the security guards, a security desk, a metal detector, the main office and auditorium. The security guards are labeled, “angry security guards” and “no gay 4 u.” On the second floor, the cafeteria takes up the right end, the counselors and C staircase are in the middle and “My dance class” is at the left end. The cafeteria says “no gay” but that has been crossed out and replaced with neutral. A note has been added that clarifies that students “make fun of gay people” here. In the dance class the student is smiling. On the third floor, Sally show us three classes, “My Art Class” with an “angry art teacher,” “My History Class” with an “angry history teacher” and the admonition,

“Don’t be gay.” Past “Other random classes that don’t include me” she shows “My French Class.”

*Analytic Discussion of Sally’s Map*

The drawing first looks very chaotic, filled with overlapping colors, big writing, hallways headed off in several directions and many teachers marked as angry. In fact, Sally’s school is very chaotic and she does not feel that she fits in it very well. She identifies as bisexual and outside of school is very vocal about her identity. She almost always dresses in very feminine clothing, with makeup and her hair done, but she makes a point of letting people know that she is not heterosexual. She complains about the burden of being read as a straight girl. In school, however, this misperception serves her. Sally does not feel safe being known as bisexual at school, even though her school, like many others allows for tacit acceptance of bisexual girls as long as they date boys at school. In her school, Sally allows herself to be read as heterosexual in order to fly under the exoticizing radar that would single her out as a “freaky” girl if her bisexuality were known. She feels because of her small size and the lack of support system in her school – she is new there and doesn’t have a large group of friends – she would be exposing herself to too much attention. The chaos of the large school, with a sometimes violent reputation, makes her wary, too. She has not identified any teacher or principal who would stick up for her if she felt herself in danger due to sexual harassment or heterosexist verbal or physical violence. She does not see any LGBT roles models among her teachers, and hears some of them participate in anti-LGBT slurs and jokes.

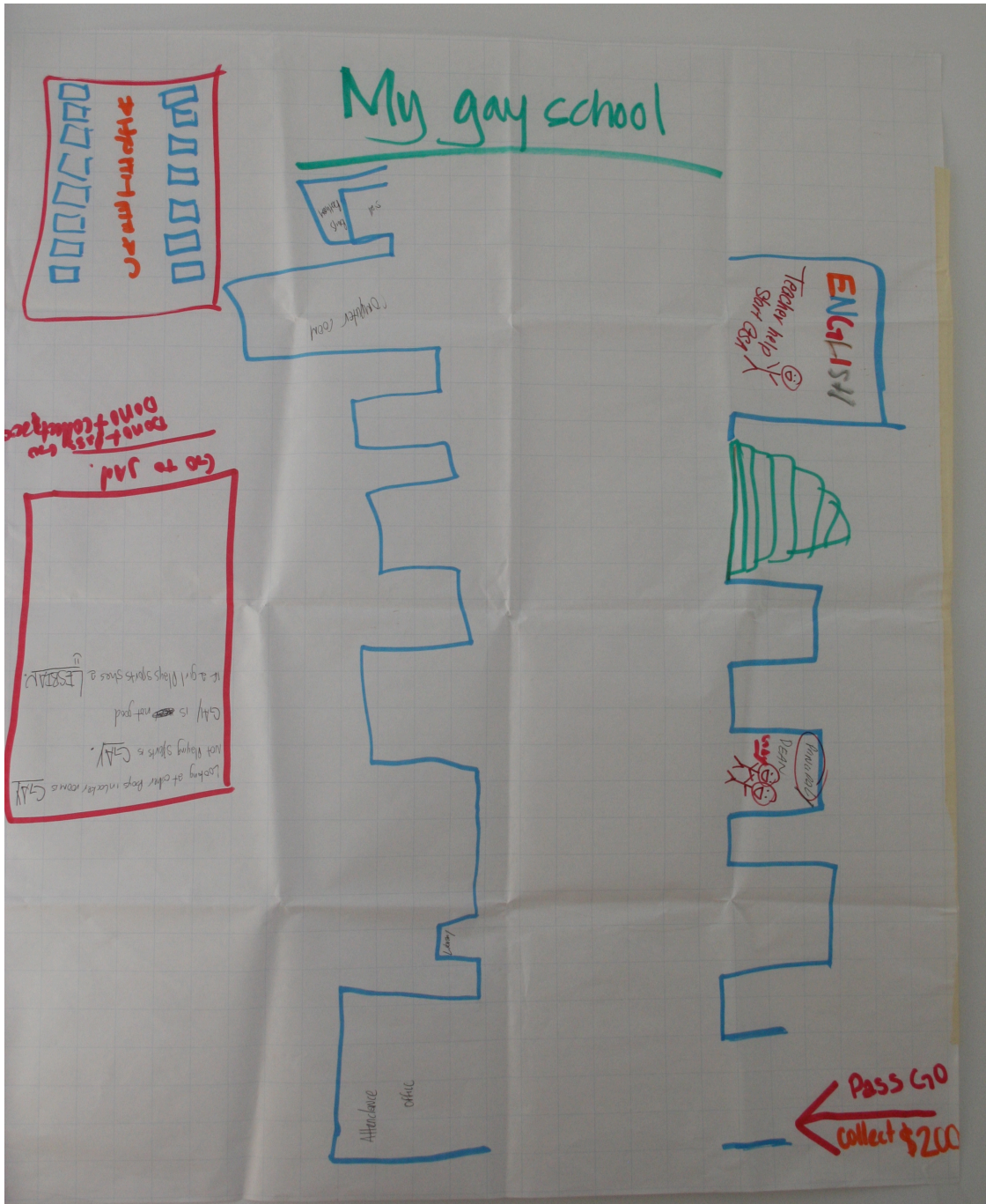


Figure 5.2: My Gay School by Mikey

*Narration of Mikey's Map*

Mikey has identified areas in his school where gender and sexuality are contested.

On the right side he marked his English teacher's classroom. Lower, he labeled the

Dean's office. Other classrooms, the hallway and stairs, are not labeled. On the other side of the map, Mikey has labeled the cafeteria and the gym. In his school, these rooms are on another floor. There are no notes on the cafeteria, but in the gym, Mikey has noted, "Looking at other boys in locker room is GAY," "Not playing sports is GAY," "GAY is not good," "If a girl plays sports she's a LESBIAN."

### *Analytic Discussion of Mikey's Map*

Mikey labeled only rooms where he feels comfortable, or where gender and sexuality are at the forefront of conversations. The English teacher's classroom is an important site of contestation because she helped start the GSA last year, and even though it was not successful, she remains a source of support for non-heterosexual and gender non-conforming students. The dean is very supportive of Mikey, and takes time to recognize him and his gay identity. She comments on his clothing, eyeliner and hairstyles, letting him know that he is seen in the school by an adult figure in a positive way. Rather than just tolerating him, she actually accepts him on the terms under which he presents himself.

The gym represents the most overtly gendered and sexualized space in Mikey's school. Here boys openly taunt one another with words like "fag," "homo" and "bitch." Boys police one another's gaze, assuming attraction and even sexual overtures from "fags" if their gazes linger too long on another's body. This is the location where fights might start, when other boys' harassing language leads Mikey or another gay boy to retaliate with words or fists. Gender is regulated very strictly in this gym, whether by other students or by the teachers. Both girls and boys are expected to fulfill gendered roles by not playing or playing sports.

Mikey reported that the school climate is not always as hostile as the locker room portrayal above. He describes an LGBTQ students experiences in his school as “depending on the day you get there.” Some days the student body seems indifferent or even welcoming of him and the small group of students who identify as non-heterosexual or gender non-conforming. The LGBTQ students are not outcasts in the school, and the group of harassers may be as small as the group of students who regularly gets harassed. However, some days there is outright bigotry about sexual and gender conformity, and Mikey, as well as other LGBTQ students, must measure the climate each day when they arrive at school, monitoring the safety situation for themselves and their friends.

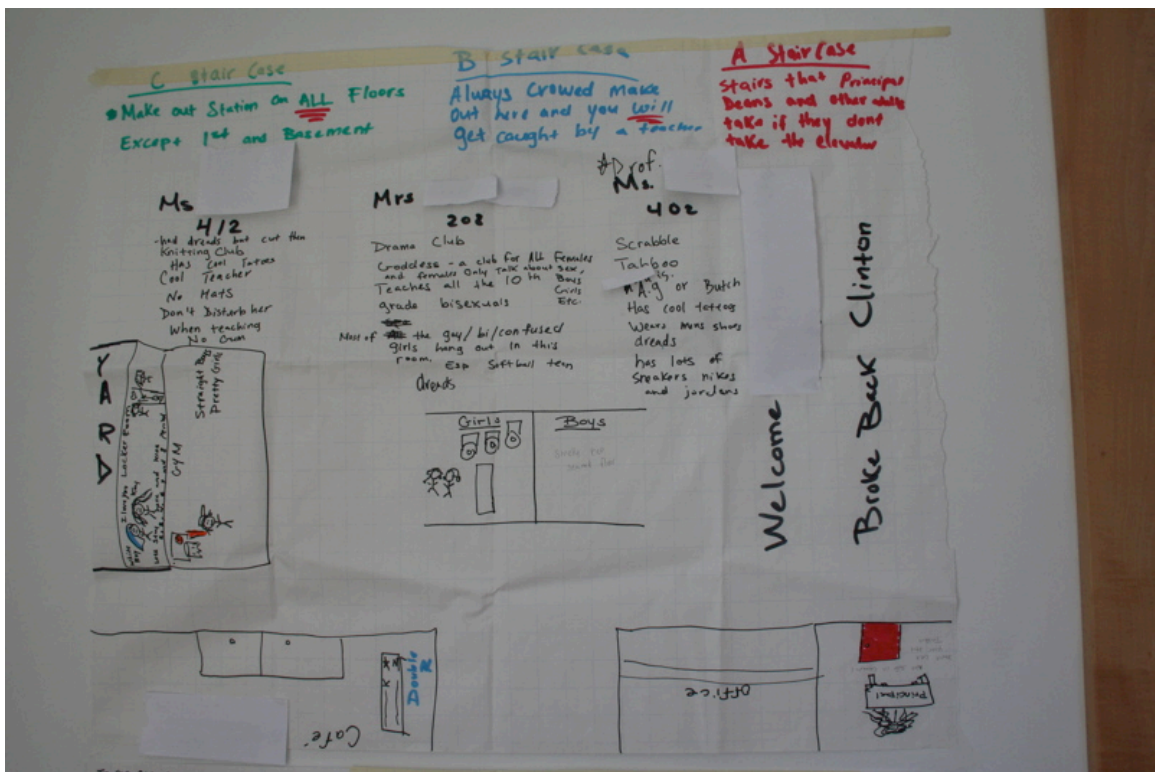


Figure 5.3: Welcome to Broke Back Clinton by Sankofa

### *Narration of Sankofa's Map*

Sankofa drew some of the spaces of her school, but uses much of her map space to detail the people and uses of the spaces. On the right side of the map she welcomes the viewers to her school, which she and her friends call Broke Back Clinton. At the top of the map she tells us about each of the staircases in the small school – A Staircase, B Staircase, and C Staircase. A Staircase is the “stairs that the Principal, other Deans and other adults take when they do not take the elevator.” B Staircase is “always crowded – make out here and you will get caught by a teacher.” C Staircase is a “make out station on all floors except 1<sup>st</sup> and Basement.” The center of the map shows the girls’ bathroom and the boys’ bathroom. In the girls’ bathroom two girls are shown kissing. The boys’ bathroom is labeled “smelly pee-stained floor.” On the left side of the map are the gym, locker rooms, and yard. In the gym are “straight boys and pretty girls” and a basketball hoop. Off to the side of the gym are a “white boy” and a girl. The boy says, “I love you Kay. Let’s stay here and kiss 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8 period.” In the girls’ locker room girls are shown kissing. At the bottom of the map are the cafeteria and the principal’s office. In the cafeteria Sankofa shows the table where she and her friends sit. The principal’s office is labeled “not safe in general – don’t get your hat taken.” Above the girls’ and boys’ bathrooms in the center of the map Sankofa lists three women teachers in the school – Ms. 412, Mrs. 208 and Prof. 402.

- Ms. 412 “had dreads but cut them, [started a] knitting club, has cool tattoos, [is a] cool teacher, no hats, don’t disturb her when teaching, no gum.”
- Mrs. 208 is in charge of the “drama club and Goddess – a club for all females and females only. Talk about sex, boys, girls, etc.” She “teaches all the 10<sup>th</sup> grade

[English].” “Most of the gay/bi/confused girls hang out in this room, especially the softball team.” She wears dreads.

- Prof. 402 has “Scrabble, Taboo” in her room for students to play. She is “AG or butch, has cool tattoos, wears men’s shoes, dreads, has lots of sneakers, Nikes, and Jordans.”

#### *Analytic Discussion of Sankofa’s Map*

Sankofa and her friends call the school Broke Back Clinton for the perception among the students that there are so many lesbian, bisexual and curious or questioning girl students who attend. Sankofa’s group, made up of AG girls, are called the Double Rs – for Riding Rainbows, a group name they chose for themselves that references the popular use of rainbows to signify gayness. She and her friends are out AGs who get lots of attention from the bisexual, curious and questioning girls, and who are very popular with other students and with teachers.

The focus of teachers and students in this school is less about heterosexism and more about sexism and girls’ empowerment. In addition, most girls feel supported by these three teachers, who demonstrate a variety of gender expressions. The teachers’ gender transgressing dress and expressed out sexuality in the case of Prof. 402 are welcoming signals for girls who dress in gender non-conforming ways and have non-heterosexual sexual identities. The fact that these teachers are African-American, and most of the students are people of color (as is typical in New York City high schools) helps students reconcile their sexuality, gender expression, and racial belonging.

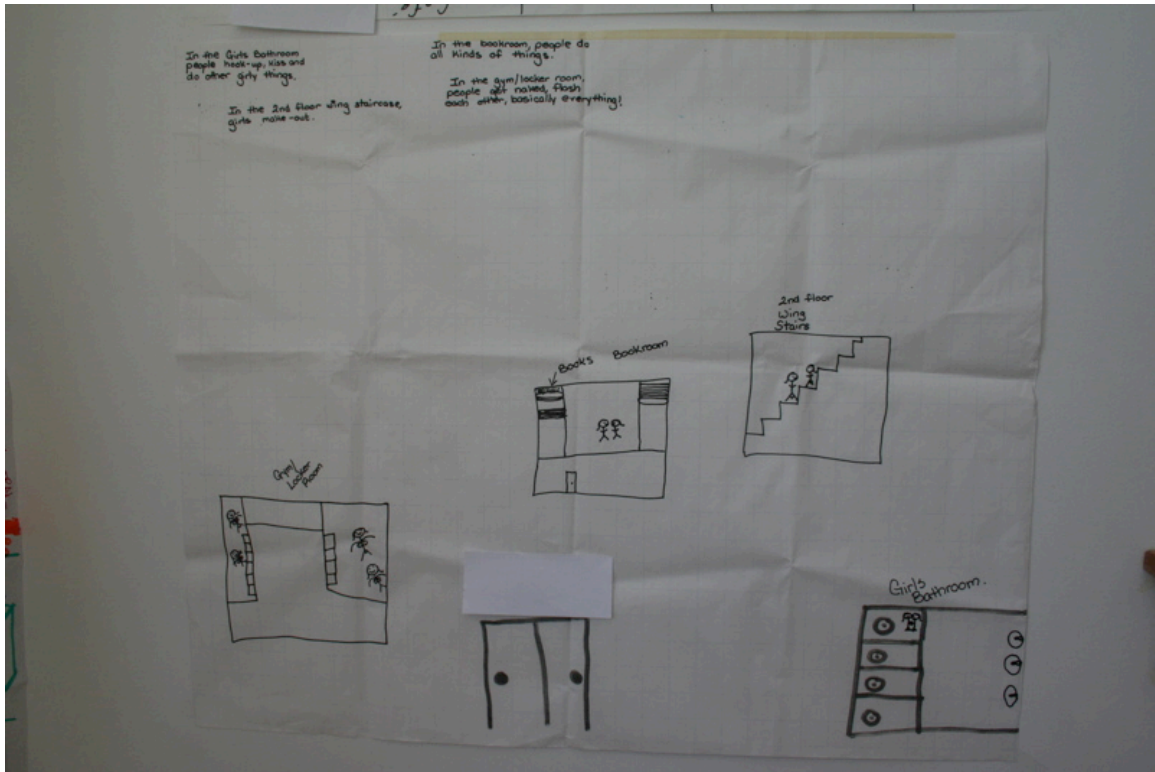


Figure 5.4: Untitled by Tayla

### *Narration of Tayla's Map*

Tayla's map shows the front doors of the school, the girls' locker room, the bookroom, the second floor wing stairs and the girls' bathroom. In each of these enclosed spaces, girls are shown kissing one another. The rest of the space is left empty, except for the description she provides at the top. Tayla wrote, at the top of her map, "In the girls' bathroom people hook-up, kiss, and do other girly things." "In the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor wing staircase, girls make-out." "In the bookroom, people do all kinds of things." In the gym/locker room, people get naked, flash each other, basically everything!"

