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ABSTRACT

This dissertation presents three and a half years of ethnographic data from an “LGBT” charter school. It explores how gender and sexuality appear within educational spaces and how providing students an anti-heteronormative inclusive education impacts a student’s sense of self. I show how critical pedagogy is deployed as an anti-heteronormative approach to supporting all students. The term anti-heteronormative is used to express an explicit rejection of heterosexism and genderism, acknowledging the complex oppressive factors that develop given the normative expectations of gender and sexuality and the impact such expectations have on all bodies and all students. Findings reveal how the juxtaposition of the inclusive space provided by the school and the heteronormative expectations of the outside world collide in complex ways for students. Bullying and challenges to inclusion persist. Critical pedagogy serves to help students assess the meaning bullying has for themselves and others. Likewise the critical pedagogy of the school supports a flexible curriculum and informal spaces that provide students opportunities to explore how they want heteronormativity to impact their lives. The anti-heteronormative approach of the school leads some students to find new ways of being – literally, new ways to exist – in the world.

FREE TO BE: ONE CHARTER SCHOOL'S APPROACH TO SUPPORTING GENDER AND
SEXUAL MINORITY STUDENTS

by

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B.A. Mount Mary University, 2002
M.A. University of Cincinnati, 2007

Dissertation

Submitted in partial fulfillment of requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Cultural Foundations of Education

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December 2016

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

A gay student who said he fired a stun gun in the air at school when bullies threatened him has been expelled, according to the school district.... “My point was not to hurt anybody ... the purpose was to back them off. I didn’t know what else to do,” he told msnbc’s NewsNation on Monday.

(“Bullied gay student,” 2012)

“It was so embarrassing to have all the other kids staring at me as I walked into the gymnasium,” said Hicks, according to [a local station]. “I didn’t want the whole school to know I was pregnant because it’s not their business, and it wasn’t right for my teachers to single me out.”

(Hibbard, 2012)

For two hours, approximately 150 students stood in front of Hillsboro High School to protest a transgender teen’s use of the girls’ facilities. And for those same two hours, the 17-year-old transgender teen huddled inside her counselor’s office — with the door locked. “I was concerned about my own safety,” Lila Perry told the New York Times.

(Miller, 2015)

Schools are at the forefront of many social dilemmas. No matter the problem, local schools are often charged with “fixing” social problems and ailments. The above examples are some of the various ways schools are taxed with responsibilities that clash with the day-to-day realities of gender and sexuality. This is to say the concerns of students, teachers and administrators, parents, and society more broadly collide as issues of gender and sexuality enter our schools. What does this mean for students? Although the examples in the above news clippings may seem trivial – an armed gay student, an embarrassed pregnant student, and an ostracized transgender student – these experiences are not unusual. On the whole they represent a group of students who are trying to deal with isolation, marginalization, and bullying, the best they can. These students face the hardships of attending schools that demand rigid compliance with the heteronormative expectations of our society. The way they embody and perform gender and sexuality is judged against traditional norms of masculinity and femininity in order to hold them to strict standards of “appropriate” heterosexual living.

Students who do not follow the norms of gender and sexuality experience various social and educational difficulties. I use the term gender and sexual minorities¹ to include anyone who is seen as going against the norms of gender and/or sexuality. This is to say they do not appear to (or are known not to) follow hetero-genders² or heterosexuality. Students who easily fall into this

¹ I would like to acknowledge the discursive power of language, and thus the challenge of adequately and respectfully identifying this group of people. I take guidance from researchers who have come before me, such as Susan Driver (2008), in identifying the troubling aspects of labels that can foreclose the “ambiguous, desiring, relational, and ephemeral dimensions of [individuals’] experiences” (p. 3). It is my intention in using the term “gender and sexual minorities” (as opposed to “sexual minorities”) to call on the various structures impacting an individual’s need to comply with both the heteronormative aspects of gender *and* sexuality, and in doing so highlight the regulatory forces working upon individuals, as opposed to the individual themselves.

² I use the term hetero-genders (Mellor & Epstein, 2006) to refer to expectations of a cohesive sex/gender/sexuality embodiment (male/masculine/desiring women, female/feminine/desiring men). The expectation of bodies to perform hetero-genders highlights the way our heteronormative society does not simply demand heterosexuality of individuals, but it also demands genders that *ritualize* and *exude* heterosexuality. This concept reiterates Youdell’s (2005, 2006) observation that in a heteronormative society the body, the body’s performance, and a person’s desires are intricately connected and understood by others (and ourselves) as complex constellations.

category include lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) youth, as well as gender non-conforming youth, the hyper-sexualized female, and the effeminate male. Their marginalization emerges from a heteronormative society that assumes heterosexuality and gender conformity of all individuals (Allen, 2004; Bay-Cheng, 2003; Elia & Eliason, 2010; Elliott, 2003; Fields, 2008; Fine, 1988; Harper, 2007; Kubicek, Beyer, Weiss, Iverson, & Kipke, 2010; Mayo, 2004; Tolman, 2002). Because of this, any youth who deviate from these norms are stigmatized, and it is this stigma that leads to emotional, physical, and psychological risks.

Schools, therefore, play an influential role in either reducing or reproducing this stigma and the risks associated with it. As we see in the opening vignettes - a gay student feels unsupported by their school and decides to take control of his own protection, a pregnant student is singled out by her teacher in order to set an example for others, and a transgender student finds solace in a supportive counselor's office while protestors wait outside - on a regular basis schools take actions that impact the difficulties students face. Consequently, a school's action or *inaction* bring further meaning to what is and is not an appropriate way of being a gendered and sexualized student. It is during this time of adolescence that youth begin forming a sense of "self in the world" (Côté, 2009; Johnson, 2015). Supportive environments encourage positive self-esteem and awareness, while unsupportive or indifferent environments breed negative self-esteem and negative self-awareness (Côté, 2009; Weeks, Heaphy & Donovan, 2001). Without supportive outlets within their schools, gender and sexual minorities remain vulnerable.

Facing the Problem: How Schools Approach Gender and Sexual Minorities

Historically speaking schools have tried to avoid having gender and sexual minorities in their facilities, taking precaution to maintain policies that would discipline them or have them removed altogether (Blount & Anahita, 2004; Fields, 2008; Irvine, 1994, 2002; Lugg, 2007;

Luker, 2006; Mayo, 2004; Pillow, 2004). Sex and any bodily representations of sex (such as pregnancy, or open displays of affection), were strictly off limits and often considered taboo. Regulation has been both for the student and the teacher. Well into the 1970's teachers would be dismissed for maternity leave as soon as their pregnancy was visible, and for unmarried pregnant teachers, dismissed all together (Luker, 2006). Likewise, pregnant students would immediately be removed, with no options for returning (Pillow, 2004). Additionally, whom an individual was attracted to was also highly regulated. Teachers had to carefully watch what they said, mannerisms they enacted, and the family pictures they displayed in order to ensure they came across as appropriately heterosexual (Blount & Anahita, 2004; Griffin & Ouellett, 2003; Lugg, 2007). Catherine Lugg (2007) traced the risk of deviation for school officials and noted, "individuals who displayed conventional gender behavior were considered to be heterosexual, and those who did not were considered to be homosexual," and ultimately risked being terminated; a perfectly legal practice in most states (p. 13).

For students, this strict regulation of hetero-genders starts at an early age when schoolchildren are taught gender conformity (Thorne, 1993). Teachers remind little boys to act like gentlemen and little girls to act like ladies. There arguably have been improvements for students, specifically with the enactment of Title IX (Pillow, 2004) and the implementation of gay-straight alliances (Lugg, 2007), however gender and sexual minority students still face considerable risk in unsupportive schools. School policies often shy away from addressing issues until it is too late: when a student is hurt, and/or a lawsuit (or threat of a lawsuit) is filed (Cianciotto & Cahill, 2012; Payne & Smith, 2011). Even when concerns of gender and sexuality minority students are addressed, Lugg (2007) has suggested many of the fixes offered by schools to protect queer students make those very students the focus, which is problematic. "By making

queer students the subjects of special protective services, a state or local school board has still reinforced the notion of queer as deviant” (Lugg, 2007, p. 23), and in doing so does little to acknowledge the oppressive atmosphere supported by the school. Furthermore, research indicates that even schools that have implemented progressive policies towards gender and sexual minority students have done little to prepare teachers to support or enforce such policies (Payne & Smith, 2011). The overall message continues to be one of disregard for the hostile atmosphere created and the ensuing challenges students may face.

Impact on Gender and Sexual Minority Students

Research has consistently shown that gender and sexual minority youth face substantial risks. They have significantly higher rates of suicide risk compared to heterosexual youth (Centers, 2008; Russell, Ryan, Toomey, Diaz, & Sanchez, 2011). Additionally, these students miss more days of school, have higher health risk behaviors, experience more psychological stress, and report challenges with depression (Almeida, Johnson, Corliss, Molnar, & Azrael, 2009; GLSEN, 2014; Russell et al., 2011). Unsupportive schools can exacerbate these risks. Research indicates that schools without gay-straight alliances or comprehensive sex education pose greater risk to youth who are perceived to be LGBTQ (Elia & Eliason, 2010; Fisher, 2009;). Bullying of gender and sexual minority students is severe nationwide. The 2013 School Climate Survey determined that high proportions of LGBT students experience verbal (74%), physical (36%), and electronic (49%) harassment on a regular basis (GLSEN, 2014).

Likewise, heterosexual youth who are not advised on the complex working of their bodies, as well as varying desires and methods of sexual protection, also are put at a higher risk for unplanned pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections, and sexual violence (Fields, 2008; Fine & McClelland, 2006; Mayo, 2004; Tolman, 2002). Many of these youth report feeling unable to

turn to their family for support (Gangamma, Slesnick, Toviessi, & Serovich, 2008; MacGillivray, 2000; Tolman, 2002). Studies suggest that anywhere from 10-40% of homeless minors have become homeless due to their sexual or gender non-conformity and being unwelcomed by their family or the foster care system (Centers, 2008; Gangamma et al., 2008; MacGillivray, 2000). Students who are struggling with homelessness or not living with their families face significant challenges with their academic studies (Almeida et al., 2009; Wegman & Bowen, 2010). These statistics reveal how gender and sexual minority students often face rejection and feelings of being ostracized both in their home and their school, leaving them no place to find comfort and security.

Given all this, one has to wonder about the impact these risks have on a young person's sense of self. As a teenager struggles to come to understand who they are in this world (as all teenagers do), facing these challenges on a day-to-day basis likely impacts how they see the world and their place in it. Research suggests the association of the risks listed above with gender and sexual minorities is not inevitable, but rather result from the stigma associated with non-heteronormative behaviors (Payne & Smith, 2011). Therefore, it is possible that when gender and sexual minority students are in supportive environments – spaces rejecting the need for heteronormative compliance – they may come to understand themselves in very different ways.

Research Questions

I would like to start the discussion of research questions with a clear statement that this dissertation presents critical research (Carspeken, 1996; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2002; Van Dijk, 2009). My hope is that the results can one day assist in implementing more inclusive education policies. I came to this project with a desire to understand how schools frame gender and

sexuality expectations of students, and how that framing ends up impacting the students' sense of self. There were many stages that led to this line of questioning, and various ways I have reworked and adjusted the final questions for this project. Since I have a vested interest in this work, I would like to offer full disclosure regarding how I came to the research. I would like to begin at the beginning and offer the personal side of this endeavor.

My road of questioning began on prom night when I was seventeen years old, a few weeks before my high school graduation. It was on that night, sitting home alone, that I realized I was pregnant. Among all of the predictable questions that follow a crisis pregnancy, I wondered: *How can I possibly return to school? What will everyone think? My reputation is ruined! Oh my gosh, college...what about college?* I worked diligently to keep my pregnancy secret, believing that if I could just graduate without anyone knowing, everything would be fine. Walking through the halls the last two days before graduation I could sense something had changed. My presence invited longer stares than usual; friends of the boy who impregnated me all of a sudden stopped talking to me; more teachers than usual asked how I was doing. Soon my best friend confirmed my greatest fears: everyone knew I was pregnant.

I am indebted to the support I received from family and friends during that challenging time in my life (as well as since then). With their support I somehow managed to get through graduation, start my freshman year of college, maintain a relatively healthy pregnancy, deliver a healthy baby boy, and place him for adoption. The challenges of these life experiences have been vast and enduring. I have largely turned to my education for solace. I undertook my bachelor's degree in philosophy primarily to answer the question, *what is the meaning of my life?* That is to say, I needed to understand why the unplanned pregnancy, and the feeling of "falling" from grace, happened to me. The small all-women's college I attended provided me with various

opportunities to scratch the surface of that question. Upon graduating I had a clear understanding of the hegemonic forces structuring the opportunities (or lack of opportunities) many of us get in life. I was beginning to understand much of that hegemony as patriarchy, and was anxiously looking for a way to feel empowered as a female.

After graduating I began working with other birthmothers and learned more about the institution of adoption. I also occasionally spoke publicly about my experience as a birthmother. Both of these experiences expanded my understanding of the constraining forces working upon women and their maternity – forces like the institutions of patriarchy, motherhood, and heterosexuality. I decided to pursue a master’s degree in women’s studies in order to further investigate these controlling discourses. This resulted in a research project on birthmothers of open adoption and how a birthmother sometimes comes to understand her identity as that of a *[M]other*³. After this work I was beginning to feel satisfied I had answered my questions. I had a sense of how being socially constructed by hegemonic forces had an impact on all of us. I again returned to full time work, helping young women experiencing crisis pregnancies. It wasn’t long before I began to feel fed up with the system that was failing these young women: the inadequate sex education, the healthcare system that treated them like dirt, the incremental and ineffective assistance programs, the lack of programs that could truly empower them. I decided once again to return to school.

My positive experiences with college led me to believe education was a critical aspect of empowerment. I began to think, *If I could reach teens before they found themselves in a bad situation, maybe things could change. And perhaps if this were to occur – if teens could be*

³ I made use of the term “[M]other” in order to emphasize a birthmother’s position as an “other” mother within our society, but also to push the boundaries of acceptable motherhood and insist that “the woman who placed a child, will not, *cannot*, be separated from the aspects of her identity that are and remain *mother*” (Sieger, 2012, p. 46).

presented with critical thinking skills from early on – they would be better equipped to handle any challenges that arose in their lives. This pursuit made it natural for me to turn to a PhD program in the cultural foundations of education. I approached the program from a desire to make a difference in the lives of high school students, and I believe that helping youth recognize the hegemonic forces working throughout society will benefit them in all aspects of their lives.

As I began to understand the complex power structures working to maintain a heteronormative culture, I realized that the same forces challenging the pregnant student (genderism,⁴ sexism, heterosexism and heterosexist family values) were also challenging the gay student, and the transgender student, and any other student who fell outside of hetero-gender norms. In other words, those students who do not or cannot portray appropriate hetero-genders (who I refer to as gender and sexual minorities) are constrained by systems of oppression dictating gender, sex, and sexuality, as well as heteronormative notions of what is age appropriate and what is valued as family. I wanted to know more about these students. How did their non-compliance with society's heteronormative values – the explicit ways teen pregnancy rejected norms of age appropriate gender, gayness rejected norms of appropriate sexuality, and transgenderism rejected norms of appropriate bodily (sex) performance – impact them?

I got there in a roundabout way. My initial research questions were broad: 1) How do students perform identities within school? 2) How does a school, as a regulating institution, impact a student's sense of self? One reason for these expansive questions was an anticipation of pushback from the IRB (see Appendix A). However, another reason was because I was still getting to know my research site and honing in on how best to approach my topic. Qualitative

⁴ Genderism largely refers to what Hill and Willoughby (2005) referred to as “an ideology that reinforces the negative evaluation of gender non-conformity or an incongruence between sex and gender” (p. 534). It speaks to the requirement for all individuals to follow hetero-gender norms, and maintain a cohesive sex/gender/sexuality embodiment (male/masculine/desiring women, female/feminine/desiring men).

research does not begin with concrete questions that are followed by concrete hypotheses. There is a flexibility within qualitative research because it values the insight a research site may bring to the questions being investigated. Some fluidity exists in this process. As Carspecken (1996) notes, research questions can change at any time during the research process. Therefore, it is not unreasonable for questions to become clearer as a researcher is in the field.

Since I knew I wanted to understand something about the experiences of gender and sexual minority students, I chose a school that enrolled more gender and sexual minority students. I found a charter school that had a mission of helping LGBTQ students who had been bullied. After spending some time in the school, I refocused my research questions to relate to the particular context:

1. How do gender and sexual minority students perform their identities in school?
2. How does a school that is looking to reduce LGBT stigma impact how gender and sexual minority students come to understand their senses of self?

These questions frame the work presented in this dissertation.

Because the school enrolls a greater than usual proportion of gender and sexual minorities, and advocates practices that promote inclusivity, hetero-gender norms are not default expectations. Therefore the school environment provides relative freedom for students to explore an array of gender and sexual identities. The influences of heteronormativity are likely to become apparent in more nuanced ways than in normatively regulated spaces, revealing the complex network of power and control working to regulate gender and sexuality on various levels. Moreover, students in the school are likely to be more inclined than traditional students to be aware and to acknowledge that there are hierarchies of gender and sexuality working to confine them. Although this certainly presents a limitation of the project (addressed further in the

methods section), it also provides a rich context to see what youth gender and sexual identities *could* be if they are given the chance to freely enact any form of embodiment. Having the opportunity to observe this in action presents an opportunity to understand how the students, themselves, are making sense of the heteronormative expectations placed on them.

Looking for a Change: How Unity High⁵ is Different

This dissertation is the story of how one school enacts critical pedagogy in a way that unequivocally supports an anti-heteronormative inclusion.⁶ It explores how a school's environment can offer support to gender and sexual minority students by advocating for and providing gender and sexuality inclusive spaces. Through this exploration, I uncover the way a school's environment impacts a student's sense of self, in particular, how those students who go against the norms of gender and sexuality are given an opportunity to be who they feel they are, or who they may want to be.

Unity High, a unique charter school, serves as the research site. Charter schools are in a rare position to implement different educational philosophies and practices because, although approved by a school district, they are independently managed. This system allows private entities to acquire a charter from a school district to run a school for a specified number of years. Some educators feel that charter schools effectively use a market-based model to elicit parental choice and push all schools to be the best they can be; they tend to have a selective student body, focusing on issues of race, ethnicity, and ability (Frankenberg, Siegel-Hawley, & Wang, 2010; Mathews, 2009; Minnow, 2008; Ravitch, 2011; Scott, 2008; Tough, 2009). This targeted

⁵ All names and identities have been changed.

⁶ I use the term anti-heteronormative inclusion to reference spaces welcoming to gender and sexual minorities specifically. The complexities of inclusion, and the different aspects of inclusive schools, are addressed further in the "Considering Inclusion" section of the literature review.

approach is the main cause of both the pros and cons of charter schools. For instance, charter schools have the ability to focus on neighborhoods with low-achieving populations, many of which struggle economically and overwhelmingly present student bodies of racial and ethnic minorities.

The Knowledge Is Power Program (KIPP) is one of the more well-known charter companies; now running 162 schools across the country, the majority of their students are either Black or Hispanic (KIPP, 2014). The program prides itself on focusing on communities in need and offering children the opportunity to excel academically, boasting a philosophy that “knowledge is power, [and] power is freedom” (Mathews, 2009, p. 74). KIPP has seen success, reporting higher test scores than their state and local counterparts, and higher graduation rates (KIPP, 2014). However, KIPP faces consistent criticism around the issue of selective enrollment. Critics suggest that charter programs often exclude students with disabilities, those with families unable to commit extra time to the school, and those who speak English as a second language (Frankenberg, et al., 2010; Mathews, 2009; Minnow, 2008; Ravitch, 2011; Scott, 2008; Tough, 2009). There is also further criticism that charter schools pull the highest achieving students from the most disadvantaged public schools (Mathews, 2009). A vast amount of research has been (and continues to be) focused on charter schools. Evidence continues to suggest both positive and negative results from these schools, and it is clear that their often-exclusionary practices are of great concern. This, however, is not the focus of this dissertation. The little I present here is meant to situate Unity High within the broader context of charter schools to simply point out it is the system of school "choice" that allowed this school to materialize.

Although Unity High is similar to other charter school in that it targets a specific group of students, it is rather different in that they are rarely pulling high achieving students. Many of the

criticisms of charter schools do not hold for Unity: a significant number of their students are learning disabled; parent involvement is sought, but enrollment is not contingent on it; and although the English language learners only represents 2% of the student-body, they are not prohibited from enrolling. The school does have a very specific target population. Enrollment at Unity High is granted to students who have been dealing with bullying, and they accept both the bullied *and* the bully.⁷ This protocol, coupled with a mission statement of providing a welcoming environment for all students regardless of sexuality, ability, appearance or belief, has led it to be known as *the* LGBTQ school. Therefore, it is not uncommon to see at the school students who are gay, lesbian, transgender, gender-non-conforming, pregnant/parenting, and others who have pushed the limits of acceptable embodiment and may be referred to as "punks," "sluts," "goth," etc. In some ways the school takes pride in being known as the "last chance" school, housing students who have moved from four or more schools, feeling outcast at all but Unity High. It is easy to recognize that this school is doing something different, offering a very powerful option for many students. This dissertation seeks to highlight how the unique environment of Unity High influences a student's sense of self and who they are becoming in the world, specifically how gender and sexual minority students cope with, reject, and reinforce the expectations of a heteronormative society.

Chapter Outline

This introduction has sought to provide a general overview of the issues addressed with the dissertation, as well as its goal. In Chapter 2 I provide a literature review establishing my theoretical framework for approaching this work and describing the current state of research in the field. I outline my use of a poststructuralist feminism and queer theory to assess the power

⁷ In the last semester of my research this enrollment practice shifted; the school no longer seeks to enroll exclusively students who had been involved with bullying, and is now open to any student.

structures working to shape, confine, and regulate the lives of gender and sexual minority students, and to highlight how discourses of heteronormativity work to create a very rigid expectation of embodiment that is differentially deployed depending on one's social location. I then move to assess how heteronormativity has been conceived regarding bodies in schools, and show how heteronormative standards for students leave them in a very precarious position. I end with a discussion of critical pedagogy and highlight the potential it holds for instituting inclusive schools.

In Chapter 3 I describe the research methods implemented and a rationale of methodology, followed by a discussion of my own positionality, and some challenges that came up during the project. Specifically, I review why I consider this project to be a critical ethnography, as well as my rationale for utilizing critical discourse analysis. Social scientists often seek to study social phenomenon that can serve as sites for positive change, particularly change aiming to ensure social justice and a more equitable society. My work falls into this tradition; I chose to use critical ethnography and critical discourse analysis because they are methods especially suited to inquiry focused on possibilities for social change. My hope, overall, is that one day the knowledge gained from this research can serve to inform educators and other researchers as they consider policies and practices that can provide our youth a more democratic, inclusive, and equitable education.