### *Analytic Discussion of Tayla's Map*

Tayla is a bisexual girl who attends an all-girl Catholic school. In her map of the sexual and gendered spaces of school, she showed only enclosed spaces where students

escape the eyes of the adults. In this school, Tayla tells that even though many of the girls are experimenting sexually with one another, very few girls claim the identity labels bisexual or lesbian, and her fellow students may be very discriminatory about girls who have claimed these labels. Even from fellow students, with all of the sexual activity portrayed here and all of the bi-curiosity in the school, there is much disapproval of the students who claim to be lesbian or bisexual, rather than just experimenting or fooling around. Girls “fool around” with other girls, but do not assume that their sexual experimentation means anything about them or that it would put them in the same category as the morally suspicious girls who claim non-heterosexuality. In this school, attitudes about homosexuality are generally that it is a sin, that gay people will not go to heaven, that young women should not be sexual beings, and “They hate you if you gay.” Conversations in this school about sexuality and gender are very traditional. Gender roles for girls are expected to conform to very traditionally feminine. No teacher or adult in the school gives recognition to girls’ sexual experimentation except to condemn it. Homosexuality and gender non-conformity are not up for discussion in classes, and no sex education beyond abstinence as the only choice is offered.



Figure 5.5: Yajaira's High School

*Narration of Yajaira's Map*

Yajaira's school shows two hallways, one marked blue and one marked red. The key she created for the map shows that green areas are places it's "okay to be gay," blue places "hell no" one can not show non-conforming gender or sexuality there, and red means it's "sometimes okay." The hallway on the left of the map is colored blue, where one teacher's room in the corner and the small main office are also blue. The other hallway is marked in red for "sometimes okay." Other spaces marked red include the principal's office, the computer lab, 9<sup>th</sup> grade science and 10<sup>th</sup> grade math. Green spaces,

or places where it is “okay to be gay” include: the stairways, the girls’ bathroom, Yajaira’s advisory, the elevator, the art room, and the school store.

*Analytic Discussion of Yajaira’s Map*

Yajaira’s school, although full of color like Sally’s, does not exhibit the same chaos. Yajaira is able to clearly locate spaces in her school where she feels comfortable and finds support and where she does not. The discourses and contests in this school are overt rather than covert. Adrienne, the teacher in the blue corner, is very disapproving of the gay students in the school, and she will “make a scene” if she catches two girls kissing or two boys holding hands in that hallway. Red spaces show where students find at least somewhat supportive teachers or the principal, and where other students’ language and behavior toward LGBTQ students will be monitored and regulated.

In green spaces, students feel free to show their affection for their same-gender girlfriend or boyfriend by holding hands and kissing. The teachers in these spaces are known by the students to be gay or lesbian or allies, and their openness in talking with the students about the relationship choices they are making creates an atmosphere in which students enjoy discussing their personal decisions within the context of national and community debates about sexuality and gender expression.

Some of these spaces are “student only” spaces, like the girls’ bathroom and the stairways. In these spaces, out of the eyes of teachers, students sometimes perform sexual activities beyond hand-holding and kissing. However, these activities are not isolated in private spaces in the same way in this school as they are in the previous school. At Yajaira’s school, students know they can go to other students or a teacher for advice or help if the situation feels out of their control. Teachers have intervened for

students being harassed in the school, and the principal has also made a public statement to the school community that he would not tolerate students exhibiting bias toward one another in the school. Yajaira reports on the principal's interactions with a student, Melvin, who was spreading rumors about Yajaira and her girlfriend last year, "No, he had a talk with him. And then, I guess Melvin told [other students]... 'Oh, yeah, they took me in the office and then [the principal] said this and that, this and that.' [The principal] was gonna suspend him, cause he felt that you shouldn't have to be in the school if you feel like... We shouldn't have to be in the school like trying to hide your identity, basically."

### Where Our Maps Lead Us

#### *Sex in School Spaces*

Sex happens in school spaces. Since at least the turn of the twentieth century, schools have been sites of regulation of sexuality and gender expression among students (Lesko, 2001). In social activities, classes on hygiene, and later, sex education classes, students have been encouraged to engage in appropriate dating activities that will lead to socially sanctioned marriages and children, as a part of their healthy sexual identity construction (Blount, 2005; Luschen & Bogad, 2003; Planned Parenthood, 2007; Rofes, 2005; Talburt & Steinberg, 2000; Zimmerman, 2002). "It has been well-documented that sex, though only one facet of social life, is crucial in the construction of identity" (Hubbard, 2002, p. 365). Schools are recognized by young people and adults as places where teens experience attractions, experiment with flirting, acknowledge desires in themselves and others, and begin dating.

Sexual activities often considered age appropriate for adolescents, such as flirting, holding hands, kissing, and hugging between youth of the opposite gender may be

allowed or encouraged in school spaces or in after-school school-based social activities. However, these same activities may not be allowed between students of the same gender, or may or may not be allowed based on the religious and cultural values of the community. Also, other sexual activities are forbidden in schools and often considered inappropriate among adolescents, such as touching of one another's genitals, arousing one another to the point of orgasm, oral sex, intercourse, and masturbation. These sexual activities are considered private, and young people who engage in them, either in schools or outside of schools, are often labeled immoral, psychologically damaged, physically at-risk, or at least misbehaving (Tolman, 1994, 2006; Tolman et al., 2003).

From the maps we can see that sexual behavior often happens in schools, where students can steal a moment of privacy within the public spaces of the school building. Adolescents often have very little private space or time they can claim, and so carve privacy out of public spaces – in cars, in parks, in restrooms and in school stairwells and closets. In the schools depicted in the maps, students have found privacy for sexual exploration in stairwells, under the bleachers in the gym, in the locker rooms, in the bathrooms, in the book room, and in the school store (a large closet out of which school supplies are sold). In these spaces, consensual sexual activities – mostly kissing and some touching – happen, and these private spaces in public provide opportunities for young people to explore the boundaries of their desires. In gender segregated spaces, for example, girls experiment with their desire for and desirability to other girls, when they flash one another, kiss and flirt in the girls' locker room and bathroom, or in the all-girls school. Girls and boys also may kiss in the public spaces of the school.

Non-consensual sexual activity also happens in school spaces, though, and often in the public spaces. These activities are not always noted or responded to by teachers. Students reported regular touching, commenting on and suggestion of sex activities between girls and boys as a regular part of the passing periods in the school hallways. Sometimes teachers, security guards, and other adults participate in the sexualized talk aimed at girl students (Krueger, unpublished dissertation). This sexual activity is seen as normal, expected and what girls just have to deal with on the streets and also within the public spaces of the school building (Pascoe, 2007). Heteronormativity allows for the sexualized behavior of boys toward girls, especially where the boys are not otherwise Othered, or racialized as different. Pascoe points out that heterosexual sexuality sometimes appears as disruptive and dangerous when it involved Black or Brown bodies in high schools with majority White student populations. The racialized Other sometimes appears “too sexual” and “disruptive” in the ways that non-heterosexuality and non-normative gender do as well.

In her “normative ideal of city life,” Young (1990) suggests that public spaces offer four virtues of social relations, including eroticism (pp. 238-239). The erotic is defined “in the wide sense of an attraction to the other, the pleasure and excitement of being drawn out of one’s secure routine to encounter the novel, strange, and surprising” (p. 239). This element of the erotic also exists in schools, where students meet others different from themselves, who come from different neighborhoods and have different backgrounds. In schools, students can explore many pleasures, including the new pleasures of sexual desire and desirability. These pleasures are not limited to the sexual, however, and students of all sexual identities may also enjoy the pleasures of gender

expression, social interactions, academic engagement, and many others as they struggle with the discourses of adolescence (Foucault, 1978; McWhorter, 1999).

*Spaces in which to Explore Desires and Pleasures*

Two maps stand out as representing schools where sexuality and gender can be and are spoken about. Sexuality and gender become part of the public forum in Yajaira's and Sankofa's schools where sexism, discrimination, intersectionality of identities, and safety in relationships are topics that students engage. In Sankofa's school, the Double Rs claim space in the cafeteria, they flirt with girls who show interest in the gender expression and sexual experiences they claim, and they found older students at their school who recognized them and mentored them through the coming-out process as they named their sexuality and gender expression. These spaces at Sankofa's school provide guidance for younger or less experienced girls who express a desire to date a girl or dress in a non-feminine way in which they find a supportive community and positive feedback for their choices.

Students also offer one another an education in the politics and history of the social category homosexuality. Students in Sankofa's school engage in political and historical discussions of race and class groups in the United States and in New York City. They actively pursue academic and leadership programs that focus on issues of gender inequalities and social revolutions. Within this setting, students feel empowered to ask for their rights to present their identities in school and to challenge normative practices and policies. Sankofa chose for her English final research paper the place of homosexuality in the Black community. Although her English teacher did not agree with Sankofa's argument that the discrimination non-heterosexual identified people face is

equal to racial discrimination, Sankofa pursued her line of argument and drew on her experiences as an activist in other settings to educate herself and other students about the history of sexual identity categories and their intersections with racial identity categories.

In Yajaira's school, students know their rights to exist in the spaces of the school and so feel empowered to claim their spaces. Although last year the school was a much less friendly social climate for LGBTQ youth, and some students were ridiculed and told they were "disgusting" for being suspected of or claiming LGBTQ identities, the situation changed dramatically in the past year. Several students spoke up and initiated a Diversity Club. The group meets weekly during lunch and loosely follows a discussion of topics brainstormed by the students. Teachers were enlisted as sponsors for the club, but the agenda is guided by the interests and needs of the student members. LGBTQ students also complained to the principal about experiencing harassment from a particular group of other students. The LGBTQ students' demand for redress for the ostracizing moves of their harassers brought a response from the principal, which reinforced the LGBTQ students' feeling of belonging and political power within the school community. Rather than organizing only around identity, students organized around a precipitating injustice to demand justice for themselves and their peers.

Sally and Mikey do not encounter these supports in their schools, and seek outside of school for information, community, and political agency. Mikey finds recognition for his gender expression and sexuality from the dean, but it does not translate into spaces in which students can challenge heteronormativity in the school community. Instead, he searches in the public library and online for stories, both fiction and nonfiction, that resonate with the way he understands his identity and help him define the communities

that he wants to align himself with. Likewise, he and Sally find others who share their ideas and support their identities in online communities. Sally in particular searches for essays, stories and other texts that explore the meaning of bisexuality and uses her own writing to engage the ideas she finds. She actively struggles with definitions of bisexuality that demean it in relation to gay or lesbian identities and construe bisexuals as confused or in transition. Mikey and Sally, already friends outside the research team, support one another in their explorations of what it means to claim a gay or bisexual identity, who they want to be within that identity, and how they will express it.

### *Teachers and Spaces in Schools*

The student mapmakers have identified, where available, teachers who recognize the issues important in the lives of students and educate students to be critical thinkers about gender roles, sexual behavior, racism and culture. The critical nature of classroom and casual discussions in the schools makes space for students to introduce questions about how sexuality and gender expression fit into the school community's discussions of identity and justice. Spaces in the school, where students' questions can be asked and answered in a respectful way, invite students to initiate discussions of ethical behavior and practical concern. Teacher's classrooms in which non-heterosexual and gender non-conforming bodies are welcomed and not scrutinized send powerful messages that these bodies are a legitimate part of the school community and have as much right to be within the space and to advocate politically as any student. This is aided by the inclusion and participation that adults and other students expect from non-heterosexual and gender non-conforming students, who are viewed in these spaces as belonging to many interest groups, not just those related to sexuality and gender expression. Students are viewed as

having complex identities not limited to “victim,” or “pathological.” Teacher’s bodies that represent non-normative gender expressions or signal non-heterosexuality also visually represent that those identities have authority and voice in the school.

Another ideal of public life offered by Young (1990) is “social differentiation without exclusion...[in which] groups will differentiate by affinities but the borders will be undecidable, and there will be much overlap and intermingling (p. 246-247). Birden (2005) described using Young’s structure for affinity grouping in schools for sexual identity organizing, and suggests that Young’s ideal offers groups within schools opportunities to organize to make changes without claiming an essential or permanent identity or affiliation. The groups can be contingent and local, created in response to the needs of a group of student or an event that happens during a school year. Having groups with porous boundaries, such as the groups of girls that hang out in Ms. 208’s room (Sankofa’s map) without having to declare a sexual identity, but where issues of sexuality and gender get discussed, helps create the opportunities for the group to rally to respond if issues arise about sexuality or gender identity in the school.

Likewise, in Yajaira’s school, a group called the Diversity Club has formed. In addition to the advisories, where students are assigned to teachers for academic and social advising all school year, the Diversity Club offers students a change to particularly discuss issues about identity and discrimination. It has been used to talk about incidents of racism and sexism, and is also the space in which LGBTQ students come to assert new identities and get support for speaking their identity publicly in school and outside of school. Because the group focuses broadly on diversity, students feel free to bring their whole selves, not just sexuality or gender identity to the group, and they educate one

another about many issues of diversity, making them ready to respond politically to any discrimination that might arise in the school.

### Conclusion

In a sexually just education, sexuality would not be impelled to assimilate to heterosexist norms, nor would non-heterosexual students have to renounce sexual behaviors. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning (LGBTQ) student relationships would not necessarily have to follow the dating/relationship/prom model of their heterosexual norms. Trans students would not be required to subscribe to one or the other of the two binary genders, but would be allowed to fashion their gendered bodies as they felt they should. LGBTQ students would not become only gay or trans, to the exclusion of their racial, gender, ethnic, religious or class identities. A queer lens would advocate for an understanding of sexuality outside of the normative, romance-to-marriage-for-life paradigm. It would advocate an understanding of sexuality and gender expression as always contingent and in the process of forming, within relations with others. It would also disrupt the formal sexuality education model currently in place that frequently implicitly or explicitly positions girls as victims of sexual violence and boys as sexual conquerors (Fine & McClelland, 2006; Tolman, 2006). It would create possibilities for different sexual subjectivities regardless of one's sexual desires or partners.

This queered notion of sexuality offers an opportunity for all students to interact with others different from themselves, and with ideas that may be strange or unknown to them. It has been stated in educational policy and legal decisions about educational policies and practices that students should be entitled to an education that will prepare them for the "real world" (Russo, 2006). This preparation requires that students know about and be comfortable

interacting with others with ideas, skin color, languages, customs, religions, political beliefs and sexualities, genders, abilities and appearances (among other things) that are different from their own in a professional, collegial manner. Learning to talk about difference without resorting to hostility, to discuss disagreements or competing claims to legitimacy or truth without denying the humanity of others, are lessons of democracy that educators can model and students can learn in schools.