Chapter 4 marks the first of four data chapters where I present data collected for this dissertation and my findings. I begin by highlighting the unique position Unity High is in as an "inclusive" school. I consider the discourse of inclusion presented by the school and how they come to it through critical pedagogy, enacting pedagogical goals of openness, acceptance, and critical thinking. These goals set the stage for two standard principles of practice in the school:

providing an informal educational space and addressing the needs of the whole student. I demonstrate that the school utilizes an informal educational space in order to offer respect and acceptance to students. Furthermore, the school's actions serve to support students beyond their academic needs, which leads the institution to value close relationships with students, their families, and community resources. The school is deeply entwined in the personal lives of students, most notably their family situations and ensuring students are safe both during and after school hours. I emphasize these two themes, an informal educational space and addressing the needs of the whole student, in order to show that by choosing to educate through such a critical pedagogy the school is setting a precedence for building inclusion, an inclusion that can largely be read as anti-heteronormative.

Following Chapter 4's descriptive results, Chapter 5 takes a critical look at how such an inclusive environment creates unique familial relationships, and the positive and negative aspects of the approach. I argue that while the school's anti-heteronormative space allows students to perform gender and sexuality in non-normative ways, the safety produced through close family-like relationships skews conceptions of acceptance and reproduces heteronormative proscriptions. Although students can be seen practicing openness, acceptance, and critical thinking, it is often done through a heteronormative lens, revealing the challenges students face as they negotiate the values of the outside world with those of their school. The effect is that students at Unity High continue to regulate hetero-genders even while challenging them in some ways. I present data that suggests the discourse of family created in the school leads to an understanding of the regulation of sex and gender as friendly teasing, as opposed to sexist or homophobic.

In Chapter 6 I probe further into the dynamic of “friendly” gender regulation to reveal how bullying occurs but is seen as a “family” building activity. Students are aware of the damage that can result from bullying and how their school works diligently to eliminate it. However, they also admit that bullying continues to happen on a regular basis at Unity High. Bullying becomes acceptable and is classified as either teasing or warranted. Students acknowledge that both forms of bullying regulate gender and sexuality but they find most bullying relatively harmless, viewing it as a means for students to secure insider status with each other. I present data that reveals how this understanding creates a type of ranking system for bullying, and the complex way students draw a line of unacceptable bullying. In fact, the school’s pedagogical goal of critical thinking becomes infused in the students’ intellectually nuanced efforts to strengthen the school community by clarifying the meaning and impact of bullying.

Finally, in Chapter 7 I consider how discourses of inclusion and family combine in complex ways to provide students with a sense of self. By examining projects students have completed at the school, I show the impact the school’s values have on their sense of identity. These projects show students working through challenging phases in their life, as well as presenting themselves within their work in order to establish credibility, validation, and acceptance. In addition to students’ projects, I present alternative spaces within the school that encourage students to think critically about how they see themselves and their place within the world. While the projects serve to demonstrate what the school’s inclusive values offer students in regard to understanding self, the alternative spaces show what the school’s promotion of quasi-familial relationships offers students in regard to understanding self. The two discourses intersect in complex ways to reveal challenging conceptions of gender and sexuality.

In the conclusion I review how the practices of critical pedagogy set forth at Unity High counterbalance the heteronormativity of our society and create safer spaces for gender and sexual minority students. I draw on student voices to bring forward their perspectives on the positive and negative aspects of their inclusive school. I end with a review of lessons learned, outlining for education reformers important points to consider as we struggle with the possibilities of developing inclusive institutions for *all* students.

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this dissertation is based on poststructural feminist theory and queer theory, both of which work to investigate issues of heteronormativity, embodiment, and intersectionality. Poststructural feminism seeks to deconstruct patriarchy and its ensuing hegemonies that dictate norms of gender, sex, and sexuality (Davies & Gannon, 2005; St. Pierre, 2000). Language is poststructuralism's principle method for understanding how systems of power and regulation are maintained. Poststructuralists emphasize "the role of language in forming individual subjectivity and social institutions" (Seidman, 2008, p. 160), and highlight that "whenever linguistic and social order is said to be fixed...[or] stable, this should be understood as an act of power or as reflecting the capacity of a social group to impose its will on others by freezing meanings" (Seidman, 2008, p. 161). By deconstructing the discourses enacted around us, poststructuralist analysis reveals the patterns of language that work to maintain social hierarchies, and in doing so disrupts hegemony. Poststructuralist *feminism* uses poststructuralist discourse analysis specifically to illuminate the power structures of patriarchy.

Deconstructing patriarchy requires one to analyze the complex interconnection of sex, gender, and sexuality. Therefore, queer theory is not an unrelated project. In its most basic form, queer theory seeks to disrupt the binary of hetero/homosexuality and reveal the power structures working to maintain heteronormative cultural values, which are mainstays of patriarchy. A significant part of queer theory focuses on identity and the need to label one's self. Just as poststructuralism seeks to reveal the instability of language, queer theory seeks to reveal the

instability of the hetero/homosexual binary and in doing so uncover “new possibilities for desire, identity, and social organization” (Seidman, 2008, p. 244). Queer theory and poststructural feminist theory complement each other nicely and provide a beneficial perspective regarding the structure and impact of heteronormativity and embodiment, as well as the role intersectionality plays in each. In what follows I introduce founding poststructuralist and queer theorists, review their perspectives on heteronormativity, embodiment, and intersectionality, and outline how their theories contribute to my understanding and interpretation of gender and sexual minority students.

Identity and Subjectivity: Materializing in the Social World

Social psychology primarily views identity as something that can be discovered by the individual, a discovery that highlights both its internal and external significance. Côté and Levine (2002) have synthesized the vast array of research on identity to reveal it is,

internal to the extent that it is seen to be subjectively ‘constructed’ by the individual, but it is external to the extent that the construction is in reference to ‘objective’ social circumstances provided by day-to-day interactions, social roles, cultural institutions, and social structures. (p. 49)

Therefore the real interest for most social psychologists is the meaning, understanding, and impact of an individual’s sense of “self.” This is to say that most individuals will question, at some point in their life, *Who am I?*, and most will eventually be able to assert a categorical identity. For example, “I am a White middle class heterosexual female.” Given our surroundings, we come to know our identities as having significant social, cultural, and political meaning.

Identities, therefore, describe roles and values of how we are expected to conduct ourselves (Côté, 2009).

Poststructuralists, however, focus on the “constructed” nature of identity and focus more specifically on subjectivity, our how an individual is able to understand themselves given the identities imposed upon them (Côté, 2009). Whereas identity is one’s ability to assert, “I am a White middle class heterosexual female,” subjectivity is one’s ability to assert, “I know how/why I came to be a White middle class heterosexual female,” and all the privileges/disadvantages that identity conveys. So, as Côté and Levine suggested, there is an interest in understanding the way external forces impact how “I” have been subjected to a particular and specific understanding of myself, and this is precisely what poststructuralism seeks to describe. Poststructuralism highlights the power structures at work creating, confining, and regulating the “I” an individual is able to be or become.

Michel Foucault’s work on disciplining bodies is a good place to start in order to understand how the construction of subjectivity takes place. In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault (1995) details the complex ways power works to regulate bodies and limit their subjectivity. Foucault’s work reveals how power is not simply something that an individual has over someone or something; nor is it simply a unidirectional source of influence. Power is not a possession. Rather, power is a network of relational control among all people, institutions, and objects that produces our understanding of reality and the self. Foucault (1995) asserts, “power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth. The individual and the knowledge that may be gained of him belong to this production” (p. 194). This understanding of power and its intrinsic connection to knowledge suggests that individuals have little to do with

who they are or who they become. Living within a network of power leads the individual into a discursively structured life.

Our bodies, therefore, become a source of power, a source that is both in need of and subject to control. In *The History of Sexuality* (1990) Foucault briefly discusses the origins of bio-power, or power operating over, through, and within bodies; he noted, “death is power’s limit” (p. 138). Power ceases to be effective once death occurs. Power at the root of life, however, offers more effect, “exert[ing] a positive influence on life, that endeavors to administer, optimize, and multiply it, subjecting it to precise controls and comprehensive regulations” (Foucault, 1990, p. 137). Foucault identifies two main ways power circulates through society and individual lives: by seeing bodies as machines, and by seeing bodies as biologically capable of reproducing. Both perspectives on bodies suggest the need for discipline and control: the former must be disciplined in order to present useful production (especially as it relates to capitalist societies), and the latter must be controlled in order to regulate population. The management of bodies takes place through a “bio-politics” whereby “biological existence [is] reflected in political existence” (Foucault, 1990, p. 142). Here we can begin to see how relations of power work to produce the meaning and possibilities of one’s life: who I know myself to be is dictated by the political power operating over and within my body.

Managing lives in this way takes a great deal of work and requires various methods of disciplining bodies. In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault (1995) provides a historical overview of methods used by institutions for creating docile bodies as a means to create “subjected and practiced bodies” (p. 138). Organizing and managing where an individual is allowed to be, and how they are allowed to spend their time, can create docile bodies. Foucault identifies institutions such as hospitals, militaries, and schools that implement these methods not only in

order to control the individual in their ranks, but also to *produce* the individual. Successfully regulating bodies allowed them to be categorized by “two elements - distribution and analysis, [and] supervision and intelligibility; [this categorization served both as] a technique of power and a procedure of knowledge” (Foucault, 1995, p. 148). In this regard, bodies become compartmentalized, hierarchized, and sanctioned into specific purposes and abilities. Groups are formed and identities secured. This approach to regulation “allows both the characterization of the individual as individual and the ordering of a given multiplicity,” which are essential components for controlling masses of people (Foucault, 1995, p. 149). The result is that individuals feel they must always know where they belong: they are given a *sense* of identity and as such understand their group placement and their position within the hierarchy.

Judith Butler (1993, 1999, 2004b) elaborates on Foucault’s analysis of our constructedness in order to highlight the damaging effects it has for those who fail to “materialize” (or become meaningful) in our world. Butler focuses more closely on language, and on how discourses use language to forcibly construct bodies into very specific positions. Her analysis begins with a critique of identity politics. As mentioned above, most individuals can recognize the utility of claiming an identity. For instance, I am an American, and I claim this identity of citizenship in order to assert my right to vote. There is a long line of feminist theory advocating for this type of identity politics: claiming an identity presents a unique perspective along with a unique claim to rights (coming from the root of standpoint theory; see for example, Harding, 1991, 2004). Although Butler acknowledges the utility of identity politics (1999, 2004b), overall she sees the project as incredibly problematic. For Butler it is clear that our current political system works exclusively through a “linguistics of representation,” requiring an individual seeking rights to first categorize themselves (Butler, 1999, p. 4). Politically speaking,

individuals do not exist prior to a category being set to represent them. Just as Foucault's earlier work suggests, networks of power and control work through the body; Butler (1999) clarifies how bio-politics construct the individual, noting, "subjects regulated by such structures are, by virtue of being subjugated to them, formed, defined, and reproduced in accordance with the requirements of those structures" (p. 4). This is a forcible construction of our bodies, requiring us to have meaningful social status. In other words, for women to obtain rights they have to be recognized as "women," which in turn works to reproduce them as women. Butler notes as concerning the fact that not all women are being recognized as women, nor do all women "fit" neatly into the category "woman." Requiring them to do so creates an essentialist category that is inherently exclusionary.

The inevitable exclusions inherent in identity categories illuminate the boundaries of circulating power. We all come to depend on categories and the norms that define them in order to present ourselves to others. Naming and marking those who are and are not in the "correct" category serves to identify which individuals may be socially recognized. By drawing boundaries determining who is able to materialize, inevitably we are also drawing boundaries of exclusion. Butler (1993) points out that in order to have an intelligible body, there must also be the unintelligible body, the excluded, to be measured against; a process that ultimately means "the subject is constituted through the force of exclusion and abjection" (p. 3). When this is the standard for understanding each other (ultimately the basis of our sociality) it creates a system by which all naming automatically draws a boundary (e.g., "It's a girl!" and *only* a girl). Naming becomes an instant marker of expectation and regulation for how that which is named is able to come into being. Such naming marks boundaries and one's ability to move/be within/out of said boundaries. It limits one's existence to what is socially and culturally acceptable according to the

norms of the named. For Butler naming is always citational; that is, we are named into being, but it is a naming that is dependent on all naming that has come before it, and that contributes to that legacy of naming and norming.⁸ So for example, the regulating power occurs when “the norm of sex takes hold to the extent that it is ‘cited’ as such a norm, but it also derives its power through the citations that it compels” (Butler, 1993, p. 13).