Sexuality and gender expression are elements of young people's subjectivity. Although they are formed within a historical moment and a social setting, they are still expressions of selfhood and freedom, and are explorations of young people's interactions with others and with the world . Schools provide social locations in which young people meet one another and recognize their attractions. This has long been supported as an activity of schools for heterosexuality (Lesko, 2001). Schools have operated as locations to reproduce normative masculinity and femininity, often in the name of community or family values. Normative masculinity and femininity are taught as binary categories, naturally existing in nature, and historically unchanging or evolving. The social categories of gender are assumed in much of elementary and secondary policy, curriculum content, pedagogy and interpersonal relationships to be based in immutable natural laws.

LGBTQ students are asking for an opportunity to participate in the erotic public and social spaces of schools. They are also asking to hear their experiences and identities reflected in conversations in the public forum, including in the curriculum, class discussions, in peer conversations, in after-school programming and in the recognition they get from adults in the building. They want their bodies to exist in the spaces of

schools. Although the co-researchers whose maps are presented here reiterated in several of our research meetings that gay-straight alliances were not the solution to the problems in their school, they do advocate for mixed-use spaces in which sexuality and gender can sometimes become the focus of advocacy work and social support. GSAs, students felt, would be too revealing for students who would not want to claim a firm identity by joining the group. However, multi-focus groups that allow for political advocacy on many issues would bring together students who claim non-heterosexual sexualities, gender non-conforming identities and other students who could work as allies on those issues but not claim the identities (Birden, 2005). Although the name gay-straight alliance would seem to allow for this as well, the perceived focus of the group strictly on sexuality and gender issues might discourage other students whose political goals focus more broadly on diversity from joining.

Teachers can help students think critically about categories and who gets to belong to them and who does not. In a critical social issues class, for example, schools could become a site of discussion of the ways people are divided up, the definition of categories and the historical and cultural contingency of those categories. Schools could also provide opportunities for students to discuss sexual ideas before acting on them and a place to think about the ethics of being in relationships with one another. As we saw in the last chapter, health education is an element of safety in schools. Students are asking for adult guidance in sexual decision-making and in thinking about sexuality and gender choices they are presented with. Teachers could be educated and authoritative about decisions about sexual and gender information they present in sex education classes, but also in responding to student questions and content in other areas such as English, science

and history. LGBTQ student look to teachers to have reliable and authoritative information about LGBTQ lives that they can share with straight-identified students, to dispel myths and counter discrimination.

## CHAPTER 6:

### **Becoming Sexual and Gendered Subjects: The Identities Young People Claim and the Freedoms Within Them**

As I have demonstrated, discourses of safety overdetermine the experiences of LGBTQ youth in high schools; at the same time discourses of sexuality and gender structure the everyday interactions between students, teachers and administrators. Most informal and formal social interactions rely on clearly legible gender expression (Butler, 1990). Schools have been structured as one of the institutions in which young people learn to direct their sexual energies in certain ways, conform to gender roles, and exhibit socially approved desires (Blount, 2005; Fields, 2008; Lugg, 2006a; Luschen & Bogad, 2003; Tolman, 2006; Zimmerman, 2002). Power/knowledge is embedded in the everyday conversations and practices of queer youth. The media and scientific portrayal of queer people – especially high school students – as victims of violence dominates most of the common sense knowledge about LGBTQ youth and their sexual and gendered subjectivity. These studies portray lesbian, gay, and more recently, bisexual, trans, queer and questioning teens as suffering from psychological problems and often violence because they were not able to hide their sexuality or gender identity (Sadowski, 2001, 2003; Savin-Williams, 2005). The literature influences the public discourse about LGBTQ youth, and informs public sentiment about them, eliciting both sympathy and loathing (Kumashiro, 2001). Although the youth researchers and I recognized this research is important, and did not dispute its conclusions, we all felt reluctant to accept the identity of victim without contesting it. We understood our engagement with gender

expressions and sexual behaviors resulted from some degree of agency, and that our adoption of these behaviors and expressions reflected decisions we had made to become certain persons, and to satisfy certain desires, and experience certain pleasures.

In this chapter I explore the discussions of these decisions with youth researchers in the research team meetings. In these discussions, we asked one another to define what it looks like to identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, or curious. We recounted stories to one another about our own negotiations with the visible markers of gender and sexuality, and how we decided to signify our identities with them. Within these discussions it became clear the ways these decisions were located in the context of the society where we live – both the macro context of United States political, moral, medical and psychological discourses, and the micro context of individual schools, peer groups, and families. Young people are invited or encouraged to pursue sexuality and gender in certain ways, and sometimes conformity to these discursive normative practices is required of youth. Young people's bodies are disciplined by discourses of sexuality and gender, in part, because sexually and gender normative bodies are understood and expected by school and social structures. Non-normative genders and sexualities can inspire fear because of the ways they seem to threaten all identities and categories, and so seem to threaten the fabric of society (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1983; Irvine, 2002, see also <http://www.nationformarriage.org>).

Questions like “Are you GI Jane?” “Why do you wear your hair so short?” “Are you gay?” ask the interlocutor to defend his or her gender expression and sexuality, by assuming the wearer is making a statement about sexuality by resisting gender conventions. Students directed these questions at me in classrooms and in the public

library, as they tried to ascertain the meaning I made with my body. For the most part, these were not hostile questions, just curious. Sometimes the youth who questioned me were looking for information and resources about queerness. In these moments, something about my queer visibility made me approachable, made me look safe, but at other times this same visibility made me look vulnerable, and I have negotiated the need to maintain my own and students' emotional safety in a classroom, as LGBTQ students often must. This kind of negotiation represents just one way that LGBTQ youth fashion themselves as sexual and gendered subjects within the discourses about sexuality and gender in schools. Youth researchers rejected research showing teens simply as psychologically scarred and victims of violence because of their sexuality because it did not tell the whole story. They saw themselves as active agents, subjected to the psychological, medical, moral and pedagogical discourses of sexuality and gender, and also struggling to understand their desires and experiences. They were searching for narratives that told a variety of stories about gay teen experiences. While they were certainly strategic in whom they revealed themselves to, they were not hiding their sexuality. They were in the process of making spaces safe for themselves, while demanding the opportunity to do desire the way they wanted. We felt there was something more complex than victimization occurring with young people in their negotiations with their world and sexuality.

Our research demonstrates that teens find spaces between and on the edges of hegemonic discourses of gender in which to fashion themselves as sexual subjects (Foucault, 1985, 1997b). Young people are actively engaging with their formation, performing gender in the ways that best meet their needs. The theoretical ideas that I had

encountered in Butler and Foucault support these ideas and challenged me to think about gender and sexuality as culturally constructed, historically specific, and interpersonally negotiated. These theorists allowed me to identify in young people's words and actions attitudes more deliberately risk-taking, fully aware of the possibilities and limitations of queer identities and non-heterosexual and gender variant behavior.

### Care of the Self

My goal in documenting the subjugated knowledges (Foucault, Bertani, Fontana, Ewald, & Macey, 2003) about sexuality and gender among young people is to allow those usually forbidden or prohibited from speaking back to adolescent sexuality experts to do so in order to challenge prevailing and taken-for-granted notions of teens and sex. In working together as a research team, we were able to accomplish speaking back in a teacher professional development day where youth researchers spoke and in talking to teachers individually about the research we were conducting as we asked them to participate by taking the Queer Q Sort. However, we also spoke back to the savoir, the official knowledge, every time we gathered and critiqued the sex education materials presented to young people in New York City high schools, the attitudes of peers and adults encountered in schools spaces and on the streets, and engaged in our own self-formations in ways that felt liberatory and not reactionary. Demonstrating how students produce themselves in light of religious, psychological, and medical discourses decouples sexual practices from a universal moral code, and disrupts common beliefs about mentally healthy development of sexuality and gender. "To ask 'how' disciplinary practices function is instead to provide means by which to expose such practices and allow for experimentation with different modes of being" (Butin, 2001). Empirical,

youth participatory data describes how adolescents in the present produce, through various practices and ideas, themselves as desiring, sexual subjects. In short, how adolescents practice a Care of the Self as individuals who engage in or consider engaging in sex.

Foucault focuses on the Care of the Self in *The History of Sexuality: The Use of Pleasure* (1985) as he elaborates on his concern for ethics, or how one relates to oneself in relation to others. He contends that the purpose of his work is to illustrate how taken-for-granted (appropriate, normal, sane, healthy) ideas and practices are arbitrary, subject to change, and are historically contingent and not “universal necessities” (Martin, 1988, p. 11). Foucault’s skepticism about universalism extends to the human sciences of psychology, biology, and anthropology, which can reduce human experiences to popular understandings and categorical tables. To look at human experiences as a care of the self, as techniques of the self, as ways of fashioning oneself, provides us with another lens through which we may speak about sexual desires rather than through the lenses of the psychologist, sexologist, or the medical doctor.

Foucault provides us with four major aspects of the care of the self. These four guided my reading of the research conversations (see below). They are:

1. Ethical Substance: Which part of myself do I focus on to alter or shape in order to be an ethical subject?
2. Mode of Subjection: How am I invited or encouraged to fashion myself in a certain way to be an ethical subject?
3. Self-Forming Activity: What practices do I engage in order to fashion myself as an ethical subject?
4. Telos, or goal: What kind of being do I want to become?

Ethical for Foucault means how one relates to oneself in relation to others. The individual shapes the self through cultural and societal “models” (Foucault, 1997a, p. 291) and

certain practices to become a specific ethical being. These models do not, however, construct or determine how the individual fashions him/herself; instead what we find in Foucault is a negotiation between the subject and these limits. There is no complete agency on behalf of the subject, but she is not completely determined either. The subject negotiates these historically contingent, presently shaped models that encourage her to care for the self in certain ways. The care of the self operates in its most urgent, subtle and immediate forms in relation to power and knowledge. The ways and reasons that young people exceed, transgress, and contest the limits of the socially available models of gender and sexuality most interested this research project.

Foucault contends that power itself is not a thing to hold or to have, and is not only prohibitive or oppressive, but is productive and always already present in any relationship (Foucault, 1977). Power exists between anyone who is in relationship with another; “whether they involve verbal communication...or amorous, institutional or economic relationships, power is always present” (Foucault, 1997b, p. 292). Power relations occur not just at mass protests against governmental policies, but appear in the everyday lives of individuals. For a power relation to exist at all, the opportunity to resist must also exist. Foucault concedes that “states of domination,” where the one dominated has no opportunities to make changes in the situation, do indeed exist, but the trick is discovering or “knowing where resistance will develop” (p. 292). How one fashions oneself, or cares for oneself, to negotiate the various power relations links ethics to power for Foucault. What part of oneself does one alter or mold in order to make a particular power move within a certain space? What are the ways that one is invited or encouraged to be a certain subject in a certain space, and how does one negotiate those ways? What

practices, activities, or power moves does one engage in order to be perceived as a certain subject? And what kind of being does one want to become, or goal (telos) does one have for oneself in order to be a certain subject, and what power-resistance moves does one need to make in the everyday in order to become that being? Power is “everywhere” as long as the subject has freedom to negotiate the power relationships and states of domination within a certain space. In the conversations below adolescents negotiate these forces.

Foucault states that power relations and the care of the self are informed by knowledge (*connaissance*) as in knowing, or being aware of “a number of rules of acceptable conduct or of principles that are both truths and prescriptions” (Foucault, 1997b, p. 285). It is the relationship between *connaissance*, or everyday knowledge and *savoir*, formal, institutionalized knowledge usually developed by the social and human sciences that the students in this data speak to. Moreover, these students contest, subvert, and fracture certain games of truth about adolescents and sexuality, by which Foucault means the procedures by which knowledge is considered valid (p. 297). Foucault states,

Thus, one escapes from a domination of truth not by playing a game that was totally different from the game of truth but by playing the same game differently, or playing another game, another hand, with other trump cards. I believe that the same holds true in the order of politics; here one can criticize on the basis, for example, of the consequences of the state of domination caused by an unjustified political situation, but one can do so only by playing a certain game of truth, by showing its consequences, by pointing out that there are other reasonable options, by teaching people what they don't know about their own situation, their working conditions, and their exploitation. (Foucault, 1997b, pp. 295-296)

In talk about teens and sexuality, the games of truth may refer to appropriate and inappropriate behavior and knowledge about sexuality and gender. Thus, within spaces of power/knowledge relationships, the youth voices presented in this chapter exceed,

transgress and resist certain lines of being adolescent, and by doing so, they practice various forms of freedom. To demonstrate how this occurs, the youth researchers and I used Foucault in our research meetings to destabilize the meanings of sexuality and gender moral codes. I also use Foucault to excerpt sections of research meeting conversations below and analyze them within the four aspects of the care of the self. I start with the telos, or goal that young people describe as the self they want to be, and then explore the various ways they work toward achieving their goals. Table 6.1 on page 191 shows the process of fashioning an ethical sexual self for three of the teens.

*Telos, or goal*

Foucault suggested that the telos, or goal, of the technologies of the self is to imagine what kind of being one wants to become. Young people involved as youth researchers in this research project wished to not be defined as gay, but to be recognized as gay. By that they meant they wished to have their LGBTQ selves welcomed into social spaces, but to not be limited to understanding of who is the LGBTQ subject. They wanted their peers, teachers, families and others in their communities to understand that their choices to pursue sexual and gendered pleasures that are non-normative are thoughtful, informed, ethical decisions. They made deliberate, agentic choices to not be limited by the discursive forces that tried to align their sexuality and gender along normative tracks, and to instead pursue pleasures that allowed them to express pieces of themselves that they would have had to deny or ignore had they decided to acquiesce to normativity. They *could* have made other choices about the pleasures they pursue in reaction to their desires. But in order to live in ethical relations with themselves and with

others, they honor their desires to live lesbian, gay, bisexual, and gender non-conforming lives.

Mikey demonstrates the kinds of life that young people wish to live in relation to their peers below. Although he ends up engaging in a physical fight with another boy in gym class, he would rather not have it come to that. He would like for the stereotypical beliefs about him and other gay boys to stop permeating relations between him and his peers and stop being used to regulate other boys' masculinity and heterosexuality.

Mikey: No, it wasn't that. It wasn't that quick. It was like in gym. And it was something stupid. Because in my school we have to change. So, [one guys said] like "stop looking at my dick, faggot" to like the other guy. And I'm just like "you don't even have one." Seriously, it just looks like one. So, he's like "what the fuck you talking about!?" and then... Yeah. So that got to me. Cause he used to be like blah, blah, blah. And [I] was like "to be like, straight, you know a lot about what gay people do." So he got offended and he pushed me and I punched him and then I got suspended for a day.

Darla: Uh huh. So that one got to you. You felt it.

Mikey: Yeah! Cause like...not all gay people want you.

Darla: Uh huh.

Sankofa: Yeah.

Mikey: That's what really offends me. Like, I don't want you! You're ugly, I don't want you.

Darla: Uh huh.

Mikey: Gay people aren't just like, hey, on the hunt.

Darla: So, behind those comments you heard "all gay men are constantly staring at all men's dicks and want all men." Right? That was the message that you thought that he was saying, and you wanted to say, "really?"

Mikey: Yeah. Exactly.

Darla: Really, there's still a selection process going on.

Mikey: Yeah there's more qualities in a boy besides just gayness.