An individual can only come to be understood or materialize when they are invested by power, which is the formative effect of norms. The possibility of materializing rests in the successful repetition of norms, or what Butler refers to as performative acts. “A performative is that discursive practice that enacts or produces that which it names,” and in doing so reinforces the discursive powers of norms (Butler, 1993, p. 13). Materializing, or being a person who “matters” in this world, is “*being* [emphasis added] through the citing of power” (Butler, 1993, p. 15). Coming to be in this way is not always an easy process. We must remember that these acts are a “forced reiteration of norms” (Butler, 1993, p. 94); we have no choice but to do them. When people and institutions continually invest in norms and the demand for normalization succeeds, a limitation develops such that materializing is possible *only* through those norms. Butler has claimed that materiality “*is* power in its formative or constituting effects” (1993, p. 34). Power does not work on its own; it takes up an object and creates an object. So for example, sex is taken up as the object that creates a gendered body. The regulatory norms of sex (as a category) designate it as the essential boundary of gender; bodies that follow this norm are allowed to have a material reality in our society. Sex and gender continuously ask language to designate a materiality of the body that is not entirely present. The fact that materiality is

⁸ I refer here to Butler’s understanding of Derrida’s performative utterance. See for example *Bodies That Matter*, p. 13, as well as Chapter 1 of *Gender Trouble*.

camouflaged in this way, as a “real” effect, means power has been effective in making the materiality of sex and gender an epistemic truth.

Butler (1993) notes that this system of materializing can lead our bodies to work against any fluidity we might come to have with regard to identity categories. She suggests that our whole basis of social relation comes through the fact that we have bodies. We use our bodies to connect, to communicate, to procreate, etc., and our bodies are always already “read” within and against existing social/cultural/historical norms. Therefore our bodies are named, *cited*, in categorical ways. These readings and interpretations of our bodies take our bodies away from us. As our bodies are taken up and read by others, defining our selves is no longer under our control. The challenges related to this loss of control result in what Butler describes as the “precarious life” (2004a) and will be discussed in detail below.

Heteronormativity: Power and Control Over Bodies

Living within a heteronormative society presents gender and sexual minority students with challenges. This is to say that the overall norms of society require a female-assigned/bodied person to act feminine and desire men, while a male-assigned/bodied person is to act masculine and desire women; this expectation can be referred to as hetero-genders (Mellor & Epstein, 2006). Michel Foucault (1990) first outlined the significance of heteronormativity in *The History of Sexuality*. His genealogy of sex identifies how a discourse of sexuality is supported by “regimes of truth” (Foucault, 1995) designating normal sexuality, or the “truth” of sexuality. In his exploration of bio-power Foucault shows how various discourses come together to strategically work *over* and *within* bodies. Therefore we can delineate how sex (category) has been socially constructed to control the sexual nature of bodies: laws, governments, institutions, and the individuals who enact them, all work to ensure bodies remain *useful* and *controlled*.

Foucault (1990) reasons that initially the control of and demand for heterosexuality was maintained through four key figures of the nineteenth century: “the hysterical woman, the masturbating child, the Malthusian couple, and the perverse adult” (p. 105). Each of these figures served to discipline bodies and *produce* sexuality. In doing so, the “truth” of sexuality was established and the required norms of (hetero)sexuality set in place. Foucault’s work was one of the first to pinpoint how such a discourse can be internalized to “tell us our truth” (Foucault, 1990, p. 69). This internalization functions to secure more control over bodies and therefore maintain adequate regulation.

The tactics revealed in *Discipline and Punish* can be used to manage any discourse, including discourses of sexuality. Foucault (1995) outlines methods of time management which “establish rhythms, impose particular occupations, regulate the cycles of repetition” in order to train bodies into specific positions (p. 149). These types of external regulations of bodies are especially significant because of how they create an internal regulation as well. For example, Foucault elaborates on surveillance as a disciplinary tactic that becomes internalized. For Foucault, there must be a hierarchy in order for power to observe all that is going on, one that always has a watchful gaze that can contribute to the project of control. Surveillance “operate[s] to transform individuals: to act on those it shelters, to provide a hold on their conduct, to carry the effects of power right to them, to make it possible to know them, to alter them” (Foucault, 1995, p. 172). This watchful discipline is what gives an individual the ability to “know” themselves. Therefore, we might suggest that the power which flows through all disciplinary tactics (dividing people, managing their tasks, their time, their movement, their ability) disciplines “me” into the *Me* that I am, which is the only “acceptable” me for the society in which I live.

Bentham's panopticon is a good example of how Foucault's concept of surveillance and normalizing come together as an important technique of power. A panopticon leaves the observed individual in a permanent state of "visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power" (Foucault, 1995, p. 201). The efficiency of the panopticon is that it is visible, but unverifiable: the observed must assume they are being watched, but they will never know for sure. This mechanism ultimately leaves the individual with an internalized self-surveillance. "He who is subjected to a field of visibility, and knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power...he inscribes in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection" (Foucault, 1995, p. 202-203). Even though it is the external surveillance that offers a potential threat, it is the reality of being a subjugated person within powerful forces of regulation that is controlling. As effective as this policing may be, its influence is not maximized until it is within the masses: society as a whole must be a panopticon. Once the whole mass of society effectively regulates themselves *and* each other, near total control exists. Foucault would argue that this type of mass control has occurred with heteronormativity.

With regards to sexuality, once the norm of heterosexuality was set (through the various discourses regulating the science of sex), individuals had to "detect" their sexuality in order to ensure they were healthy (or at least not "mad"). Consequently, we can see how power worked at "contacting bodies, caressing them with its eyes, intensifying areas, electrifying surfaces, [and] dramatizing troubled moments," all in order to discipline the body into an acceptable sexuality (Foucault, 1990, p. 44). Although we now live in a society where many believe we are "Born

This Way”⁹ in regards to our sexual orientation, Foucault would assert that we are ‘*Conditioned This Way*,’ and in particular conditioned into an acceptable *heterosexuality*. Foucault traces how vilification and pathologization happens to those who do not comply. Those who do not fit the norm of sexuality are considered anomalies for choosing to be different. The Born This Way movement seeks to free individuals from the ostracizing power of heteronormativity by suggesting non-hetero identities are not a choice. However, Foucault likely would assert “choice” has nothing to do with the ostracizing effect of heteronormativity, and that such a movement ultimately reinforces the pathologization of those involved – they become contained in their movement, and further, serve as the “other” against which the norm may be measured (similar to the historical figures of the hysterical woman, masturbating child, Malthusian couple, and perverse adult). The example of “Born this Way” highlights the limited power of popular culture (or subcultural or countercultural groups) to disrupt normalizing discourses. Even in trying to escape the dominant power structures, such movements continue to need and use the normalizing discourse, and all too easily reproduce the very power they object to.

Foucault would urge us to remember that this power to vilify, to mark others and control masses, comes from the very fact that power does not come from one specific individual; rather, it comes from a network of forces that circulate everywhere. All of these disciplining tactics work together to maintain an orderly society. Foucault states that,

⁹ Here I am making reference to the current popular movement - largely reinvented [notions of gender and sexual minorities being “born this way” can be traced back as early as the 20th century and sexologists assessments of homosexuality (for example, Ellis, 1915), and the beginnings of the gay liberation movement of the 1960s] by musician and artist Lady Gaga and her song (and subsequent foundation) “Born this Way” - to accept all individuals as they are because that is how they were born/created. Jang and Lee’s (2014) work has indicated music can serve as a catalyst to political change and a person’s evaluation of equality, something that emphasizes the desire to “popularize” human rights issues and concerns. Lady Gaga’s original song resulting in her starting a foundation to support youth in building more inclusive communities (Born This Way Foundation, 2016) speaks to the impact pop culture has on our sense of self and other.

[A]lthough surveillance rests on individuals, its functioning is that of a network of relations from top to bottom, but also to a certain extent from bottom to top and laterally; this network ‘holds’ the whole together and traverses it in its entirety with effects of power that *derive from one another* [emphasis added] (1995, p. 176-177)

There is power everywhere, working through everyone and everything, as a hegemony that is omnipresent and yet often unacknowledged. This omnipresence allows it to be both discreetly and indiscreetly effective. That is, hegemony can often be hidden; one does not always know how or why power is operating. This type of power moves beyond the calculated discipline of one individual and infiltrates *all* aspects of social relations. The resulting impact is a subjugated person *in* and *of* these power structures. Who a person can be, how they can materialize, is limited in every way by what is made available from circulating powers.

Normalizing – conforming to the dominant norms around you – is one of the mechanisms of power that become significantly internalized. Norms work to regulate all of us, but especially those who do not conform. Our society has made it easy to see when someone breaks a rule, and ensures that when a rule is broken, the person will be punished. Foucault (1995) reveals how punishment can be effectively thought of as a corrective guidance that allows the disobedient to be trained into obedience, or trained into a norm. Furthermore, good and bad behaviors come to be quantified so that individuals can continue to be hierarchized and differentiated. For example, those who do not follow the norms of heterosexuality are deemed bad, and rank lower in the social hierarchy. One’s ranking becomes a part of who they are, “their nature, their potentialities, their level or their value” (Foucault, 1995, p. 181); it becomes *their truth*. These disciplinary measures are so effective that what begins as external penalties result in internalized regulations marking a person’s self-understanding.

Discipline becomes a democratic process as the exercise of power becomes “supervised by society as a whole” (Foucault, 1995, p. 207). We observe and regulate each other. We enforce norms on each other. All of society is caught up within the web of power and continues to circulate discipline and control on each other. We always exist within a web of power because we can only come to be known through these forces. Foucault (1995) reminds us that “the individual is carefully fabricated in [our social order], according to a whole technique of forces and bodies...[we are] in the panoptic machine, invested by its effects of power, which we bring to ourselves since we are part of its mechanism” (p. 217). We need these effects in order to be visible and materialize to others.

The panoptic effect of sexuality leaves the “vilified” individual feeling caught in a “law of transgression and punishment” with no options other than to obey the demands of normative sexuality (Foucault, 1990, p. 85). They must not find themselves falling into one of the four deviant categories (the hysterical woman, the masturbating child, the Malthusian couple, or the perverse adult) of sexuality. With this we can see how “all of the modes of domination, submission, and subjugation are ultimately reduced to an effect of obedience” (Foucault, 1990, p. 85). Although historically laws against non-normative expressions of sexuality may have initially been conceived and enforced by the state (with threats of death), it transformed into bio-power and the regulation of *life*. The strict demands of normalization and continuous self-surveillance that ensures the effectiveness of bio-power.

Judith Butler (1999) again expands on Foucault’s analysis to reveal how our understandings of an embodied sex and gender are also socially constructed. In *Gender Trouble* Butler outlines the veracity of hetero-genders by identifying exactly how we are stuck within a “heterosexual matrix.” She traces the various discourses deployed to construct a seemingly

essential gendered and sexed person. Her investigation reveals the intricate workings of a heterosexual matrix and describes the manufacturing of this matrix through discourses including psychoanalysis, religion, anthropology, and other sciences, and the ways in which the heterosexual matrix produces cultural norms that reinscribe the unquestioned “nature” of gender. She explains, “The limits to the “real” [a naturally gendered self] are produced within the naturalized heterosexualization of bodies in which physical facts serve as causes and desires reflect the inexorable effects of that physicality” (Butler, 1999, p. 90). This matrix and the demand for heteronormativity create a social expectation of embodiment: bodies must present heterosexuality and hetero-genders in order to be socially recognized. Reiterating the control and regulation suggested by Foucault, Butler (1999) postulates that bodies can only come to be meaningful within our society by enacting normative hetero-genders.