Mikey often feels the discourses that define gay men as hypersexual, indiscriminate and predatory, and his complaints about being defined this way emerged several times over the course of the months that we worked together. He resists these stereotypes, and other discourses that define gay men as victims and subject to violence. He stands ready to defend himself verbally and physically from dishonor or violent attack, and yet is not closed to the feelings of fear and insecurity that such attacks bring. He honors what might be defined as feminine and masculine in himself, and exhibits all the gender expressions that bring him pleasure on the street and in school spaces. He understands that sometimes this visibility brings him negative attention, but feels ready to confront it and either counter the negative stereotypes or defend himself. Mikey finds support for his gender expression, his sexuality and his choice to be very visible as a gender transgressing gay boy in his friend group that he cultivates outside of school. He has some support within schools, but as he says, "Yeah, like at most like 10 [people]. But like... I guess it's less of a support group. Because, like, you know, it's less people. It has its ups and downs." In online communities, after-school and drop-in programs for LGBTQ youth, and friends he has met across the city he finds recognition for the queer self that he presents.

In schools where students fit in more easily, and feel more belongingness, youth researchers expressed a reluctance to push their peers to change. They felt that the school was "good enough" for them, and that they did not need to challenge their peers or teachers to examine heteronormativity or binary gender as long as they found acceptance there. They did not mind if their peers or teachers misunderstood or maintained

hegemonic beliefs about sexuality and gender as long as LGBTQ students were allowed to freely express their gender and sexuality in the way that they chose. In some cases, this attitude seemed to stem from the belief that the ideas about sexuality and gender that support heteronormativity and binary gender are cultural, so to challenge these ideas would be to challenge their culture and would put them at odds with everyone who is like them on all other identity axes besides sexuality and gender (Collins, 1998; Muñoz, 1999). This may represent young people's ways of negotiating the connaissance of sexuality within an ethnic or racial community, by knowing "a number of rules of acceptable conduct or of principles that are both truths and prescriptions" (Foucault, 1997b, p. 285).

Sankofa expresses her wish to be accepted as a part of her Afrocentric school and Caribbean home community, and also to be recognized as a gender-transgressing, butch, woman. She does not feel that these identities conflict with one another, even though they sometimes cause conflict for her in her home or on the street. She stated, "In class we have read many books such as *Kindred*, *Things Fall Apart*, *A Small Place*, *The Blacker the Berry*, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, and *The Color Purple*. We are instilled with a very strong sense of Black identity and Black pride. But we are not told that many of these authors are lesbian, gay or bisexual." She feels that by eliding the sexual and gender expressions of these authors, her teachers are deliberately hiding a part of her community, and furthering stereotypes that claim that non-heterosexuality is somehow opposed to Black identity. Some of her teachers discouraged her from thinking of sexuality and gender expression as identity issues of equal importance to gender and

race issues. She struggled with the need to remain respected and liked within her community and to raise those political issues that seem most important to her.

One event that caused her to reflect on her position was being asked to run for Homecoming King by her peers. She declined to run because, “If I ran there might be a big scandal in school and I definitely would not have the support of my parents, so it might fall apart then and there.” She also worries that her actions could create a “negative backlash and thus more gender role policies being put into place at [the school]. Other AGs might feel the backlash after I graduate or more severe rules might be implemented. Also, if a trans person did come they might feel offended that I am making a joke out of something they feel seriously about.” Negotiating the political importance of various stances, and her own desires, Sankofa decided not to run for Homecoming King, because it was “not her issue.” She did not desire to be king, but felt that the movement in favor of her running called into question the gendered nature of such school rituals. She moves easily in the spaces of freedom between binary masculinity and femininity in the school, and feels that overtly challenging rituals such as Homecoming might disturb the “peace” and focus more restriction on the many girls who subvert gender standards in the school. For the time being, she decided to challenge gender and sexuality discursive norms in her everyday ways, with her gender comportment and her lesbian desire and desirability, rather than through a challenge to the institution of Homecoming that might result in alienating many of her peers who currently are allies.

In some cases, I wondered if young people felt that if they acknowledged the differences they were embodying, there would be grounds for the stereotypes and lies about them to be understood as truth, even by themselves. In other words, they needed to

believe that they were “just like straight people, they just happened to love someone of the same gender,” rather than claim they are changing the landscape of gender and sexuality, as I read their gender performances and sexualities. The radical nature of their project with their body performances and their sexual desires can not always be acknowledged by them, because of the ways that it threatens the very binary structures of sexuality and gender and destabilizes other identity categories understood as natural and real, and threatens to make them unintelligible or unrecognizable within their families or ethnic communities.

Bisexual girls may be involved in the most radical project of all in terms of sexuality and gender, although they are not perceived to be by their lesbian and gay peers. Several of the research team conversations focused on bisexuality and what kind of an ethical decision it is to be bisexual. Although at any meeting three bisexual girls might be in attendance, questions still arose about whether one could really be bisexual, or if bisexuality was a proxy for sexually experimenting, transitioning to claim gay or lesbian identities, or a way of getting attention. Some disbelief and discrediting existed about the kind of ethical decision required to declare bisexuality, as if one could just add it to heterosexuality but not have it change one’s basic experience of social and political issues. This attitude frames bisexuality for girls as recreational and apolitical, as having the best of both worlds, getting to benefit from the existing structures of heteronormativity and binary gender/femininity and still getting to enjoy the illicit pleasures of lesbianism. This same framing derides the actions of men who are on the “down low” and, in fact, Sankofa uses this term to describe the bisexual girls in her school.

Sankofa: I don't think there's enough people that are out. Like...

Darla: Even all these girls who are bi/questioning?

Sankofa: They don't want their boyfriends to know. They're so crazy. I don't...

Darla: They just want to do it on the...

Sankofa: Yeah, on the low.

Darla: Uh huh.

Sankofa: Yeah, so... There's about maybe 10? Eight to 10 gay girls and like one gay boy that's like out. And the rest of them are... They're all on the low.

Bisexual girls, and boys, “on the low” destabilize the truth-telling requirements of sexual identity categories and genders. If a girl looks feminine and dates boys, but also dates girls, then her identity, her loyalty to political projects or hegemonic structures becomes unknown and unknowable by just reading her body. One must question her, must ask about her, in order to understand her ethical stance on sexuality and gender. The same may be true of femme lesbians or butch gay boys, although they have joined the community of the non-heterosexual, and their loyalty is considered more affirmed. Although bisexuals often represent a significant membership in political movements and social causes under the umbrella heading LGBT(Q), at the same time many people who fall in love with both same-gender and other-gender partners do not think of themselves as non-heterosexual (Diamond, 2005). In addition, sometimes people who might read as opposite genders may feel themselves to be in a same-gender relationship. Those who do not conform to LGBTQ normative positions further queer the notions of what sexuality and gender are and can be.

In addition, since bisexual girls do not abandon their position as desirable in the heterosexual social arena in many schools, girls may feel freer to examine and

experiment with sexuality through bisexuality. Yajaira highlights this desirability among the girls in her school when she describes,

And like, one thing that I find that's funny...I don't want to go off-topic, but like...In my school, last year, it was nasty to be bisexual, when people found out they were like "Eeew, that's the dyke! Don't talk to her." You know, stuff like that. But now this year everybody want to be bisexual, you know? Everybody like "Oh, I'm bisexual."

Dylan and Sankofa agree that girls in their schools have also recently claimed bisexuality. Since bisexual girls are not visible in the same way that lesbians sometimes are, they often signal their interest in other girls through their actions, such as flirting and touching. Pursuing lesbian girls in their schools may offer bisexual girls an opportunity to exhibit an agentic sexuality they do not often have the opportunity to perform in relation to boys. As other studies remind us (Fine & McClelland, 2006; Tolman, 1994, 2006; Tolman et al., 2003) girls often find it hard to navigate the tricky waters between sexual passivity and slut, and are most often portrayed in sex education as victims of sexuality rather than agents within it (Fields & Tolman, 2006).

In these ways we see that Mikey wants to be a gay man and also to be respected as a man and thought of as a good person. Sankofa wants to be recognized as a legitimate member of her ethnic and racial community, and also to be recognized as a strong, butch, lesbian woman who is desirable in the eyes of other Black women. Yajaira and other bisexual girls in the group want to be seen as feminine and attractive in feminine ways, but also able to choose sexual partners actively, not just wait to be chosen by a boy, and to express that they are attracted to both femininity and masculinity in others. The bisexual girls assert that their bisexuality is not "diet gay" as some other students in the research team put it, but it represents a strategic resistance to hegemonic

heterosexuality and femininity discourses as much as butch lesbianism or gayness in boys. They assert their belonging in the queer community.

Table 6.1 Care of the Self

<b>Student</b>	<b>Telos or Goal – Who I want to be</b>	<b>Ethical Substance Bodies &amp; emotions</b>	<b>Mode of Subjection Interactions with others</b>	<b>Self-forming Activity Becoming political</b>
Mikey	Gay and respected man	Makeup and jewelry  Sexual experimentation  Self-confidence in masculinity and femininity	Young adult literature  Assistant Principal  Peers outside of school	LGBTQ community on Internet  Start gay-straight alliance
Sankofa	AG, Lesbian and Afrocentric/Black subject, strong	Dresses herself AG, feels most comfortable in boys' clothes	AG or butch teacher  Media images  Older girls	Became peer sex educator  Member of the Riding Rainbows – 4 AG girls in her school
Yajaira	Feminine woman and sexual agent, strong	Negotiates body parts and sexual identity  Sees nonheterosexuality in all races and communities	Diversity Club  Principal  Other bisexual girls	Advice time  Advocating against harassment in school

*Ethical Substance*

Foucault first asks: Which part of myself do I focus on to alter or shape in order to be an ethical subject? Young people engage with the discourses about sexuality and gender as they seek to understand what will make them ethical people. Ethics defines how one seeks pleasures and narrates a life in relation to others (Butler, 1999). One

decides what parts of one's identity must respond to social and ethical mandates and creates a self in response to the expectations and requirements of normative discursive practices about sexuality and gender. Students in the conversations below focus on health of their bodies, mental health, and desires/satisfaction.

One way youth negotiate the ethics of their sexual and gendered selves is through decisions about when they are mature enough to begin engaging sexually. The youth researchers have strong beliefs about having sex and the age at which it is right for young people to begin engaging in sexual activities. The conversation below highlights some of the concerns they have about it, and how they negotiate their concerns to come to an ethical decision for themselves.

Dylan: I don't agree that you should be having sex when you're 12, I think that's like really immature. Like, your mind-set is really immature. I think you should be...

Mikey: Yeah, you're like "oh, yay! Have sex!" and then you go watch Pokemon.

Dylan: Yeah.

Mikey: I think when you're old enough...I think 16 is a good age. Cause that's when you get a little bit of responsibility, as in like, you can get a job, you can get a car...

Dylan: But like...

Yajaira: How about 15? Fifteen's not bad, right?

Darla: Yeah, I was gonna say... [laughs]

Yajaira: What about people in...

Dylan: ... so, like, when you drive you can have sex?

Darla: ... what about the people in here who aren't 16 yet? [laughs]

Mikey: It's like at... Hey!

Dylan: So when you drive you can have sex? I think that's completely ridiculous.

Mikey: Hey, I had sex in cars.

Darla: You can't drive till you're 17...

Yajaira: I had sex at 15.

Darla: ... so when is it appropriate?

Sankofa: To have sex?

Darla: Yeah.

Chelsea: I mean, I was 14...

Sankofa: Where?

Darla: When.

Sankofa: [laughs] Oh! I was gonna say...

Darla: Well, that'll be another conversation. [laughs]

Dylan: Yeah, I was 14 and I thought it was fine at the time.

Sankofa: I was 14.

Mikey: Really? I was 15.

Yajaira: Me too.

Darla: I thought you were 14, with the girl?

Dylan: Did you say you were 14?

Dylan: Oh, you mean gay sex?

Mikey: Oh, I didn't mean like... That doesn't count.

Darla: You meant real sex.

Sankofa: He said that doesn't count! [laughs]

Mikey: That doesn't count, because it's not enjoyable!

[...]

Dylan: Your maturity level is like a lot different at 14 than compared to 17. Like, he's just going into high school and you're finishing high school? It's weird.

Mikey: It's weird. But you know what the biggest thing, though, because I met him... A boy, in person, like, as friends. Obviously, like, no commitment, whatever. And he was just like "I'm so glad I met you, you're like the one..."

Dylan: Uh huh.

Mikey:... And I was like "I'm not even going out with you, boy! Go back to watching Naruto."

Darla: But what about when it was you, and you were 14 and the other person was 17 or 18?

Mikey: That's different.

Dylan: She was...Yeah, she was 17.

Darla: Why is it different when it was you as like the little kid?

Mikey: Cause it was me, and I was mature!

Dylan: I was more mature and she was a little immature for her age.

The youth researchers here debated with one another about age and maturity markers that signal that one is old enough, or mature enough, to begin engaging in sex. Other symbols of maturity and responsibility, such as driving a car or holding a job indicate that young people have enough maturity to be trusted to engage as adults in the community and in social interactions. The young people suggested that about the same age, sixteen, might be the right time for adults to assume that young people will begin to have sexual relationships with one another. They argue that peer sexual encounters, where both the young people are the same age or maturity level, provide more ethical first sexual experiences because both parties engage with a similar kind of power in the relationship, based on experience and level of influence they have over one another.

Although Mikey and Dylan were both younger than the first person they had sex with, in each case both parties were similarly sexually inexperienced, so they had the opportunity to discover sensations, acts and emotions together for the first time. This leveled some of the differences that age created.

Conversely, as older teenagers, neither Mikey nor Dylan feels right engaging sexually with 14 year olds. They both recognized the eagerness and willingness-to-please of younger teens with regard to their older, more experienced status and that they would feel wrong taking advantage of the differential power that would confer on them. They felt the relationship would be unethical, because each person would not be able to exert as much power over the other, and they are looking for more equality between themselves and their boyfriends or girlfriends in interests and life stage. Dylan notes that someone that much younger is just entering high school, whereas Mikey is finishing and going off to college. This puts him and the 14-year-old who has a crush on him at very different places in their lives, and creates too many differences for them to engage in a relationship ethically. The ethical substance in these decisions, the emotions and bodily feelings about engaging in sex, help young people reflect on their experiences and the choices they have made around becoming sexual.

Mikey redefines real sex for the rest of the research team, when he declares that his experience of sex with a girl when he was 14 was not real sex. For him, that was an exercise, an experiment to see if he really did not desire girls, and it was confirmed because “it’s not enjoyable.” Mikey explained, “Yeah! Cause you know, how, like... You know how everybody is just like ‘Well, how do you know you're really gay?’...And I'm just like ‘How do I know if I'm really gay?’ And then I was like ‘You can't knock it

till you've tried it.' And then I tried it, and then I knocked it." In this description Mikey refutes the usual notion that "real" sex is sexual intercourse between a man and a woman and makes his own claim about sexual pleasures. For him, real sex is the sex that he enjoys, which is sex with a man. He claims this subjugated, experiential knowledge to counter the official knowledge, and to define for himself an ethical stance about sexuality.

Young people also describe their bodies as ethical substance in the ways they perform their gender. Jake defied gender expectations in his abilities, although his everyday gender performance included nothing that would be construed as beyond stereotypical masculine behavior. His friend Yajaira introduced the extraordinary elements of his gender expression to the group:

Yajaira: Oh, hold up. You know he could belly dance? He could belly dance. He was trying to teach me to belly dance this weekend.

Mikey: Oh my god, you're like the gay Shakira!

Yajaira: No, no lie. He could really belly dance.

Jake incorporated atypical gender expressions into his performance of gender that could be exhibited in queer spaces but that would not be visible at all times. In this way, he could engage with gender in a variety of ways in a club, for example, in order to show his interest in another man, or to gauge another's interest. However, because these elements were not part of his everyday dress or style, when he walked down the street in his neighborhood they were not visible. He had the opportunity to evaluate the safety of a space before revealing his gender expression and sexuality.