Embodiment and Intersectionality: The Complex Construction of Hetero-Genders

Both Foucault and Butler expose how embodiment becomes discursively fixed and regulated. Butler articulates the role embodiment takes within heteronormativity: individual bodies are expected to embody, *perform*, very specific attributes (that is, heteronormative sex, gender *and* sexuality). The constellation of sex, gender, and sexuality cannot be broken, and cannot be removed from what has been “biologically” dictated “by” the body: this is the forceful demand of hetero-genders. The body is inextricably linked to the heterosexual norms of our society. It is our enactment of our bodies as portraying a cohesive sex and gender that allow us to materialize. Butler (1999) posits that this performative brings us a sense of an internal self, but that it is “an illusion discursively maintained for the purpose of the regulation of sexuality within the obligatory frame of reproductive heterosexuality” (p. 173). Even so, she claims, following these norms is our only option for materializing.

Building on Butler's work, queer theorists suggest *all* aspects of embodiment are socially constructed. Queer theory focuses on a rejection of categories and labels more generally, asserting that confining one's self to a label (of sex, gender, or sexuality specifically, although other labels are also rejected) is limiting and unhelpful to projects of equality (de Laetis, 1991, 2011; Eng, Halberstam, & Muñoz, 2005; Sullivan, 2003). Although rejecting labels is a tenet of queer theory, recognizing one's position (or positionality) is advocated by most queer theorists, allowing for political organizing and representation (Sullivan, 2003). This is discursively strategic, necessary given our reliance on norms, in order to find representation.

Queer theorists uncover the significance of bodily performance and the necessity of performing our bodies "correctly." Butler (1993) suggests there is something very important to learn from understanding the "bodies which fail to materialize" because they effectively allow other bodies to succeed in materializing (p. 16). Queer theory investigates the ways in which our society prescribes embodiment and to critically look at how gender and sexuality intersect with other forms of embodiment, such as race, nationality, religion, ability and other social locations. Providing an intersectional analysis helps us see how being "appropriately" sexed and gendered is coupled with being appropriately raced and classed, revealing the ways intersecting systems of oppression impact the experiences of different individuals differently (e.g., the experience of a White upper-class woman versus that of a Black lower-class woman). Gender, sexuality, race, and class have been socially constructed to maintain a White male superiority, dictating complicated intersections of acceptability depending on one's social position.

Intersectionality works to reveal the powerful nature of these multiple domains of control. Vivian May (2015) has articulated how intersectionality "helps to expose erasures in ways of knowing and to identify forms of resistance, whether individual or collective....[and]

exposes how norms and practices declared to be impartial are often applied and enforced in (biased) ways that perpetuate systemic inequality” (p. 28). When queer projects work to reveal the functions of these complex matrixes of race, class, and gender, structures of control become more visible and the vast impact of hetero-genders becomes apparent.

The intersectional aspects of heteronormativity reveal how racial discourses are deployed in conjunction with heteronormative discourses (and vice versa). For instance, in reviewing the history of interracial marriage Ruth Frankenberg’s (1993) work revealed the ways racialized bodies have been constructed to portray very specific genders and sexualities. “Foremost was the construction in racist discourses of the sexuality of men and women of color as excessive, animalistic, or exotic in contrast to the ostensibly restrained or ‘civilized’ sexuality of white women and men” (Frankenberg, 1993, p.75). Laws were set in place to maintain these perceptions and regulate how bodies acted in general, and how they interacted with others more specifically. For example, Jim Crow and miscegenation laws were regulatory strategies to reinforce the norms of gender and sexuality, while also reinforcing norms of race and class.

Patricia Hill Collins (2004) suggests that a Black sexual politics could help us to more explicitly highlight these complex relations. Her work unequivocally shows how racism cannot effectively be addressed without also addressing sexism. This is precisely because sexuality is not just about biology; it has been socially constructed and is “deeply implicated in shaping American social inequalities” (Collins, 2004, p. 6). Collins’ (2004) work emphasizes that “racism is a gender-specific phenomenon” and so in order to combat racism, gender must be of central concern (p. 7). Understanding the intricate ways race and gender coalesce reveals how new forms of racism differentially impact those individuals multiply confined by power. For example, a hierarchy of masculinity is constructed and stratified by gender, age, class, sexuality,

and race. In relation, and always subordinated to it, is the hierarchy of femininity. Collins (2004) exposes the complex way these hegemonies work:

[T]he social power granted to race and class in the United States means that sexism is not an either/or endeavor in which all men dominate all women. Rather, gender norms that privilege men typically play out *within* racial/ethnic and/or social class groups as well as *between* such groups. (pp. 186-187)

Just as there is no escaping the norms of gender and sex, there is no escaping the norms of race and class; additionally, the powers of each norm have circulated through/into each other, intersecting in ways that cannot be disengaged. Collins (2004) suggested that the current result of this infiltration is an ideology of Black sexuality that has detrimentally invaded the bodies of Black people and resulted in a “dishonest body politics” (p. 282).

Sharon Patricia Holland (2012) describes some powerful manifestations of race/sexuality intersectionality as “the erotic life of racism.” Holland has argued that since race is so ingrained in our social and cultural understandings of each other, our desires will inherently be racist to some extent. This is partly because, as Collins suggests, desire (sexuality) is socially constructed, and race is never removed from that construction. In melding both critical race theory and queer theory, Holland presents an intersectional analysis of how mundane racist acts speak to our need for connection, our expectations of others, and our perception of hierarchies, all of which are reflected in our intimate relations. Therefore, “what we have called racism is now ‘personal choice’ or becoming mildly prejudicial,” for example, preferring to date one race over another; “the erotic, therefore, touches upon that aspect of racist practice that cannot be accounted for *as* racist practice but must be understood as something else altogether” (Holland, 2012, p. 27).

Holland suggests that rather than marking race as part of the body, as history, as ideology, or

even within a temporal understanding, race must be marked as within the present and within the intimacies of everyday interactions. Such an analysis reflects the powerful intersection of race, gender and sexuality and reveals a small aspect of the hidden functions of heteronormativity.

Ability further complicates intersections of gender and sexuality (and other locations) as well. While racial intersections have become fairly well represented within queer theory, issues of dis/ability have often been left behind. In *Crip theory: Cultural signs of queerness and disability* Robert McRuer (2006) highlights this absence and shows how queer theory's critique of compulsory heterosexuality is closely paralleled by compulsory able-bodiedness. He identifies how "normalcy" perceived in heterosexuality is precisely connected to a "normal" ability, resulting in an able-bodied heterosexual. Even at the level of basic definitions, the parallels are striking: McRuer notes, "first, to be able-bodied is to be 'free from physical disability,' just as to be heterosexual is to be 'the opposite of homosexual'" (2006, p. 8). Not only do these definitions carry an assumption of choice, they also assume all individuals aspire to be able-bodied. McRuer suggests that compulsory able-bodiedness comes about in the same way as compulsory heterosexuality - through repetitive forces seeking conformity. In this regard, he mirrors Butler. Just as Butler shows that gender can only exist through performance, McRuer shows that able-bodiedness does not truly exist; it is a socially constructed norm that can only be performed. He draws the parallel further, stating:

Able-bodied identity and heterosexual identity are linked in their mutual impossibility and in their mutual incomprehensibility – they are incomprehensible in that each is an identity that is simultaneously the ground on which all identities supposedly rest and an impressive achievement that is always deferred and thus never really guaranteed.

(McRuer, 2006, p. 9)

Just as Butler's "heterosexual matrix" (1999) and its demand for heteronormativity create a very specific expectation of embodiment, compulsory able-bodiedness does the same: bodies must present ability in order to be intelligible to others. McRuer highlights the intersectionality in that not only must bodies present able-bodiedness, but it must be presented as a *heterosexual* able-bodiedness, or remain unintelligible.

The complex intersections of gender, sexuality, race, class, and ability highlight how "intersecting oppressions share certain core features" (Collins, 2000, p. 135) of hegemonic control. Heteronormativity is therefore not only a powerful discourse on gender and sexuality, but also on race, class, ability, and other social locations, drawing boundaries of acceptable bodily performances. Omi and Winant (1994) remind us of the usefulness of understanding the functions of these intersections, and mark the potential for disrupting hegemony:

[R]ace, class, and gender (as well as sexual orientation) constitute "regions" of hegemony, areas in which certain political projects can take shape. They share certain obvious attributes in that they are all "socially constructed," and they all consist of a field of projects whose common feature is their linkage of social structure and signification.
(p.68)

Identifying the complex intersections of race, class, gender, sexuality, and other social locations allows us to identify how an individual's position within hegemony is directly connected to the social norms dictating the intelligibility of their body, and their body's potential to be meaningful within our society. Acknowledging this construction and revealing the complex ways dominant ideologies intersect to reinforce subordination, on both the micro and macro levels, is essential to understanding how power works to control bodies.

Precarity. Given that our identities grow out of our subjection to the discourses at work all around us, and that those discourses intersect in complex ways to further dictate embodiment, our options for being known within the world are limited. This limitation brings us to a precarious life: “I” can only come to be through the taking up of norms that are laden with power, history, and meaning not defined by me, and you can only come to be through the same process. Our humanness, therefore, is dependent on social norms. Butler (2004b) cautions that, “these norms have far-reaching consequences” and that “sometimes the terms that confer ‘humanness’ on some individuals are those that deprive certain other individuals of the possibility of achieving that status” (p. 2). Our lives thus become muddled in their dependence on the Other, and so precarity befalls us.

Moya Lloyd (2007) provides a helpful analysis of Butler’s thinking on precarity. She clarifies two specific ways Butler discussed how we come to know ourselves through the other. First, through “our dependence on others, and [second, through] the fact that we inhabit a world governed by social norms that we have not chosen” (Lloyd, 2007, p. 138). This speaks to the double function of norms: they are both relational and regulatory. I come into being through my dependent relation to you, and I can only remain as a being through the forced compliance (regulation) of norms. A dependence on the other makes us vulnerable; our primary vulnerability comes in infancy, when we are reliant on our caregivers, and it continues as we come to realize that the taking in/on of norms is the only way for us to be recognizable in society (Butler, 2004a; Lloyd, 2007). This vulnerability becomes evident in bodies; “to be a body is to be given over to others” as we are exposed to and experience love, anger, mourning, and other visceral bodily experiences (Butler, 2004b, p. 20). Through examining loss, Butler (2004a) eloquently reveals how this vulnerability captures our precariousness:

[When I lose you] I not only mourn the loss, but I become inscrutable to myself. Who “am” I, without you? ...I think I have lost “you” only to discover that “I” have gone missing as well...what I have lost “in” you, that for which I have no ready vocabulary, is a relationality that is composed neither exclusively of myself nor you, but is to be conceived as *the tie* by which those terms are differentiated and related. (p. 22)

We are thoroughly entwined and dependent on each other in order to achieve what Butler terms a “livable life” (2004a, 2004b). These ties both mark who I am and who I am not, and in setting those boundaries, also leave an unknowingness for both the self and other. Butler insists that there will always be an opacity to this process of recognition. All categories will inevitably create exclusions, and these exclusions make it impossible for us to ever fully know ourselves or others; there will always be gaps in our sense of who we are. Precarity befalls us as we are left with no choice but to pick up unreliable/unsuitable norms in order to exist.

When I assert that I am a White, middle-class, heterosexual female, I am giving an account of myself within a sociality of regulated norms that I have not necessarily consented to, but are the only categories available for me to use in order to become knowable to others. By calling on these categories and neatly fitting into them, I achieve a livable life. These categories are “social in character, and they establish social norms, a domain of unfreedom and substitutability within which our ‘singular’ stories are told” (Butler, 2005, p. 20). It is when an individual does not feel they fit neatly into these categories, or when others determine that someone *cannot* fit into a category, that problems arise; they have no right to give an account of themselves.

Although this precarity is inevitable, Butler (1999, 1993, 2004b) suggests that it is manageable because norms are always changing. Norms are temporal; they shift and change

throughout time, and convey different meaning at different times. This temporality means that how one takes up norms, or how one performs a given norm, factors significantly into how that person materializes, both in the sense of how they see themselves, and how others see them.

Performing Self: Surviving on the Edge of Precarity

Butler's theory sets up the standard that in order for someone to know who they are, and matter in this world, they must perform, or "do," the acceptable norms circulating around them. They must cite and enact norms that are not their own, but that have come from a long history of others' doing. Butler's (1993) sense of performativity can thus be described as the "...forced reiteration of norms" (p. 94) and the complex way we take up and "do" that which is already constituted around us. "A performative act is one which brings into being or enacts that which it names, and so marks the constitutive or productive power of discourse" (Butler, 1995, p. 134). Once these discourses are in place, it becomes nearly impossible for individuals to imagine something that does not "fit." For example, the discourse of heterosexuality makes it difficult for us to understand a person who does not inhabit a reproductive sexuality; such discourse regards the homosexual or asexual as the vagrant "other;" both are unintelligible.

Gender Trouble is one of Butler's (1999) groundbreaking works that highlights how performance takes critical form in our lives. She traces the various discourses that construct sex and gender as essential and biological. By deconstructing the regulatory fictions constructing both sex and gender, Butler shows that they are both performances. We learn that "gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being" (Butler, 1999, p. 43-44). Gender and sexuality are a "doing" (rather than "being") that is required by the heterosexual matrix. Although gender and sex may appear to be intrinsic to who we are, "[t]his

appearance is achieved through a performative twist of language and/or discourse that conceals the fact that ‘being’ a sex or a gender is fundamentally impossible” (Butler, 1999, p. 25). At the same time, *not* “doing” a sex or gender is also impossible. The requirements for this performance are so ingrained within our society that no one dares to (or is able to) imagine anything different. The discourses that maintain rigid hetero-genders are so powerful that every person is required to embody them. Those who do not become unintelligible, and socially abolished.

It can be violent for an individual to forcefully materialize through norms. It can hold a normative violence with the potential to build into physical violence. The ironic truth is that for an individual to be oppressed, they first must be recognized, or materialize, in society. Refusing that recognition is itself a normative violence: the norms available reject/refuse recognition. For Butler (2004b) then, “norms of recognition function to produce and to *deproduce* [emphasis added] the notion of the human” (p. 31-32). In Butler’s more recent work, she looks into our dependence on norms to identify the various discourses working to frame bodies as dehumanized. In *Precarious Life* (2004a) (and again in *Frames of War* [2010]) she posits that violence (that is understood as violence) cannot be perpetrated upon those whose lives have been foreclosed. “Violence against those who are already not quite living, that is, living in a state of suspension between life and death, leaves a mark that is no mark” (Butler, 2004a, p. 36). In other words, the violence is of no consequence because its normative value, its discursive formation, has already determined the life was not livable. It is a life without meaning (without a mark). Normative violence has already refused the person’s ability to materialize/live and, as such, physical violence upon the person is seen as inconsequential.

Butler’s elucidation of the concept of normative value makes it clear that discursive violence (i.e., norms refusing to let a person materialize) is a stepping stone to physical violence.

This is incredibly important to consider when thinking about the impact of microaggressions.

Microaggressions involve brief, daily assaults on members of marginalized groups may be social or environmental, verbal or nonverbal, and intentional or unintentional (Sue, 2010). Derald Sue (2010) investigates the intricate ways microaggressions inform our lives in *Microaggressions in Everyday Life: Race, Gender, and Sexual Orientation*. This work reveals the complex ways the dominant group works to regulate the norms of race, gender and sexuality through small everyday hidden messages meant to keep a person in their place. The harm is significant, as microaggressions

assail the self-esteem of recipients, produce anger and frustration, deplete psychic energy, lower feelings of subjective well-being and worthiness, produce physical health problems, shorten life expectancy and deny minority populations equal access and opportunity in education, employment, and health care. (Sue, 2010, p. 6)

This list of harms demonstrates both the normative and physical violence that takes place with microaggressions. A Foucauldian analysis of microaggressions reveals them as a disciplinary technique within the panopticon of mass social control. Various networks of power intersect, impacting both the dominant and subordinated groups, to ensure individuals stay in their rank.

All of this leaves the average person with a desire to reproduce the norms asked of them, simply so they can survive, acknowledging that they must perform the norms that allow them to matter. Depending on our particular embodiment – and the complex intersection of race, class, gender, sexual orientation, religion, ability, and nationality – our options for performing acceptable norms may be limited. However, our relational dependence means that most of us are successfully socialized into conforming to and reproducing these acceptable norms.

Learning to Survive: Gender and Sexuality Performances

As discussed in previous sections, heteronormativity demands very specific ways of being men and women in this world; yet this does not mean that we are able to meet those demands easily. Two aspects of living a queer life highlight the complexity involved with learning to comply with the norms of gender and sexuality: the discourse of living in the “closet,” and the varied experiences of being transgender. Both represent the inevitable performances that individuals take up in order to survive or become meaningful within their social surroundings.

Steven Seidman’s (2004) *Beyond the Closet: The Transformation of Gay and Lesbian Life* presents a vivid anthology of closeted life for gay and lesbian individuals in the United States, and demonstrates the historical and enduring utility of the closet. Seidman argues that the closet exists as a “systematic harm,” which materializes because of the “*heterosexual domination*” demanding it (2004, p. 30). The system of heterosexual domination supports the shame, guilt and secrecy of homosexuals, and asks them to work at “passing” as heterosexual. This has meant “for closeted individuals, a daily life acquires a heightened sense of theatricality or performative deliberativeness” (Seidman, 2004, p. 31.). In order to survive, homosexuals were taught to pass by performing hetero-genders; men were expected to fully appropriate their gender privilege, while women were to fall in line beneath them. By enacting these social standards of heterosexuality, many lesbian and gay men deliberately chose the closet as “a strategy of accommodating to heterosexual domination” (Seidman, 2004, p. 55). Seidman’s analysis emphasizes how threats to individuals who transgress gender and sexuality expectations are so great they are willing to choose secrecy as a form of survival. Certainly not every homosexual takes this route – although many may be (at one time or another, or to some individuals but not

others) in the closet. However, the fact that it even exists as a possibility speaks to the necessity of performing to survive, even if the performance is a “false” performance.

Seidman (2004), along with other researchers, considers the complexity of closeted performance at the intersections of other social locations, noting that due to a person’s “age, class, gender, race, ability or disability, region, religion, and nationality” they may find themselves navigating “multiple closets” (p. 31). The significance of these intersections is aptly revealed by Cathy Cohen’s (1996) investigation into how Black communities construct particular notions of blackness for gay Black men. Historically many gay and lesbian Black people remained silent about their homosexuality as a coping method for dealing with racism, in order to avoid becoming dually marginalized. Hiding one’s sexuality was a “willing payment” in exchange “for the support, caring, and protection” of one’s community and family members (Cohen, 1996, p. 369). Although more and more people of color are open about their homosexuality, stigma continues in these communities. Cohen (1996) revealed how the framing of Black sexuality, and specifically the vilification of Black homosexuality, “have been advanced to justify any number of economic, political, and social arrangements” (p. 376), largely resulting in an upward mobility for the “‘good’ or ‘true’ black person [who displays an] appropriate sexuality” (p. 379), and denying it for those who do not.

The construction of being on the “Down-Low” (or DL) is one result of this regulation, and highlights the racialized aspects of the closet. Mark Anthony Neal (2006) considers the significance of DL identities, and suggests that to assume “DL identities are simply a response to the homophobia that exists in black communities simplifies the ways in which normative black masculinities are constructed within those communities” (p. 82). Just as Cohen (1996) suggests, Neal shows that there is a purposeful in-group regulation taking place. Performing an acceptable

hetero-gender becomes not only about an individual's gender and sexuality, but also about their race and how those embodied aspects coalesce in unique ways, resulting in varying gender expectations across racial groups. For many gay and lesbian people of color, this intersectional regulation adds to the necessity of learning to perform acceptable hetero-genders and survive in our society, even when it means hiding aspects of their sexuality.

Performance shows up differently when we consider the experiences of transgender individuals. If at birth a person is declared one gender, and later on in life they determine their gender identity is different than the one that has been imposed, challenges arise for how society views their embodiment. Judith Halberstam (2005) explores these challenges, specifically relating them to the temporality of transgender bodies and revealing the constant gender performance demanded of these bodies. Halberstam (2005) says,

Transgenderism is constituted as a paradox made up in equal parts of visibility and temporality: whenever the transgendered [sic] character is seen to be transgendered, then he/she is both failing to pass and threatening to expose a rupture between the distinct temporal registers of past, present, and future. (p. 77)

That is to say, competing understandings of the reality of gender challenge us as we view a transgender person. Halberstam identifies how this is translated into a desire to reconcile the past (the original understanding of a person's gender), the present (acknowledging a misunderstanding of that gender), and the future (deciding to accept or reject the new understanding, or unreality, of a biological gender). This process leaves the "viewer" in a constant position of rewind and replay as they work to make sense of a transgender person's gender performance.

That this performance is even demanded in the first place is significant. Though the viewer may not read a transgender performance in a way that illuminates the performative aspects of gender, the disjuncture the viewer perceives provides at least a possibility of rendering the situation differently. In other words, “realness” is called into question when a transgender person is visible as trans. Butler (1993) states that realness “is a standard that is used to judge any given performance within the established categories” (p. 129). As individuals reiterate the norms of sex and gender, their success or failure is determined by how closely they approximate the ideal of a “real” man or woman. Realness asks people to embody a believable, authentic, and natural performance of sex and gender. Success is marked by a performance that is undetectable as performance, and which reinforces the “truth” of hetero-genders.

Halberstam argues that transgender persons are put into a position where they can never achieve “real” gender (understood here as the successful, normative performance of gender demanded by a heteronormative society). Rather, at best, transgender people aspire for a gender “realness,” which, although only a performance (and here it is a performance of a performance), is the condition of their materializing. They are limited in this way because “the real...is that which always exists elsewhere, and as a fantasy of belonging and being” that cisgender¹⁰ bodies inhabit (Halberstam, 2005, p. 52). Although for Butler this becomes the realness of gender performance and the opportunity to materialize, for Halberstam it is the fantasy *unrealized* for transgender people.

Both the requirement of passing (or giving a “false” performance of hetero-genders) and the requirement of giving a *transgressive* transgender performance reveal how individuals are continually negotiating the required performances of living in a heteronormative society. These

¹⁰ Cisgender is a term used to identify those individuals who are not transgender and who have never felt a disjunction between their physical body and their gender identity.

examples emphasize that a person's ability to materialize, to survive within the social world, must account for their embodied gender and sexuality and how that embodiment must be performed as dictated by the heteronormative prescriptions circulating around them. People begin to learn these (hetero)norms and how to give a convincing performance early on in life. The following section begins to outline the process of how youth learn to perform appropriate hetero-genders.