Bisexual girls in our research group expressed less need to conform to a certain gender identity or dress or performance standards. Sally says she has never really felt

pressure to conform to gender standards either way, and sometimes dresses more butch, although mostly she prefers to look very feminine.

Sally: I never really tried to fit myself into a stereotype.

Darla: No?

Sally: It was just... whatever.

Dylan: It's easier for bi people, though. Cause like, you don't have the ste...

Sally: It's whatever, right?

Dylan: Totally. You don't have the stereotype of like being a lesbian. Like, "that's a lesbian." You know? Not like, bi girls.

Mikey: There's no, like, bi look for guys...

Sally: There are actually some like really dykey bi girls. Seriously.

Mikey: Which is just, like, pointless.

Sankofa: Because you can't get a boyfriend because they don't want you to look like that.

Although Sally asserts and Dylan agrees that there is no “bi look” for girls, there is a gender expectation that bi girls will look feminine and pass as straight when they do not verbally declare themselves bisexual. As shown in chapter two (see Table 2.2), there are no stereotypical expectations about bisexual girls except that they will not defy gender expectations that would apply to heterosexual girls. Rather than leaving bisexual girls outside of gender discourses, bisexual girls are often interpellated by discourses that require them to be desirable to boys and men, and to conform to feminine gender standards.

Lesbian, gay and bisexual teens who participated as youth researchers in this project define the ethical substance of their care of the self in differing ways, depending

on their demographic backgrounds. Dylan, a white girl attending an independent school espouses strongly the idea that her sexuality is natural and genetic, since she has a gay father. She believes she cannot help being gay, because she was born that way, and so she should be accorded rights based on the naturalness of her homosexuality. She asserts that, “And I don't think, like, being gay is any better or any worse [than being straight].” She would consider not having children, because she would worry about passing on a gay gene to them, and burden them with facing the same hatred and ignorance that she faces. Her privilege in other areas of her life, such as race and class, allow her to isolate discrimination she faces to just her sexuality and possibly her gender, although she does not feel that being a girl has hampered her success in any way. She also claims the masculine role in relationships and so assumes a transgressive gender role in relation to her lovers. The privilege she experiences makes her feel that if LGBTQ youth have equal access in schools, there is no need to challenge systems of privilege or ask for fundamental changes in understandings of regulatory structures that stratify and classify populations. She just asks for inclusion.

Other students on the research team fashion their ethics of sexuality and gender in relation to other also unprivileged or less privileged communities. Muñoz suggests that a minoritarian subject's care of the self “is to veer away from models of the self that correlate with socially prescribed identity narratives” (Muñoz, 1999, p. 145). The identity narratives that young people veer away from, however, may be socially prescribed among their peers or represent larger social constructs that apply to a whole society. These constructs may be different within a youth subculture, an ethnic subculture or within a regional community. Mikey defines his gender, for example, in

contrast to other boys who are “shady.” He sees himself as more committed to relationships than most boys, either gay or straight, in a youth culture that promotes emotionally unavailable men and pleasure-seeking men, who avoid staying with one partner (Clay, 2007). Also, bisexual girls define themselves as sexual subjects within discourses that label girls as only passively sexual in relation to boys, as victims of sexual violence and as at-risk for pregnancy and rape (Fine & McClelland, 2006; Tolman, 1994).

### *Mode of Subjection*

How am I invited or encouraged to fashion myself in a certain way to be an ethical subject? Generally young people reported little encouragement to choose homosexuality or a non-normatively gendered self-presentation. It has been widely reported elsewhere, even adult LGBTQ figures often resist endorsing non-normative identities in young people for fear that their support may be viewed by other adults as predatory behavior or may result in the young person encountering danger (Aleman, 2004; Driver, 2007; Miceli, 2005). Most of the official messages about homosexuality and bisexuality and non-normative gender expression are negative, or at best indifferent, whether they come from families, teachers, administrators or community members. Some places, though, allow for the freedom to think about non-normative identities – these literal or figurative spaces may be gay-straight alliances, LGBTQ teachers’ classrooms, older students who invite younger ones to express non-normative identity, principals who outlaw hate language, or teachers who invite LGBTQ topics into lessons in ways that question the “natural” structures of society. Some of the modes of subjection presented below include a Diversity Club, family, media and peers.

Yajaira talked about a Diversity Club she attends at her schools. Initiated by several students and two teachers, it addresses questions of sexual diversity within communities of color. One of the teachers who facilitates is a lesbian of color, and the other is a White lesbian. They intentionally let students direct the conversations and lead the group in the direction they need it to go to give them the support they need in their school. At the point when Yajaira was in the research group, the club was functioning mostly as a support group and a space for students to get advice from one another and debate points of view about sexuality and gender expression. Yajaira reported the most interesting day so far in the group,

...they talked about, like, what made us turn that way? How did our family react to that? Or, um, some of the people in the group didn't even tell their parents, so we were giving them advice on how they should tell their parents, or give their parents clues. Or how they think their parents will react to that, if they were to tell them. So, it's like a support group. We all support each other.

For Yajaira and others at her school, this group functions as a space that invites them to express their sexuality and gender in non-normative ways. Especially for students who do not encounter support for their identities outside of school, getting recognition for the identity they claim from their peers and from trusted adults who are teachers in their school creates an opportunity for them to fashion their ethical self within the protected walls of an affirming social group. Because one of the teachers shares multiple identities with the students – she is a woman of color and a lesbian – she offers students an example of how to navigate the multiple communities they live in. Though her politics may be the same as the White lesbian teacher's politics, her performance of her “minoritarian ontolog[y]...conjures the possibility of social agency within a world bent

on the negation of minoritarian subjectivities” (Muñoz, 1999, pp. 145-146). She makes visible the possibility for the students’ subjectivities.

Besides school, family is an institution in which students’ must negotiate their identity and the ethic of their self-presentation. In order to excavate discourses young people and their parents interact with when a child declares a non-normative sexuality or gender identity, I asked the student researchers what they would say and/or do if they had a non-heterosexual child. The following conversation elucidates the many responses from families that youth researchers encountered.

Darla: What would you say to them?

Dylan: I wouldn't say "are you sure you're a lesbian?"

Mikey: "It's a hard world."

Sankofa: Yeah. Yeah! It's just a phase.

Mikey: You know the worst...

Dylan: It's just a phase...

Sally: Yeah!

Mikey: You know what the worst thing is? "Why?"

Sankofa: Why.

Sally: Why.

Mikey: Cause I like boys. [laughter]

Dylan: No. Or you say something, really like... vulgar and sexual...

Mikey: Oh, I did...

Dylan: ... "cause I want..." [laughs]

Mikey: Cause I like... [popping sound with mouth]

Sankofa: I made the mistake of saying that one time. It wasn't that great.

Mikey: I said something like that one time and they... You know what they said? They said I'm gay, and they turned and walked away.

Sankofa: Yeah. He walked away.

Dylan: My mom doesn't care at all...

Darla: You said that to your father?

Sankofa: Yeah. I... He was like "why?!" I was like "I like the same things you do."

Mikey: I like the same things you do!

Sankofa: I was like... He was like "what makes you attracted to a girl?" I was like "you know... You see her, look at her ass." He just... he was like "get out the car."

Young people encountered responses that told them non-heterosexual and/or non-normative gender desires are “just a phase,” “lonely,” something they will “grow out of,” something that they might be pressured into or otherwise do even if they were not “sure” they were gay, lesbian or bisexual, and demanded they defend their non-normative desires. Simply by asking “why?” family members and others challenged young people’s knowledge of themselves, their mental health, and their morality. Depending on the context of the conversation and the asker, young people might hear the question “why?” as a challenge to their maturity by asking them if they are sure they know what they desire in sex and love. They might also hear a challenge to their mental health or physical health, if they know the person thinks that homosexuality is a sickness or links it to disease. In religious families, young people might hear a question about their goodness, or the question, “Why do you choose to engage in sin?” These questions cast doubt on a young person’s sexual and gender subjectivity and attempted to discipline

their desires through subtle shaming and insinuated that their choices are wrong. Young people created counter narratives by claiming their desires and challenging their questioners about how they come to know their desires and to act upon them. When Mikey made vulgar noises with his mouth suggesting sexual acts and Sankofa told her father she is attracted to the same things he is attracted to, they challenged their questioners to account for their attractions and acts. They said, you like it, why should I not like it.

Among peers this kind of questioning and inviting happens as well, sometimes in positive ways and sometimes in negative ways.

Ali: I don't know. I think a lot of people, especially gay people in my school, they yell out to other gay people, their gay friends "hey fag!" or something like that...

Sankofa:... and it's become such a norm, I think, around that whole gay community in my school that other people now think it's OK, straight people...

Ali: ... think it's OK to just say it, so they say it. And then, like, some of my straight friends hear it and my gay friends don't mind, then that's the way they see it, that it's OK to say it.

LGBTQ youth in schools recognize and name one another as “fag” or sometimes “dyke” as a way of naming and making one another visible (Butler, 2004). These practices constitute them as “intelligible subjects” even if they also insult or “wound” one another (Youdell, 2004, p. 480). By calling one another with the word that describes a wounded identity used in another context, LGBTQ students reclaim the resistance in the identity and diminish the power of the wound – although the language can still be used to wound in another context and cannot be completely neutralized, these practices also claim the joy and freedom within the abject identity. Youdell (2004) summarizes this discursive power:

As Butler has argued, it means that they are open to strategic reinscription, they can take on non-ordinary meanings and they can function in contexts where they have not belonged. This suggests that a given identity is not either wounded or privileged, inert or capable of resistance. Rather, the possibility of both injury and resistance is intrinsic to performative constitutions. Indeed, a discursive moment of injury may simultaneously open up particular possibilities for resistance. (pp. 481, emphasis in original)

Multiple understandings can be made of language in interactions, and young people understand this flexibility of meaning.

In another conversation the youth researchers reflect again on the opportunities offered them to think about their identities and act with agency. In answering a question about what it means for them to be LGBTQ identified, Yajaira answered “fun.” She questioned if the word fun described what she was feeling, so she elaborated.

Yajaira: I don't know, I just couldn't find a word. So I just put fun. But what I wrote was, um, because it's different and it makes you feel unique. It makes certain people want to know more about you. Then when my friend first found out I was bisexual, in a way it brought us closer and I was shy because I thought it was gonna bring us apart, being that she's straight. But anyway, she started calling more to ask about me and my girlfriend and how did I become bisexual and how do I interact with people that don't like that?

Mikey: She's curious.

Yajaira: Yeah. Real curious. But she's still my best friend.

[...]

Sally: Well, it's completely different from being straight. Like, seriously. Everybody else is like heterosexual... and then when they find a lesbian or a gay person it's like "oh, how's that like?!" I mean, it's different, but the same.

Darla: Mm hmm. Enlightening. I want to get back to this because Sally said something... Help, what did you say again?

Sally: Oh, because it's different from being heterosexual. But it's sort of the same, but people just think it's different.

Darla: Oh yeah. People think it's different, and that's part of what Yajaira said, too. So, because it puts you in this space where you're having to... sometimes be

confrontational, even. But sometimes just be, um, enlightening for other people, in fact. But it makes you... what? It's not like you just, you were born and you grow up, and then you became... Well, I mean it sort of is, but, people have to ask you about it, right? It's not like if you just were born and grew up and started dating boys. No one would ask you about that. No one would say, "How is that? What's it like for you?"

Sally: Yeah. Cause I actually liked girls before I liked guys, so I can really say that, yeah.

Darla: Nobody would question it. But now, because you're... whatever... lesbian, gay, bisexual, people stop you and they make you think about it. They make you say why. Why are you doing that?

Sally: Why would you do that?

The youth researchers describe the ways the “mad questions” their peers ask them about identifying as lesbian, gay, or bisexual, and about their desires and relationships, offer them moments of freedom within the discourses of normalization that may prompt the questions. The practice of reflecting on the ways they care for themselves, by developing an ethical stance in which they decide how to conduct their relationships, perform their gender, and define their sexuality as a practice of freedom (McWhorter, 1999). “Freedom is the ontological condition of ethics. But ethics is the considered form that freedom takes when it is informed by reflection” (Foucault, 1997b, p. 284). Upon reflection in conversations with peers young people learn what they know about their bodies and the pleasures they enjoy. As they talk about the ethical decisions they made to arrive at an identity, they come to understand more the discourses of sexuality and gender at work in their social networks, and to understand the ways they act as discursive agents to create space for sexuality and gender expressions.

At the same time, young people feel pressure from normalizing discourses on their relationships and their own expressions. The additional pressures of hiding one’s

relationship from parents, peers, teachers or strangers, the expectation that the relationships cannot become permanent because they are not widely recognized through the institution of marriage (now in four states with the addition of Vermont and Iowa) work to undermine young people's belief in their relationships. They believe this may contribute to the inconstancy of their partners and themselves, at times.

Dylan: From the outside world looking into you, their response. Not your own...

Mikey: Yeah, cause like, it's already hard you know, to like, maintain any relationship. But then you have, like, people who are like "oh, you're gay?!" And you can't even get married, and all those things happening. And it's just like...

Sally: Yeah...

Dylan: Well, also the stigma in the gay male community that like all men are whores and want to go, like, sleep with everyone else...

Darla: Mm hmm. So it's harder, not having certain structures, like the... expectation that you meet someone, you get married, you start having babies, you grow old together...

Mikey: Yeah.

Sally: Yeah.

Darla: ...not having those expectations makes it harder, too, you're saying.

LGBTQ high school students resist the discourses that say they are only interested in sex, have sex all the time, want to have sex with anyone of the same gender (or either gender if they are bisexual), and also resist the discourses that frame teens as “hooking up” and unwilling or unable to commit to relationships. Their disidentifications (Muñoz, 1999) with negative stereotypes of young people and sexuality – which often elide teens’ agency in sexual decision making and their responsibility for those decisions – creates at times identities about relationships which follow a traditional dyad in monogamous union model. In that sense, young people do not seem to demand new models of relationships

with the discursive power they wield through their sexuality and gender expressions. However, as much as they challenge the limits of agency within the discourses of sexuality and gender and adolescence, and ask for recognition of their bodies and pleasures, they are creating new spaces within which their peers can imagine themselves in new gender and sexuality identities.

Young people also interacted with discourses in media such as youth literature, television programs, music and films, fashioning themselves after the popular culture images of queer youth and adults. Discussions included references to teen literature in which teens deal with relationship situations like the ones referenced by the youth researchers above, where a girlfriend or boyfriend has a different ethic about speaking to friends, teachers or parents about their identity. Mikey loved this story, where a gay boy goes with a friend who is a girl to the prom and relationship drama ensued:

Mikey: Yeah. Because his boyfriend is in the closet. And then what happens, his boyfriend gets high and he gets high, and he runs over with a stripper, and the stripper actually ends up being deaf and is a drug dealer... Oh, it's complicated.

Yajaira: Whoa.

Darla: I think I read that one.

Mikey: It's good, though! I was like, "I want my prom to be like that."

Stories like this one, and other youth literature featuring lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer and questioning teen characters let young readers imagine themselves in the situations the characters find themselves in. Readers can judge the situation from an omniscient observer's perspective and decide if they would take the same course of action in their own lives. Although the story presented in this conversation is exaggerated for the purposes of humor, teen literature in general presents problems which

teens themselves solve, and is designed to help young people begin to think about their agency in making decisions. They also present various kinds of narratives and have been documented to allow readers to imagine various ways of living by allowing characters to transcend their discursive circumstances (Bean & Moni, 2003). This is another way young people engage in caring for themselves as they decide how they want to live.

In a similar manner, young people look to the lives of celebrities as they imagine how to live ethical gendered and sexual lives. They examine a star's expression of gender, what kind of respect or disrespect his or her gender expression receives from other celebrities and the media, how he or she talks about sexuality and a dating life in the press and from these clues the young people try to piece together the truth of the singers and actors they admire. In the conversation below, young people sort through the rumors about three of their favorite women stars.

Mikey: You know who's a lesbian? Alicia Keys.

Dylan: Yeah. Alicia... Queen Latifah and Missy Elliot are lesbians.

Sankofa: Yeah, they are. That's why I like them so much.

Dylan: There's no way Missy Elliot can be straight.

Mikey: I love Missy Elliot's new song.

Dylan: She's so cool.

Sankofa: Yeah, I love that song...

Mikey: "Ching, ching, gettin' paid over here" I love that song. And I don't even like hip-hop like that.

Yajaira: That's true? I thought that was a rumor.

Dylan: No, no. She's dating... She's been dating a woman for four years.

Mikey: Yeah, I saw that on like, MySpace. We saw that on MySpace, right.

Sankofa: Yeah, the picture?

Interestingly, these three women have all denied or avoided questions about being a lesbian in the press. They each, however, say in interviews they understand where that rumor comes from because they are strong women who do not seem to need a man for their social or their business lives. They each have lived very public lives and had great success while refusing to conform to gender norms at one time or another. Young people see the celebrities pushing for public space for women to be attractive, strong, independent of a heterosexual relationship and less feminine in their dress and they admire the celebrities for it. They would, however, admire even more an outright stance that disclaimed heterosexuality as necessary or preferable. Having a celebrity say that, in hip hop especially, would challenge notions about sexuality and race and would undermine fears that these women can only remain successful as long as they are not too “in your face” with their sexuality, too explicitly non-heterosexual. It would challenge stereotypes that a woman can only be successful if there is a possibility that she has sex appeal for a masculine audience.

In their interactions with media, including celebrities and fictional characters, as well as with peers, family and teachers, young people are invited or discouraged to express non-heterosexual sexuality or non-normative gender. These interactions, even when they are not overtly inviting, provide opportunities for young people to reflect upon their desires and the pleasures that they wish to pursue, and to reimagine the body they want to present in various settings. They provide young people with a discursive space in which to reflect on the ways they care for themselves, by developing an ethical stance in which they decide how to conduct their relationships, perform their gender, and define

their sexuality as a practice of freedom (McWhorter, 1999). In these spaces young people sometimes destabilize discursive practices meant to make their identities appear wounded or undesirable, by reinscribing them as pleasurable, interesting and fun (Youdell, 2004).

### *Self-Forming Activity*

What practices do I engage in order to fashion myself as an ethical subject? The youth researchers reported engaging in many physical practices in their processes of fashioning themselves as sexual and gendered subjects. They shared examples of “acting gay” when seeing someone cute, wearing eyeliner, necklaces, hair product, specific clothing and fashioning themselves after the popular culture images of queerness. These acts often involve signifying with gender to reflect one’s sexuality, to attract the partner one wants to attract, and to achieve one’s desire. Youth researchers also remarked that part of the process of fashioning an ethical self includes becoming political, attending youth events and programs focused on sexuality and gender, deciding to speak about sexuality, and asking for recognition of non-normative selves at school.

One of the ethical questions young people encounter on declaring non-heterosexual sexuality or non-normative gender identity is how they understand themselves to fit into national or local LGBTQ movements or politics, and whether or not they define themselves as like or unlike the people whose faces represent those movements. Dylan describes an attitude often found in adult gay community blogs or political rhetoric, which obscures the link between gender and sexuality. She says, “It’s a lot harder to be transgender than to be gay. And it’s not... To me, it’s not even like sexual orientation at that point, it’s like gender identity. So I don’t know why it’s GLBTQ. But,

whatever. It sounds... The acronym is fine.” This sparked a discussion in which the research team marked out some of the links between gender identity and sexuality, especially in the legibility of queer bodies. Her attitude is a common one, which describes people with gender identity or expression differences as somehow fundamentally unlike lesbian, gay, and bisexual people, especially those who conform fairly closely to gender norms. Although Dylan describes herself as “the masculine one” in relationships, and as “butch,” she still knows that her body reads feminine on the street, albeit rejecting many tropes of femininity. Dylan is negotiating her place within the discourses of sexuality and gender, performing a self that can be recognized within the norms of gender, but declaring to those who can read the symbols, her butch lesbian identity.

The image of “the homosexual” in the media or the conversations of adults does not seem to have defined the body or image that young people felt they had to conform to in order to be LGBTQ, or limited the possibilities for a community of people who lived and loved differently from their family. In one of our research discussions I asked the youth researchers what their ideas about homosexuality had been like as children, and where those ideas came from.

Yajaira: Like, the opposite sex. Like, if it was a girl, and I thought she was gay, I thought she looked like a boy. If it was a boy, and he was gay, I thought he looked like a girl. 'Cause that's how you see it, like on comedy shows? Like, there used to be these guys making fun of gay people, and I used to laugh at it. But, I don't know.

Darla: Did you think about it as a race... As a certain...?

Dylan: Like, the person in your head, was he or she white?

Yajaira: Oh. Nah. I always pictured them to be dark-skinned.

Darla: Dark-skinned.

Yajaira: I don't know, like a White person with a tan, like just dark-skinned.

Darla: Mm hmm. How about you, Dylan?

Dylan: Yeah, like honestly, like, I've been... Like, there's been gay people around me all the time. Like, my mom's best friend when I was younger was like... Out, gay woman, and she was like Puerto Rican... No, she's not, she's Dominican?... So like, I never... And like, at the time she was like feminine, long hair, and... So I just never really had, like, that stereotype of like thinking of...

Darla: So you had a lot of...

Dylan: Yeah. There's just been gay people around all the time.

Darla: ...images to supply you with real people, that you didn't have to be making up who it is. Because that... Or this... Gender atypical person that Yajaira is talking about, too.

Dylan: Yeah

Darla: You know, if you're a woman and you're gay then you look like a man...

Dylan: Oh, too masculine and all.

Darla: Yeah, you're super-but. Or if you're a man and you're gay, then you're super-feminine, right? You're hopping around, prancing around, squeaking...

Yajaira: No like... [laughs]. For some reason, when I was younger, too, I used to think that, um, people who were gay... Like it was... For girls, I thought they had a little... thing. You know? I don't know why.

Darla: A little penis?

Yajaira: Yeah. I don't know why! [laughs] I don't know what I was thinking, but I used to always think that.

Yajaira and Dylan reflected on their ideas about homosexuality growing up.

Yajaira's came from comedy shows and were not racially marked as significantly different from herself. She pictured them as "dark-skinned" or like "a White person with a tan." Perhaps this is because she thought of them as looking like some of the people

she saw around her, the Puerto Ricans and other Latinos of the Bronx. She also imagined lesbians as very butch and with a penis. This belief might have come from her knowledge of coupling as usually heterosexual, heterosexual sex as involving a penis, and mapping her knowledge of heterosexual sex acts onto women's bodies. Without information about lesbian sex acts, her imagination may have decided it was as likely that women could have penises as sex without penises.

Dylan received more reliable information about lesbian lives and relationships in her own relationship with her mother's best friend. This woman challenged the gender stereotypes that labeled all lesbians as masculine, and, although she may not have received specific knowledge of lesbian sex, in asking questions of her mother she may have been told that a penis was not necessary for sex. Dylan's mother and father divorced when she was a child, amicably, when her father came out as a gay man, so her early childhood pictures of relationships were much more varied than some children experience.

Dylan and Yajaira understand the references to the stereotypical effeminate White male body that often depicts homosexuality, especially in the popular imagination if someone does not have other LGBTQ images available (C. Cohen & Jones, 1999; Conerly, 2000). Each says this stereotype has become familiar to her after she identified herself as part of an LGBTQ community, but was not part of her childhood understanding of homosexuality. Neither had to negotiate this stereotype in their own understanding of their desires, but each girl engaged with her body and her understanding of sexual and gendered bodies, as well as raced and classed bodies, as she sought to formulate her own understanding of her sexual self.

Mikey reflected on his gender expression before and after he came out, as he engaged with the images of the gay man he wanted to emulate. He used to dress more traditionally masculine, with baggy jeans and untucked t-shirts, and no make-up or jewelry. Now he wears eyeliner some days, and often wears necklaces or rings that contain shiny fake jewels. Even before he came out, though, he would change his body carriage, voice and mannerisms if he wanted to flirt with a boy he found attractive.

Mikey: ... before that I was like really like [butch growling noise]. Like, really like trying to hide it, whatever. But when I would see somebody who I thought was gay, or cute, or both...I would instantly, like, turn up the gayness...

Darla: Uh huh...

Mikey: Like, like, if I'm... I can be like this. And if I see a gay person, I was like...[shy, effeminate voice] "Hi." Like, but, I wouldn't say you know, like I'm gay but, like, I would instant...I would act in a, like, stereotypically gay way.

Mikey tested his desirability as a gay boy before he declared his sexuality or changed his dress to find pleasure in expressing his gender. As part of his formation as an ethical subject, he used his experience to understand how his body, mannerisms, and dress would attract the interest of those he felt an attraction for. In this way Mikey engaged with expectations of what a gay boy looks like, how he dresses and how he carries his body and uses his voice. As he sought out examples of gayness and sought to make his body recognizable and desirable as a gay man.

In the research meetings we discussed whether these gender expectations were felt as requirements by LGBTQ youth. Did they, we wondered, feel they had to conform to femme or effeminate gender performances as gay boys or masculine or butch gender performances as lesbians? And we questioned if there were specific contents to these gender performances that would signal femme or butch, and without which young people

would feel that they were inadequately lesbian or gay. Sankofa brought this example up in our meeting:

Sankofa: You know like... All right, so this is more like the... urban lesbians... You know, like the ones that dress like me...

Mikey: The gangsters.

Sankofa: Yeah, whatever... Wearing boxers.

Darla: Boxers. Right...

Dylan: I wear boxers.

Sankofa: I wear boxers, but like...

Mikey: I wear boxers! I am a lesbian.

Dylan: Some girls like it. Like... some girls like it, though.

Darla: Lots and lots, yes.

Sankofa: That's just me. But, like... there's this girl in my school and she just came out and I just see, like... she never wore boxers before, but now...

Darla: Now she's wearing boxers.

Sankofa: ... she does.

Darla: Cause she thinks she should, right?

Sankofa: Yes! That... I did not...

Darla: She's signifying "lesbian."

Sankofa:... to wear boxers.

Mikey: She's like... she's like... She thinks it's required.

Sankofa indicates that wearing boxers is her style, something she feels she would wear regardless of how that gender expression correlated with sexuality in the larger LGBTQ community's perception, but she thinks that the girl in her school may feel pressured to

conform to gender expectations that in order to be a lesbian a girl must be masculine, and in order to signal masculinity she will wear boxers. These expectations, and the possibility that a young lesbian or gay boy, bisexual girl or boy or trans student will not conform to the group's idea of the right kind of LGBTQ youth, constitute the heterotopia that gay-straight alliances can present. In a school, if there is acceptance for butch girls, or trans students that conform to a gender norm, but not for students that push the boundaries of intelligible bodies or sexualities, some youth continue to be excluded by the structures designed to serve them. These interpellative moves may discipline LGBTQ bodies into particular gender expressions so that they can be intelligible and accepted within the immediate social community of school. The girl in Sankofa's narrative indicates that she recognizes the signals shared among African American butch lesbian girls in her school, and in the wider LGBTQ community, and engages with the community by dressing as she sees other girls dressing in the gender and sexuality identity that she would like to express.

In another example of creating community and engaging the discourses of the LGBTQ community, the youth in the research team created a space where they could ask one another for ethical advice about how to conduct relationships, how to pose questions to partners, how to think about what happens in their interactions with potential or current lovers. This space, called "Advice Time" took place at the beginning of the research meetings. Each youth researcher could bring a question or problem to the group to get support, suggestions, factual information, referrals or questions to help them make a decision. In these discussions, competing definitions of relationship ethics sometimes

emerged and young people debated the merits of the psychological, medical and moral discourses about sexuality and gender they often encounter.

Yajaira: But, like, I get over boys faster than girls. Guys, I cry over them. Girls, like I just feel like killing myself when I break up with a girl. Like, man, you know, I broke up with her, why'd she do that to me? Then I just... I really fester with girls.

Dylan: Yeah, it's just... It's like you're vulnerable in it. And that's like... You know, he's an asshole, obviously.

Sally: Yeah.

Dylan: But you made yourself vulnerable, and that's healthy.

Mikey: Yeah. Cause I bet you, right before his ex came into the picture he was saying, like "oh, you're my homie!" Like you his princess and shit.

Yajaira: No, we started going out. Like, we was going out for like two months, whatever. But I knew the nigga for mad years, so...

Yajaira: And that happened...

Mikey: Boys are shady these days. I'm not! But...

Dylan: It's not... It's not worth it, then...

Sally: All straight boys, though...

Dylan: ... to even think about him, you know what I'm saying? Just get over him.

Sally: Cause he's straight, right? Uh. Straight boys... I hate straight boys. I mean, I go out with a straight boy, but I hate straight boys. It's like, constant programming. Like, you go through phases, like, "Oh, I like you now!" "Oh, my god, no, no we're going too fast!" "Oh no, I want to mess with other girls." And then they come back and then, like, you know...? Straight boys.

Dylan praised Yajaira for taking the risk of making herself emotionally vulnerable to the boy she has been dating by having feelings of attachment and love for him, although Yajaira felt used by him since he decided to go back to his ex-girlfriend. Sally, however, presents a different ethics of being in relationship with straight boys. She

asserts that girls should try not to be vulnerable to straight boys, and instead should try to remain in control of the situation and their feelings at all times. She describes this relationship as “programming,” in which the girl must try to get the boy to act in the way she wants him to act. She asserts that boys do not know how to behave properly in relationships, because they learn to lie, cheat and avoid commitment, so girls must spend their energies in relationships teaching them. Although Dylan espouses an ethics that promotes equality between relationship partners and mutual vulnerability and openness to one another, Sally’s working relationship ethic makes her an unequal relationship partner, both more knowledgeable and less powerful, and tightly in control of the information that her partner receives about her and her feelings. She manages her vulnerability in relationship with straight boys by attempting to program them to be the partner she wants. These competing discourses of the psychology of relationships were not resolved by the discussion during Advice Time, but constituted an ongoing negotiation with power relations as young people tried to understand the correct ethical stance for themselves in relationships.

Through political involvement both locally in their schools and in the larger city or Internet community young people form themselves within the models provided by lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and queer bodies and ideas. As they encounter the discourses in LGBTQ communities they may find that they will resist them as well, as some young people have done when offered the opportunity to join a gay-straight alliance in their schools that is discursively defined to exclude their bodies. Interacting with the political and social discourses of lesbian and gay, and to a lesser extent bisexual, trans and queer communities on the Internet and in community centers in New York City, young people

find counternarratives about ethical ways to be in relationships, possibilities for fashioning gender or sexual identities and moral, psychological or medical truths about non-heterosexual or gender non-conforming bodies. These counternarratives provide spaces of freedom in which young people can form their own identities.

### Relationships to Others and to Self

Foucault examines the relationship possibilities within homosexuality in a 1981 interview entitled “Friendship as a Way of Life” (Foucault, 1997a). In it he suggests that rather than examining one’s homosexuality in order to understand the truth of oneself by asking “Who am I?” it would “perhaps . . . be better to ask oneself, ‘What relations, through homosexuality, can be established, invented, multiplied, and modulated?’” (p. 135). Foucault asserts that relationships between persons, outside of the heterosexual matrix and not limited to procreation, allow for many intimacies, affections, eroticisms and loves that are unavailable to others who reject the possibility of non-heterosexual love. In these relations, emotional and physical needs usually restricted to blood relations or spouses can be met by others with whom one shares an elaborated notion of friendship. Friendship and relationship possibilities offered by changing the assumptions about gender roles, about the place of desire in relationships and about the bodily intimacies between persons (who may or may not be lovers and may or may not be in romantic relationships) disrupt the categories of relations that schools formally seek to produce. As students, both LGBTQ and their heterosexual peers, work to create or maintain friendship and community and to be the sexual selves that they wish to be, they engage with the care of the self.