Adolescent Performative Acts

The years between childhood and adulthood have predominantly been constructed as the single most tumultuous transitional period within the life course (Johnson, 2015). Adolescence can be termed as a period when children become more independent, seeking adult responsibilities, and "is largely conceived of as a time of identity development and preparation for adulthood" (Johnson, 2015, p. 115). During this significant time of growth and adjustment, youth learn to manage norms (or the social expectations of being a raced, classed, sexed, gendered, etc. person) in varying ways. Many sociological studies of adolescents focus on their processes of learning (and sometimes pushing) the boundaries of norms, often focusing on teen "delinquencies" or failures to cooperate with norms (Johnson, 2015).

As we consider the need to be able to materialize within the social world, the way teens begin to understand *how* they materialize becomes critical. In the process of coming to understand their identities, it is not unusual to see teens try new manners of being to see what feels like a good fit. They may try a new sport, club, or extra-curricular activity. They may take different internships, or change jobs every few months. All of this is seen as a natural part of teens learning who they are, and this happens with gender and sexuality as well. Teens explore different ways to "perform" the hetero-gender expectations taught to them by social agents such

as family, school, peers, and media. They learn to navigate the norms demanded of them in order to become socially meaningful in our society. We might say they perform different norms to learn the effects those norms have on their lives. In doing so, youth come to understand how they are seen as a gendered and sexed person, and how varying performances affect how they are seen. The norms of gender and sex are straightforward in our heteronormative society: “girls” are to act feminine and like boys, while “boys” are to act masculine and like girls.

The harsh demands of femininity can be seen when we examine girls’ transitions from childhood to adolescence. Often times the pre-pubescent years are very difficult for girls as they see what they must soon become (Eckert, 1994; Orenstein, 1994; Tolman, 2002). Tween girls (roughly between the ages of 8-14) often sense that there is a proper time to begin to show romantic or sex interest in boys and “grow up” into heterosexual women, and this realization is often met with ambivalence (Eckert, 1994; Orenstein, 1994; Striepe & Tolman, 2003). Penelope Eckert (1994) notes that puberty marks the transition “from a normatively asexual community to a normatively heterosexual one,” a transition greatly dependent on female subordination (p. 1). Eckert (1994) discusses what she calls the “developmental imperative,” the process of girls learning how to become “older” by negotiating behaviors and age-appropriateness (p. 3). This process can be frightening and filled with ambivalence because girls see childhood freedoms that are lost with womanhood. They become aware of the subordination of women within patriarchy: “at the threshold of adolescence, girls face demands to conform to norms of femininity, essentially becoming socialized into their proper place as women in a patriarchal system” (Tolman, 2002, p. 53). Although girls may be ambivalent about this transition, there is also an allure of womanhood and submission because “much of the power of subordination lies in its status as an accomplishment of maturity” (Eckert, 1994, p. 14).

Eckert notes the connection between gendered maturation and heterosexuality, and discusses how “in preadolescence, those new behaviors involve engagement in the heterosexual marketplace” (Eckert, 1994, p. 3). The demands of compulsory heterosexuality (Rich, 1983) and the valuing of femininity create what Eckert (1994) names as the heterosexual marketplace, where women’s value is constructed solely from their position as feminine (and how that femininity is valued/desired by men), and men’s value is constructed from their position as masculine. This value is dependent on a person’s embodiment of both gender *and* sex (category), revealing the importance of hetero-genders. A girl who does not perform her feminine expectations – including (or perhaps especially) that of desiring boys – holds little value.

Likewise the demands of masculinity are central for boys’ processes of transitioning to adulthood. Research suggests that the pressures of a hegemonic masculinity leave boys with angst as they work to construct a masculine persona that commands respect and expresses strength and power (Kehily, 2001; Kimmel, 2004; Mac an Ghail, 1991; McGuffey & Rich, 1999; Pascoe, 2007; Phillips, 2005). This transitional period teaches boys that, “what may be gender appropriate at one stage in life may be gender inappropriate at a later stage. Boys, for example, are free to touch each other affectionately in early middle childhood, but this is subsequently stigmatized” (McGuffey & Rich, 1999, p. 612) and regulated “by teasing and name-calling, marginalization and exclusion from the group, and physical aggression” (McGuffey & Rich, 1999, p. 624). In learning this lesson, teenage boys begin to understand that what commands status within the heterosexual marketplace and conveys the most masculinity is a public show of heterosexuality. Debbie Phillips (2005) suggests this public hetero-masculinity has become essential to identifying as a “real” man “due to the fact that all different kinds of men and women can do what historical discourses have presumed only ‘real’ men can do” (p. 4). The only reliable

marker of “real man” status is being able to “get” the prettiest girl in the room, which marks adolescent boys as specifically higher ranked than other boys and solidifies their position as “real men.” This display of hetero-masculinity is to an audience of other boys in order to command respect and demonstrate power (Kehily, 2001; Mac an Ghail, 1991; McGuffey & Rich, 1999; Pascoe, 2007; Phillips, 2005).

Performances of masculinity are meant to showcase a boy’s status as a high-ranking heterosexual man. Essential to this performance is an implied knowledge about sex acts (Kehily, 2001; Pascoe, 2007). Mary Kehily’s (2001) work demonstrates how even younger boys who have no sexual or romantic experience work to show impressive hetero-genders. Through performances such as talk of masturbation or pornography, even inexperienced tween boys are able to convey knowledge about sex and girls and gain masculine status. Again, this display is homosocial in that the intended audience is other boys. Although the power and agency that develops serves to maintain control over women, it also functions, perhaps primarily, “as a way of controlling other young men” (Kehily, 2001, p. 184). McGuffey & Rich (1999) further note that

the overwhelming majority of boys support hegemonic masculinity in relation to subordinated masculinities and femininities because it not only gives boys power over an entire sex (i.e., girls), but it also gives them the opportunity to acquire power over members of their own sex. (p. 613)

Hierarchized masculinity, then, reveals the discursive power hetero-genders hold in structuring homosocial relations as well as dictating the basic gender performances of boys.

Queer youth¹¹ feel the impact of the rigid demands of hetero-genders as well. From early on they may understand their difference from the norm, sensing the transgression of their bodies and/or desires (Driver, 2008). For some, this understanding is expressed through “playing” with their performances in more ways than their cisgender or heterosexual counterpart. Media, and social media more specifically, provide a significant avenue for exploring gender and sexuality norms (DeHaan, 2013; Fisher, 2009; Gray, 2009; Lipton, 2008; Rasmussen, 2006; Regales, 2008; Talburt, 2004; Singh, 2013). Mary Gray (2009) shows how rural youth use media to explore their senses of self. Seeking to feel a “realness” about who they are, some queer youth turn to the Internet to find reflections of people “like them.” In doing so some teens in Gray’s study learned from the Internet that the expectations for expressing a gay life was at odds with moral obligations they felt towards their local surroundings. This is to say that some of the requirements of visibility conveying gay “realness” online were sometimes not available, or sought after, by these rural teens (Gray, 2009, p. 139). Youth have to negotiate a gay identity that makes sense for their locality. Gray’s (2009) work, and the way it showed the challenges some youth face with achieving visibility as gay, highlights how “identity, even the most intimate, personal senses of self, can be explored as deeply social and highly mediated” (p. 139). Managing the social aspects of identity becomes an important aspect of coming to understand how a teen sees/knows him/herself.

Needing to negotiate the terms of one’s identity is evident for many LGBTQ youth, and in particular ways for youth of color. Susan Driver (2008) emphasizes that “whiteness remains the unmarked center of heteronormative ideologies” (p. 5) which can lead to a “structural norm of white visibility” that discounts and erases queer youth of color (p. 6). Youth who embody

¹¹ I use of the term “queer youth” to refer to adolescents who have, in some capacity, rejected heteronormative values of gender and/or sexuality, regardless of whether or not they label themselves as queer.

multiple axes of marginalization may struggle to find the performances that best allow them to materialize. These teens must negotiate what way of being in the world leaves them with the most livable life, even if it may feel inauthentic (McCready, 2004). For some queer youth of color, choosing one category over another (i.e., race over sexuality) may serve as helpful in some situations (Kumashiro, 1999; Singh, 2013). A teen's learning to manage how they are seen by those around them becomes critical to their sense of self, and also in negotiating safety in a heteronormative society.

For gender and sexual minority youth, experimenting with gender performance can have an impact on relationships. Most significant for children and young adults is the family relationship. Family represents the most critical socializing agent in the life of children and adolescents (Bregman, Malik, Page, Makynen, & Lindahl, 2013; Harro, 2013; Johnson, 2015; Smetana, Robinson, & Rote, 2015). Families teach youth how to survive in the social world. They teach important lessons about social structure, organization, and culture. Within these lessons are messages on race, class, gender, sexuality, religion, and other critical aspects of our social ordering. It can be very challenging for teens to form a healthy sense of self without the support of their family (Bregman et al., 2013; Nadal et al., 2011; Smetana et al., 2015).

The demand for hetero-gender conformity has led to the breaking up of many families, particularly those who value traditional gender/family roles (Weston, 1991) because, in many ways, an individual's transgressions are also those of their family. Therefore, it is not uncommon for family members to decide that it is not "worth" enduring the hardships of their child's/sibling's/parent's transgressions. The rejection by family that some gender and sexual minority youth face makes it necessary for them to find dependable relationships outside their family of origin. Families of "choice" become essential for many youth who have been rejected

by their biological family. Weeks, Heaphy, and Donovan (2001) describe families of choice as the “flexible, informal and varied, but strong and supportive networks” that many gender and sexual minorities come to need (p. 4). They further suggest, “chosen families provide the ‘life-line’ that the biological family, it is believed, should provide, but often cannot or will not” (Weeks, et al., 2001, p. 11). Thus, friendships and peer relationships become of utmost importance for queer youth who experience significant loss of family support.

Weston (1991) first introduced the concept of families of choice through her research on gay and lesbian families living in the San Francisco Bay area. Weston’s work revealed that many gay and lesbian individuals, whether having faced rejection by family or not, participated in families they chose. Signature to these familial relationships was how they “consciously incorporated demonstrations of love, shared history, material or emotional assistance, and other signs of enduring solidarity” (Weston, 1991, p. 109). Families of choice in Weston’s study showed an enduring form of commitment and support that gender and sexual minorities were unable to attain from their biological families. Similarly today, youth who struggle with the demands of performing “appropriately” in our society may come to rely on families of choice out of necessity, or simply as a means to have greater understanding and empathy. It is in this space of families of choice that queer youth are provided more support and therefore may gain more freedom to play with the norms of hetero-genders. Doing so allows them to explore the meaning heteronormativity will have in their lives.

To elaborate further on experiences of adolescent performance, I turn to examples from schooling. In the next section I present research that highlights specific examples of how youth perform gender and sexuality. It illuminates the way schools, as a major regulatory institution,

teach students to manage their performances in a manner that complies with the heteronormative demands of society.

Bodies in School

Various researchers have begun to unravel how bodies are regulated in school and how that regulation varies depending on a students' embodiment. Topics of inquest include race (Ferguson, 2000; Kumashiro, 1999; McCready, 2004), class (Alonso, Anderson, Su, & Theoharis, 2009; Eaton, 2009), gender (Pascoe, 2007; Pillow, 2004; Thorne, 1993), and sexuality (Fields, 2008; Pascoe, 2007; Youdell, 2005). The focus of this research has largely been on providing students with safer learning environments, while also acknowledging how the health of students' bodies influences the development of healthy young adults. In this section I give a brief review of the history of regulating student bodies, followed by a few of the foundational works examining different types of embodiment within education.