In the research meetings youth researchers and I used our experiences of our own desires and pleasures, the ways we have fashioned our genders and the interpersonal relationships that our visibility as lesbian, gay and bisexual people has permitted and complicated.

It isn't easy to make ourselves aware of what official interpretations of the world leave out, to find where the gaps lie and where, therefore, the potential lies for thinking and living differently. Sometimes we can remember events in our own lives that reveal alternatives or at least indicate places where official knowledge doesn't quite cover its slips. (McWhorter, 1999, p. 199)

As McWhorter claims, it can be very difficult to imagine the constructs that shape our understanding of the world as historically and geographically situated rather than universal and natural. Young people involved in this research project made one another aware of these gaps when they validated one another's experiential and lived knowledge of their sexualities and genders.

Researchers discussed the ethical substance of their engagement with sexuality and gender, which included both the feelings they have about desire and the behaviors they enact to find pleasures. They imagined themselves as sexual agents, struggled with questions of the intersections of sexuality and gender, and also sexuality, gender, race, ethnicity, nationality and religion. They also established ethical guidelines for themselves about the age at which one can engage in sex acts with another person, and worked to ethically manage those relationships with an understanding about coercion and power. They imagine themselves beyond the limitations of the popular imagination which views adolescents as unable to control their hormonal urges and as subject to victimization because they will not be able to negotiate power in sexual relationships.

Research team members understood how they were invited to become sexual subjects in a variety of settings: by their school administrators and teachers, by their parents, by their cultural communities, by their peers and by their lovers. The teens understood the necessity of negotiating these settings to avoid being attacked physically or verbally, but also understood that it is sometimes necessary to challenge their interlocutors, even when it involves making someone uncomfortable or requires physically defending oneself. Youth researchers also understood that their gender presentation sometimes would speak loudly and be interpreted as a challenge to hegemonic gender and sexuality structures. In addition, they realize that their gender and sexuality expressions occur within historical and geographic settings that structure them in specific ways, and that they are not completely novel or agentic. The young people whose voices are represented in this chapter actively engage in asserting a subjectivity of sexuality and gender that feels comfortable and pleasurable to them.

Young people are engaging with relationships in ways that honor what Foucault calls the ethics of friendship. Foucault asks, “are we able to have an ethics of acts and their pleasures which would be able to take into account the pleasure of the other?” (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1983, p. 233) in a conversation in which he expresses a wish for sexual relationships which can involve reciprocity and action, not domination and passivity. I read in young people’s negotiations with the ethics of sexuality and aesthetics of gender expression a desire to engage with others in sexual relationships that can involve mutuality and respect, to form an ethics that requires honoring the pleasures one enjoys the desire one feels. In this way young people are both subjects of

psychological, medical, moral and pedagogical discourses of sexuality and resist these discourses to fashion themselves as sexual and gendered subjects.

## CHAPTER 7: What More Can Be Done?

*But I do think the fantasy of transcending gender in the name of sexuality, when and where it is installed as a heuristic for sexuality studies, keeps us from asking certain crucial questions about the formation of sexuality across genders, about how identification works within lesbian and gay sexuality, how it is implicated in heterosexual desire, how heterosexual identifications are implicated as well in homosexual desire, how normative gender does not always line up with normative sexuality, and how cross-gendered identification is not the aberration, but the very condition of gender norms.*  
(Butler, 1999)

The research presented in this dissertation examines discourses of sexuality and gender in schools to understand both the school climate in which lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer and questioning are forming their own sense of their sexual subjectivity, and to examine what other policies and practices schools might engage in to get beyond safety and tolerance. Although this research started from the position that safety is not enough, in fact, schools in states with longstanding safe schools programs for LGBTQ youth (Szalacha, 2004) have not managed to protect students from harassment, violence, and death. As I sat writing this conclusion, a boy committed suicide after being taunted as a “fag” at his school (Valencia, 2009). His mother had begged teachers to do something about it, but said nothing was done to stop the harassment of her son. The school’s response did not disrupt the structures that maintain hegemonic heterosexuality and masculinity. The boy being harassed and his harasser were asked to sit together at lunch to overcome their differences. This “punishment” equalizes their positions – as if each were putting forth an opinion on a topic, not that one was trying to erase the body of the other or to squeeze him into conformity with measures that his body resisted. It also reifies binary gender and sexuality and equalizes heterosexuality and homosexuality by acting as if each child was making a simple choice about becoming a sexual being in a certain way, as if each did not have to wrestle mightily with the pressures to only fit into

one binary location, as if one of those positions didn't accrue much more social power than the other and the as if the other wasn't used to diminish the social power of the person against whom it was leveraged. One young person was interpellating the other, creating the other as abject, wounded (Youdell, 2004).

Clearly, disrupting the hierarchical, binary categories of sexuality and gender in schools is an urgent task. An incident like this presents teachers and administrators with a unique opportunity to challenge students to explain what they mean by the language they are using and why they imagine that their assumptions about other students are correct, even when the student denies the purported identity. Adults in this situation, rather than exhibiting embarrassment about the sexuality and gender identities interpellated in the students' conversations, can confront the structures that make students' assumptions possible and work to disrupt the necessary connections between gender expression and sexuality, and between normative masculinity and heterosexuality for boys. It may be necessary in these situations, and it may have been necessary in Carl Walker-Hoover's situation, to also challenge racialized gender expectations, and to disrupt the connection between violence and sexual uncontrollability and Black boys (Somerville, 2000). Educational institutions can and should be places where social structures such as sexual identities, race, and gender can be examined for the power various position hold and the functions of society they maintain.

### Summary of Project

This project is based in the principles of participatory action research (PAR) in which students were recruited to work as co-researchers gathering and analyzing data. PAR focuses on the local setting and how it interacts with theory and with the larger

structural forces in place (Cahill, 2005; Fine et al., 2003). The questions we asked existed within a setting of virulent national attitudes about teen sex, national policies requiring abstinence only until marriage sex education, and rampant homophobic discourses deployed for the purposes of political gain. PAR is interested in the local, personal knowledge that comes from lived experiences. A goal of this research was to offer alternatives to the “official” understandings of schools’ roles in sexuality and gender socialization.

In order to examine the functioning of discourses in secondary schools, high school students were recruited for this project as researchers and as participants. Youth researchers engaged in work on the project once a week for six months and continued meeting with me after that time to provide ongoing feedback on the analysis of the conversation data. Students identified as queer, trans or gender variant were solicited as researchers and ultimately eight lesbian, gay and bisexual students joined. Queer, trans and gender non-conforming youth were sought as researchers because of the ways that sexuality and gender discourses were deployed *at them* during their years of schooling, and the reflection that they were able to bring to the analysis. As we worked to identify discourses of sexuality and gender in schools, their personal experiences of having been singled out by these discourses made the experience of coming to awareness of them more direct.

In this PAR project, the students and I researched and wrote in order to form an archive of the discourses about sexuality and gender that circulated in and around schools. The archive was developed from newspaper articles, school publications and curriculum, sex education policy, New York City Department of Education (NYCDOE)

policies about LGBTQ students, NYCDOE communications to students or families about harassment and bullying policies, city, state and federal policies on sex education content, and curriculum content. These statements were categorized according to the norms they represented: psychological, medical, religious/moral, or pedagogical, or as representing alternative discourses (Foucault, 1978).

The researchers also engaged in weekly writing projects and discussions to document the everyday language and behavior about sexuality and gender that students heard and observed in schools. These observations allowed the group to understand the ways that subjectivities are produced by gender/sexuality discourses. The discourses identified in the document research and in writing exercises were used to create a Queer Q Sort which was administered to a snowball sample of other LGBTQ identified adolescents ( $n = 21$ ). We used the Queer Q Sort to measure LGBTQ teens' beliefs about their own and their peers' agency and the structural limitations in creating themselves as sexual and gendered subjects. The statements students sorted represented verbal, behavioral or interactional cues that students encounter and that compel gender or sexuality conformity or resistance. Because this method examines the prevalence of the discourse, it gave us evidence with which to make claims about the discursive fields in which young people are fashioning themselves as sexual subjects.

Finally, students created spatial representations (maps) of spaces in their schools, and identified the areas in which various discourses are deployed. Enumerating and locating these discourses allowed the researchers to see how hegemonic discourses regulate spaces – and identities within spaces – as well as what kinds of resistances emerge in response to them. Student researchers showed how different expressions of

sexuality and gender may be encouraged, allowed, curtailed, or surreptitiously enacted in different spaces, and create meanings. Understanding the spatial arrangement of discourses allowed for greater understanding of the ways that the various actors in schools – students, teachers, and administrators – used their access to power to deploy discourses, to resist interpellation, to coerce conformity, or to structure small spaces of freedom for their own sexual subjectivity. This documentation showed how heterosexism continues, even when policies suggest that LGBTQ students should have the freedom to express their gender and sexuality in school.

### Summary of Findings

The construction and execution of our Queer Q Sort functions to create a genealogy of the present (Foucault, 1998). In the list of statements compiled and through the process of sorting the statements to provide a picture of the discursive landscape of their schools, young people identified the contradictory narratives about sexuality and gender that exist among adolescents. In these statements we identified many positive ideas about non-heterosexuality and gender non-conformity, but still found more negative ideas. Although young people claim “Being LGBTQ is fun,” they also admit that many people believe that “Homosexuality is wrong.” LGBTQ youth have created counter-narratives about sexuality and gender expression that make it acceptable for the most popular girl in a school to be a lesbian and for experimentation with bisexuality to be an option for many girls. Among girls, these spaces of freedom may provide options for experimentation with sexual agency that girls do not experience in relationships with boys.

Among young people of New York City, acceptance of LGBTQ peers seems to be increasing in many schools and communities, although some students still encounter harassment at the hands of their peers, and many trans students still leave school because of the violence they experience there (Advocates for Children of New York, 2005). LGBTQ youth researchers and the young people surveyed in the Queer Q Sort confirmed that safety continues to be a concern for them in their schools. However, more important than the concern for their physical or emotional wellbeing in interactions that take place in school, students express a fear that the information they receive in health and sex education may be partial, inaccurate, untimely or irrelevant to their lives. Students asked that adults take seriously their requests for reliable and timely information about health and sex that covers all bodies, desires and includes pleasure and relationship ethics. Young people are sexual, are entitled to pleasure in their bodies, and are engaged in a project of fashioning themselves as ethical sexual subjects. They ask that adults respect them and their progress in that endeavor, and offer guidance as they engage in becoming sexual beings.

Teachers can help young people feel safe by making it clear that they belong in the school community and that their bodies are welcome in school spaces. Recognizing a young person's identities and acknowledging them creates freedom for LGBTQ youth in schools to express their gender and sexuality, and also creates spaces of freedom for other students to explore what gender and sexuality mean for them, and how they would like to express themselves. Teachers and other adults can also recognize other elements of LGBTQ youth's identities, ensuring that they receive acknowledgement of the various ways that they belong in the school community. In this way, young people experience

the many pleasures of exploring their freedoms and identities, not limited to sexual or gender performance pleasures. LGBTQ youth need to receive recognition for their many-faceted selves.

Young people create counternarratives that challenge the dominant discourses about sexuality and gender, creating their own knowledge from their experiences and their ethical engagement with one another. They use many sources: popular culture, sex education information found on the Internet, literature about LGBTQ teens and adults, health and self-help materials from the library, and conversations with trusted peers and adults to help sort out the many discourses about right and wrong, natural and unnatural, healthy and sick, and good and bad about sexuality and gender. Young people understand the risks involved in speaking out against hegemonic masculinity, heteronormativity and binary gender, but also understand the freedoms to be found in those transgressive locations, and negotiate with the dangers to find pleasures for themselves.

### Significance

This research contributes to a richer understanding of bullying literature complicates humanistic tolerance policies which aim to help students but also contribute to maintaining binary structures of gender and sexuality that privilege masculinity and heterosexuality. Tolerance policies and practices may make homosexuality more acceptable to the heterosexual public, but also further control students' expression of their sexual selves and normalize queerness by fashioning queer sexuality as same-sex relationships in the heteronormative, marriage-centered mold. What is challenging about queerness is what it offers to relations in terms of newness, change, and rupture with given models of relations (Foucault, 1997a). Humanistic models of tolerance for non-

heterosexual, gender variant students dulls the transgressive possibilities in their relationships and gender expression and makes them more legible as “same” to other students, parents, teachers and community. Foucault urges us to examine the revolutionary possibilities in queerness, to imagine new ways for humans to relate to one another, and to allow ourselves to search for new spaces of freedom.

The youth whose voices speak in this project offer a nuanced critique of sex education. They renounce sex education as it currently exists as anti-educational, and demand that they be given current, reliable and necessary information about the ways bodies engage in gender practices and sexuality, about the risks involved in those practices, about the ways to be “healthy” and “safe,” and about possibilities for engaging in relationships. Although “healthy” and “safe” are contested terms, and discourses of health and safety limit what we can imagine doing and being, young people ask to be educated on the range of knowledge that exists about sexuality and gender, bodies and pleasures, so that they can decide for themselves how to use that knowledge. They explicitly state that teens access information about sexuality and gender expression from a variety of sources, and if adults in their lives would like to have a say in that conversation they need to actively engage, not pretend that young people will be better off without information. For young people to make decisions about their sexual lives and relationships, they wish to understand the range of knowledge available to help them in their ethical choices.

Empirically, this project contributes to the literature that documents the lives of LGBTQ youth in schools, a literature that is sparse in the United States. Because of challenges obtaining permission to work with LGBTQ youth, many researchers have

examined the experience of high school from the perspective of college students looking back at their high school years. The voices of young people documented in this research describe the current context for LGBTQ youth in schools, which is both better and worse than some previous research has proclaimed. Youth researchers identified the discourses that make schools unsafe for LGBTQ bodies, desires and pleasures, and also the spaces of resistance in which they find possibilities for unsettling the gender and sexuality binaries. By asserting their right to the public spaces of schools, either through the official mechanism of a gay-straight alliance or a diversity club, or through unofficial social groups that claim spaces as queer, LGBTQ youth present non-heterosexual bodies and pleasures as enjoyable and desirable to the community of the school. They represent for the school community the value of questioning sexual and gender normativity in order to explore the freedoms available when hegemonic identities are challenged. They incite curiosity.

Theoretically, the findings provide support for Foucault's theory that although hegemonic discourses regarding what constitutes normal sexuality and gender circulate widely, different discourses exist simultaneously and reveal negotiation of and resistance to the dominant. Using Foucault's theory and methods, the researchers challenged assumptions about teens as victimized, rebellious, promiscuous or innocent in conversations about sexuality and gender in schools. They exhibit freedom of self-fashioning that "does not consist in self-creation itself, but in the experience of self-formation in the face of all the other forces that fashion us" (Hofmeyr, 2006). The ethical nature of their gender and sexual expressions can be found in the practices of liberty, the confrontations with norms and the resistance to official knowledge that young

people engage in. By disidentifying (Muñoz, 1999) with sexual, gender, race, class, or ethnic expectations, young people are engaging ethically in self-formation within the geographic, historical and cultural structures in which they live. This is a political move, as well, inasmuch as young people create spaces for themselves and for their peers to think differently (Hofmeyr, 2006).

Educationally, dissemination of the research by myself and the student researchers at conferences and professional development trainings has given those who work with students the opportunity to view queer and trans youth as agents in the creation of their own identity, not as pathological or pitiful. It provides possible directions, explored in the next section, for curriculum, pedagogy, and policy change in schools to better serve non-heterosexual and gender variant youth. The archival research, observations, and mapping demonstrate for teachers, administrators and other adults in teens' lives, the agency of youth as they create themselves as ethical sexual subjects.

#### Implications for Education

Organizations working for LGBTQ rights have focused their efforts in the educational realm on protecting the safety of LGBTQ youth in schools and on comprehensive sex education curriculum as young people in this research project often did. The Human Rights Campaign (HRC) and the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF) both have legislative campaigns to change the national policy requiring federal funds solely be used to support abstinence only until marriage sex education (HRC, 2007; Sklar, 2007). HRC has sponsored specific legislation, the Responsible Education About Life Act, S. 972/H.R. 1653, which promotes comprehensive sexuality education that includes non-heterosexual sexuality and gender variance (for an explanation of the bill see Planned

Parenthood, 2007). Safety and safe access to schooling is promoted by Lambda Legal (<http://www.lambdalegal.org>), the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (<http://www.glsen.org>) and the National Education Association (NEA) Gay and Lesbian Caucus (<http://www.nea-LGBTQc.org/training.html>). These organizations all provide support to students, teachers and parents to promote tolerance education programs, such as the “National Day of Silence” and support organizations within schools to help change homophobic and heterosexist climates to ones more tolerant of difference. With the support of Lambda Legal, students have won court cases in which they charged their school districts with not protecting them from a hostile environment in schools which resulted in the student losing access to education ("L.W. v. Toms River Regional Schools, Board of Education", 2007, "Nabozny v. Podlesny", 1996). Schools, too, have been successful in keeping tolerance education content in the curriculum against parents' wishes ("Morrison v. Board of Education of Boyd County, Kentucky", 2006).

Little effort has been made in the United States for curriculum content change, however. Curriculum changes were proposed in a California Senate bill sponsored by Senator Sheila Kuehl, that passed the legislature but was vetoed by Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger. Kuehl wrote the legislation, SB 1437 (Equality California, 2006), which would require the inclusion of significant historical contributions of lesbian and gay historical figures. It would also eliminate any curriculum material that denigrated lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people. Although other states have implemented mandatory treatment of non-heterosexual sexuality and gender variance into the health and sex education curriculum (for example the Massachusetts Safe Schools Program for Gay and Lesbian Students, <http://www.doe.mass.edu/cnp/safe/ssch.html>), no other state has included

mandates about gay and lesbian (or bisexual or transgender) historical, literary or contemporary figures into the curriculum, or mandated teaching about gender and sexual variability in biology classes. Proposals have been made by education scholars, however, that students need to learn about non-heterosexual sexuality and non-binary gender in sex education classes, as well as in other subjects, both for the benefit of LGBTQ students and heterosexual students (Moje & MuQaribu, 2003).

Changes in education that challenge heteronormativity may seem like a distant goal to some, but educators have already been theorizing about how justice and sexuality can come together in the classroom (Linville, Walsh, & Carlson, 2009). Students must be able to name their sexuality in schools, participate in public dialogues about sexuality without hiding that they are sexually different, and to voice their questions and concerns about justice for those named sexually (or otherwise) Other in school. They also must be free to pursue sexual and romantic relationships in school – as queer theory shows that heterosexually-identified students are able to – and express their gender preferences and be visible as their sexual and gendered selves.

Queering education is not about adding famous homosexuals to the list of required authors, or acknowledging the broader spectrum of sexuality in the family life/sex education curriculum, although these are all additions that LGBTQ students wish for. It is about noticing and noting aloud the knowledge that appears in textbooks and on school booklists, and that which is omitted (Kumashiro, 2001). Queering recognizes heteronormative practices as the processes through which schools and educational policies reinforce the belief that human beings fall into two distinct sex/gender categories, male/man and female/woman. Queering the curriculum emphasizes the importance of developing critical analyses of

heterosexism, heteronormativity and normativity with the goal of helping students understand that binary categories are not givens, but rather social constructions we are often forced to perform (Butler, 1990). Bryson and De Castell (1993) used the term “queer pedagogy” and described it as “a radical form of praxis implemented deliberately to interfere with, to intervene in, the production of ‘normalcy’ in school subjects” (p. 286). Queering pedagogy deliberately interferes with the production of normalcy because it requires the teachers and student to interact with competing discourses about sexuality and gender.

Spurlin’s (2002) definition of queer pedagogy furthers this idea:

In one sense, a “queer” pedagogy would imply not only an analysis of (sexual) difference(s) in the classroom but of interrelated, broad-based pedagogical commitments to free inquiry and expression, social equity, the development of more democratic institutional and pedagogical practices, and the broadening of dialogical spheres of public exchange within and beyond the classroom as sites for engaged analyses of social issues and collective struggles. (p. 10)

In order to access the transformative possibilities, queering the curriculum might involve talking with students about why history books and biographies often avoid mentioning the same-gender relationships of famous people or examining the construct of gender with a biology class and discovering together the prevalence of offspring born with indistinctly formed (according to binary gender standards) genitalia or that chromosomally humans can be many combinations of X and Y (Fausto-Sterling, 2000). The aim of these conversations, however, is not to simply add more points of view or give a finer-grained version of the truth (Kumashiro, 2001). The aim is to discuss with the class what was left out, how the story, or the science or the canon or the logics was constructed in order to support the current beliefs and worldview. This kind of queering can be done to show how heteronormativity and gender binaries have been constructed, but it can also be used at the intersections of identity to show how stereotypes of races, genders, sexualities, ethnicities

and classes are all socially constructed, and how each of us is more complex than the stereotype would suggest (Crenshaw, 1994; Loutzenheiser & MacIntosh, 2004).

In queering the curriculum, queer identity is not restricted to gays and lesbians, but open to anyone who feels marginalized. Rather than trying to find the limits of the category “queer” and to work for rights in schools only for that group, “queering” would require teachers and students to think about how to make the classroom a more inclusive and accepting environment all the time, at every turn, within every conversation. Queering the curriculum attempts to *not* socialize youth into a world that can be described by common sense. It hopes to help them understand they have choices and alternatives in how they learn to be adolescents or men/women and how they express their gendered and sexual identities through taking up or rejecting competing narratives of sexuality or gender in their lives.

Pedagogy, practices and policies can also be queered. Teachers and administrators can examine the ways they interact with students that might be silencing to some and encouraging to others. Teachers can learn to recognize what characteristics they assign to the “good student” and vary their teaching styles to take advantage of the characteristics of other students in the class as well. In particular, in light of the data about belonging in schools, it seems important for teachers to understand that they might not know all of the identities of the students in their classes, and that rather than assume that there are no LGBTQ-identified students in their classes, they should assume that there are, and always teach and interact with students as if they could be exploring gender or sexuality expressions. I am not advocating that teachers try to “out” students or get them to reveal their sexual or gender identities, just that they assume that there are some students in their classes that would

appreciate having their sexuality or gender identity negotiations recognized, even if the teacher never knows who those students are.

In addition, queering pedagogy could mean varying assignments so that students are allowed to interact with the material they are learning in ways that don't require them to show mastery or to recite back to the teacher the content exactly as it was presented (Kumashiro, 2001; Rofes, 2000). Alternative assignments could allow students to bring their own imaginations, knowledges, deductions and conclusions to bear on the subject matter, and create a space in the classroom where everyone is learning at the same time, where students are not expected to find the answer that the teacher already knows, but where they are interacting with information and creating knowledge together. The classroom would become a space in which the relations between the persons in the room and the materials were constantly being evaluated and renegotiated. This is the extension to all knowledge of the ideas presented by queerness to normative discourses of sexuality and gender.

Similarly, practices and rituals in the school can be queered. These rituals support a certain kind of order, a certain regulation of students, teachers and administrators that works for certain purposes. In the case of heterosexism, the tradition of school dances can be historically situated in the era in which they emerged – a time when urban areas struggled to keep students in school longer, out of the workforce and unmarried. In order to appeal to more students, after-school sporting events and organized dating events were added to the academic curriculum (Lesko, 2001). The question can be posed about what types of after-school activities and events are appropriate for this age. It can be explicitly asked what role the school has in heterosexually socializing students in dating rituals and gendered roles such as cheerleading and homecoming kings and queens. Other types of recognition that do not

rely on gender norms and heterosexual rituals might be instituted to acknowledge, for example, gender creativity or cutest couple – regardless of sexuality.

Finally, challenging practices and knowledge can be expected to cause ruptures and “crises” in the comfortable spaces that teachers and students and communities inhabit (Kumashiro, 2001). In order to introduce ideas that contradict the beliefs of members of the community, and that leave everyone in a complicit position with the oppression of someone, teachers, administrators, teacher educators and district leaders should be prepared to anger and upset some people (probably most people) and to need time to talk through the issues (Rofes, 2000). In the case of sexuality, the precedent is not encouraging. Changes in schools’ presentation of sexuality and other curriculum changes that have contradicted parents’ knowledge have often led to Conservative and Religious Right-funded backlashes against the schools (Irvine, 2002; Lugg, 1998). These backlash efforts have been fairly successful so far at scaring parents and unseating educational leaders through electoral or appointment changes. In New York City’s history, which the research team examined in our document search, the Chancellor who attempted to implement the sex education and family life curriculum that included lesbian and gay families became so discouraged about the resistance he encountered that he left within a year (Myers, 1992). Change will have to happen incrementally, and may be more effective if it is initiated by students with the support of teachers and parents. Many policy studies have advocated for curriculum and policy changes that will give greater safety and support to LGBTQ students, and the courts have supported these studies. Schools and teachers must work in these openings to expand the possibilities for sexuality and gender in schools, to ensure that all bodies are welcome, and

students with many expressions of sexuality and gender are not excluded from educational opportunity.

## Appendix A: Recruitment Flyer



Are you queer? Trans?  
LGBTQQI?

(Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer, Questioning, or Intersex?)

High School Student?

- Do you want to learn more about sexuality and gender in schools?
- Are you interested in taking part in a research project?
- Would you like to work with a group of students to understand better how schools deal with gender and sexuality?

**Join a research team!**

**Meet weekly in a writing and discussion group!**

**Say something about your experiences!**

This research project seeks 6-8 NYC public high school students to be part of a youth research team to examine the ways public schools regulate sexuality and gender. Sign up to participate in an ongoing discussion and writing workshop series that meets once a week for about 5 months to find out what other young people have to say about the ways they have learned about sexuality and gender in school.

**All youth researchers will be paid \$20 per workshop.  
Snacks and transportation are provided!**

**In this participatory action research group you will make a difference:**

- Create a research tool to survey other students about their experiences
- Map the ways that genders and sexualities are located in your school
- Create an action or product to distribute to others, showing what the research data taught us

**For more information about this research study, or to volunteer for this study, please contact: Darla Linville, 718.431.4518 or by email at [dlinville@gc.cuny.edu](mailto:dlinville@gc.cuny.edu).**

Darla Linville is a graduate student in the Urban Education Department at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York.

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## Appendix C: List of Statements for Queer Q Sort

1. Schools should be changed to protect LGBTQ students from bullying.
2. Parents of LGBTQ students worry that they may not be able to get married.
3. LGBTQ students will not be able to have children.
4. A school for LGBTQ students discriminates against heterosexual students.
5. LGBTQ youth can't have sex because they can't find sex partners.
6. Segregating LGBTQ students from other students creates intolerance among both gay and straight people.
7. GSAs or other clubs for LGBTQ students make school safer for all students.
8. LGBTQ students have an unhappy future.
9. Teaching about homosexuality is dangerously misleading because it is an unacceptable lifestyle.
10. Teachers are not reliable supporters of LGBTQ youth.
11. LGBTQ youth should not be too "in your face" with their sexuality and gender.
12. LGBTQ youth are harassed or beat up in schools.
13. Gay people can't go to heaven.
14. LGBTQ relationships are not long-lasting, and will not last a lifetime like marriage.
15. LGBTQ students are discriminated against no matter what.
16. Bullying and homophobia exist in just about every high school.
17. Not all LGBTQ people are the same.
18. There is more than one way to get HIV/AIDS.
19. High school students should get information about sexual health.
20. All teens are curious.
21. Teachers are embarrassed to talk about homosexuality
22. It's much harder to be trans than to be gay, lesbian or bisexual.
23. LGBTQ students face hatred.
24. LGBTQ students will face discrimination.
25. Families reject LGBTQ children.
26. LGBTQ people have a harder life.
27. It should be mandatory for junior high and high school students to have an HIV/AIDS curriculum.
28. New York City teens are at a higher risk of HIV/AIDS than other teens.
29. LGBTQ relationships are just like straight relationships – one person is the man and one is the woman.
30. Gym is an unsafe place at school.
31. Trans people are born in the wrong body.
32. Public high schools can be unfriendly and scary, especially for LGBTQ students.
33. LGBTQ students are vulnerable to violence
34. LGBTQ students are depressed and suicidal.
35. LGBTQ people can't have intimate relationships because they are only interested in sex, not love
36. Homosexuality is an inappropriate topic for high school classrooms.
37. Homosexuality is wrong.

38. If you have sex with someone of the same sex/gender, you must be gay.
39. LGBTQ students are isolated in schools because there are few of them.
40. LGBTQ youth shouldn't touch or kiss in school.
41. It's important to identify as LGBTQ if you have sex with someone of the same sex.
42. LGBTQ people choose to be LGBTQ.
43. Gay people spread AIDS
44. There are no LGBTQ people in our English or history books or curriculum
45. LGBTQ students need separate high schools so they won't get beat up or harassed.
46. A club for LGBTQ students is immoral
47. Gay sex isn't real sex, it's perversion because it uses body parts for things they were not intended for.
48. Homosexuals, bisexuals and drug users are most likely to get STDs/HIV/AIDS
49. Bisexuals will go out with anyone.
50. Bisexuals want to have sex with everyone.
51. LGBTQ students will hit on anyone of the same sex.
52. Gay boys are disgusting.
53. A positive attitude toward gay people in the curriculum threatens the family and marriage.
54. LGBTQ students have bad relationships with their parents.
55. LGBTQ youth have trouble meeting anyone to date.
56. LGBTQ people are weird.
57. LGBTQ people have sex all the time and are obsessed with sex.
58. Students should not be separated on the basis of race, gender or sexual orientation.
59. Bisexual students are just experimenting or confused, not gay.
60. LGBTQ people are born that way.
61. LGBTQ people are visible by how they look.
62. Bisexual girls are sexy.
63. Everything rainbow is gay.
64. Most girls are bisexual or experimenting.
65. LGBTQ people should be viewed as real people, to be respected and appreciated.
66. Young children should learn about gay parents and families.
67. It is appropriate for middle and high school students to discuss society's treatment of homosexuality.
68. LGBTQ students should be provided with more information about sex and health issues.
69. Sex and sexuality is always going to be a sensitive topic for children and teens.
70. The English teacher's classroom is the safe place at school.
71. For schools to be accepting of LGBTQ youth they should teach about LGBTQ people and issues in all subjects.
72. LGBTQ youth have friends and community.
73. Bisexual people have more options for romance.
74. LGBTQ students get support from their parents.
75. Being LGBTQ is not any better or worse than being straight.

76. Being LGBTQ is fun.
77. Straight people are the ones with the problem with homosexuality, not LGBTQ people.
78. Teachers give support for LGBTQ students.
79. Most LGBTQ students attend school with no problems.
80. All lesbians want to be men or look like men
81. All gay boys are feminine
82. Schools should allow gay couples to go to dances and the prom
83. Girls who play softball and basketball are lesbians
84. Boys who play basketball or football are not gay

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