Regulating Student Bodies

Blount and Anahita's (2004) historical overview of the regulation of gender and sexual minorities in schools helps to identify the ways in which the regulation of student bodies has been closely tied to the regulation of teacher bodies. Hence, "policies intended to affect one have had profound, though sometimes unanticipated consequences for the other" (Blount & Anahita, 2004, p. 66). For example, policy changes enacted to curb the homosexual activity of boys or girls at same-sex boarding schools also resulted in greater scrutiny of teachers, leading many teachers to further hide any same-sex desires/identities they harbored. Such regulation has largely been based on the false assumption that the gender and sexuality of a teacher will inevitably influence, or taint, that of their students (Blount & Anahita, 2004; Lugg, 2007).

Although there has been no evidence to support such a claim, this fear continues to abide in some school districts and may surface as a fear of standing up for gender and sexual minority students (Payne & Smith, 2011).

Historically schools have encouraged gender conformity and heterosexual partnering through both curriculum and rules for student behavior. In the Cold War era, this played out through tracked curriculum (such as girls learning clerical skills and domestic arts while boys received industrial training and advanced math and science instruction), extracurricular activities (such as dances that encouraged heterosexual partnering), and visual inspections of students' gender compliance (such as monitoring students' dress and hairstyles) (Blount & Anahita, 2004). Much of the regulation of student bodies continues; however, now it is framed as protecting "at-risk" students (Blount & Anahita, 2004; Griffin & Ouellett, 2010; Lugg, 2007). The 1990s began to see an increase in the number of student activists who advocated for gay-straight alliances (GSAs) in their schools to help create a more inclusive and supportive environment. Blount and Anahita (2004) point out that schools' tolerance for such student services came about from a concern about protecting LGBT youth from the blossoming AIDS crisis, rather than from a framework of equality. Aligned with this framework of fear are the most common way we see gender and sex regulated in schools: through heteronormative sex education and student codes of conduct (Fields, 2008; Irvine, 2002; Luker, 2006; Luttrell, 2003; Mayo, 2004; Moran, 2000; Pascoe, 2007; Pillow, 2004).

Sex education has been widely accessible since the early 1900s, when it emerged as a "social hygiene" initiative to guide older boys and girls away from venereal diseases or obtaining a ruined reputation due to unwed pregnancy/motherhood (Luker 2006). With changing times (and morals), sex education transitioned into "family life" education, with the specific aim to

teach abstinence until marriage (Luker, 2006). This remained the standard until the onset of HIV/AIDS. The AIDS crisis brought forth a commitment to comprehensive (usually abstinence-based comprehensive) sex education and a further vilification of homosexuality (Fields, 2008; Luker, 2006; Mayo, 2004). Although recent years have shown some inclusion¹² beginning to infiltrate sex education, it remains a fight within most communities (Luker, 2006; Mayo, 2004). The regulation of heteronormative sex education is coupled with school policies dictating heteronormativity: no same-sex dates at dances, strict gender related dress codes, and attitude of permissiveness about male-on-female sexual harassment, and disregard for homophobic bullying (Fields, 2008; Luker, 2006; Mayo, 2004; Pascoe, 2007). Schools are getting better at recognizing the need to change these policies (and many schools already have), but in many communities change has been slow to come. As schools continue to enforce policies and curricula impacting students' gender and sexuality, the impact is different on different students based on the intersectional aspects of their embodiment.

Differing regulation: Gender, sexuality, race, and class. When we examine how educational facilities regulate student embodiment, it becomes clear that different students are regulated for different reasons. Intersections of gender, sexuality, race, and class result in varying approaches to regulating student behavior. This section introduces some of the founding investigations in this area. Each highlights some intricate ways student bodies are interpreted, disciplined, controlled, and either normalized into an “acceptable” student or cast off as unworthy of being taught.

¹² For example, see Elia and Elison's (2010) conception of "anti-oppressive" inclusive sex education, which advocates "sexuality education imbedded within a context that equally honors other issues such as racial/ethnic background, class status, and other forms of oppression [in order to acknowledge]... that human sexual desires, fantasies, thoughts, and behaviors are not always consistent or easily labeled, and that change and fluidity characterizes much of human gendered and sexual behavior" (p. 40).

One of the earliest studies regarding embodiment in schools focuses almost exclusively on gender. In *Gender Play: Girls and Boys in School* Barrie Thorne (1993) describes her investigations of how elementary school children actively and collaboratively create and/or challenge gender. Thorne observed students at “play” in order to answer this question because it is an intrinsic part of children’s daily life and can be seen through action/activity, and what I would highlight as *bodily* acts. From this work we learn a great deal about how children work to create gender binaries, however it also critically revealed the institutional gender divisions set forth by schools, imposing gender norms on students at a very early age. For instance, Thorne shows how teachers rely on gendered language for addressing children (“big boy,” “big girl,” “ladies” and “gentlemen”). Teachers intentions may be to encourage relatively mature, rather than babyish, behavior, but as Thorne observes, “by frequently using gender labels when they interact with kids, adults make being a girl or a boy *central* [emphasis added] to self-definition, and to the ongoing life of school” (Thorne, 1993, p. 35). Teachers and other adults in the school also tend to increase limitations on girls, more than boys, as the children age. Thorne (1993) highlights how adults in her study perceived the threat of sexuality in the bodies of girls who happened to develop early: “Adults felt uneasy around girls who ‘had their development,’ especially big breasts, way ahead of their peers” (p.139). Adult regulation of play shifted for these girls – as well as for all students in higher grades – who were no longer allowed to play games that might be considered “sexually provocative” (Thorne, 1993, p.71-72). Thorne’s work paints a clear picture of what it means to be a “developed” girl: “girls with ‘figures’ (big breasts and rounded hips) are treated as deviant and even polluting because they violate the cultural ordering of age categories” (Thorne, 1993, p. 141). Thorne’s work demonstrates how elementary

schools believe student bodies, and especially developing bodies, threaten an academic environment.

In addition to this central finding, Thorne's study also explores how schools' formal attempts to address bodies are limited, and how informal regulation remains central. For example, even when human growth and development was broached in the curriculum of schools Thorne examined, teachers continued to avoid addressing specific body knowledge. One teacher openly told her female students that she "was not supposed to volunteer information but only answer questions raised by the students" (Thorne, 1993, p. 146). Not surprisingly given this introduction, the girls had no questions. All of Thorne's findings highlight the intricate ways schools' work to police student bodies. They condition male- and female- gender assigned students to display appropriate gender; they assume heterosexuality and regulate "risky" contact; and while doing this, they neglect to openly incorporate actual *body* knowledge into school life and curriculum.

Ann Ferguson (2000) approaches a different angle on the same set of dynamics, examining how race, gender and class intersect for young Black men in high school. In her ethnography *Bad Boys: Public Schools and the Making of Black Masculinity*, Ferguson (2000) outlines the processes of discipline which mark African American boys as aggressive, deviant and destined for incarceration. She argues that punitive systems within educational institutions are "highly charged with racial and gender significance with scarring effect on [the] adult life chances" of these young Black men (p. 3). *Bad Boys* highlights how schools construct success and acceptable behavior as a matter of individual choice and responsibility, and obscure any wrongdoing on the part of social or economic structures inherent in educational access. Policies are presented as race-neutral, and the fact that the majority of youth being punished are Black

boys is positioned as the fault of the boys rather than as a structural issue. School discipline becomes synonymous with bodies: Black male bodies.

Ferguson's (2000) work reveals that schools prioritized disciplining bodies as an "essential prior condition for any learning to take place" (p. 41). The enforcement of rules is subjective and uneven, and functions to "govern and regulate children's bodily, linguistic, and emotional expression" (Ferguson, 2000, p. 49). School discipline provides an example of Foucault's theory of power relations, as power works through punishment to constitute people as individuals with "natural" identities, as opposed to individuals intricately formed through relations of power (p. 52). Ferguson describes how these identities are attached to very specific masculinities which are performed through acts of explicit heterosexual behavior, classroom disruptions, and fighting (Ferguson, 2000, p. 171), all of which are punishable offenses and are seen as dangerous to the youth as well as to perceptions of normal (i.e., White middle class) child development. The racial intricacies of these identity performances are complicated by the school's "raceless" ideologies: on the one hand, in order to do well in school and become a "schoolboy," a student must "act White" and distance himself from blackness; however, "to perform this act too realistically...is seen as an expression of self-hatred and race shame" (Ferguson, 2000, pp. 212-213). Those who embrace their Blackness and assert a group solidarity are labeled "troublemakers" because they "distance themselves from the class mobility strategy preferred by the school and identify with the poor, black, rebellious 'hood'" (Ferguson, 2000, p. 219). Both positions demonstrate how the identity of Black boys is directly related to the school's regulation of their bodies. How the boys in Ferguson's study embodied race, class, *and* gender was highly influenced by their school, and therefore highly influential to their sense of being a successful student.

These aspects of gendered embodiment are further investigated by C.J. Pascoe (2007), who adds a focus on sexuality to bring even more depth regarding how schools regulate student bodies. In *Dude, You're a Fag: Masculinity and Sexuality in High School* Pascoe (2007) demonstrates how the inseparability of masculinity and heterosexuality impacts all students. Dating is a very important part of high school for many teens and Pascoe's work shows how navigating demands for heterosexual relationships and performing hetero-genders is central to surviving high school. For boys, knowing about and displaying a knowledge of hetero-masculine sex (male dominant sex acts) is a primary way of defining masculinity during adolescents. This work is done within groups of males, in which boys try to out-show each other's level of masculinity by looking big and strong, knowing explicit details of domineering sex acts, and showing aggression towards and dominance over girls. These performances allow young men to align themselves with a hetero-masculinity that is assertive, aggressive, and desirous of dominating and penetrating females. As they display this masculinity, they simultaneously defend against being seen as passive, vulnerable, or desiring to be penetrated. Such hetero-masculine performances are central to boys' identity formation.

Engaging in very public practices of heterosexuality, boys affirm much more than just masculinity; they affirm subjecthood and personhood through sexualized interactions in which they indicate to themselves and others that they have the ability to work their will upon the world around them. (Pascoe, 2007, p. 86)

Further, Pascoe (2007) shows how the school supports this development. Physical interactions between boys and girls are often dismissed or ignored by teachers, even when "seemingly clear violations of girls' bodies" took place (p. 97). Invariably all heterosexual interactions were taken as normal (hetero)sexual interest.

Youth understand the demand for hetero-genders and tightly regulate each other. In Pascoe's (2007) work, this is prominently displayed through the derogatory epithet "fag." Pascoe identifies "fag" as the worst possible label a boy can acquire, and shows that when a boy is called a fag, it has nothing to do with his sexual identity; rather it is about his *failed* masculinity. Boys in Pascoe's study openly admitted that they would never call a gay kid a "fag," because homosexuals "couldn't help it," whereas straight boys should be able to perform successful masculinity; this reasoning reveals that, for these boys, "to be a fag was, by definition, the opposite of masculine" (Pascoe, 2007, p. 58). Although it is possible for a gay student to "pass" as masculine, boys who cannot (regardless of sexual orientation) are fair game for the "fag" label.

The teens in Pascoe's (2007) study tried their best to avoid marginalized reputations by embodying acceptable hetero-genders. Heterosexual dating proved to be one of the easiest ways for both males and females to negotiate these boundaries. For boys, "girlfriends both protected boys from the specter of the fag and bolstered their masculinity" (p. 90), while for girls, boyfriends were a marker of status, making "male erotic attention crucial" (p. 104). Pascoe's work highlights how adolescent male-female interactions in the hallways, in the classroom, at school dances, and at school sporting events allow youth numerous opportunities to mark and label themselves and others as same/other within the norms of heterosexuality. In this way, "school rituals don't just reflect heteronormative gender difference; they actually affirm its value and centrality to social life" (Pascoe, 2007, p. 40). Indeed, Pascoe (2007) found that even as these adolescent interactions relayed sexist and homophobic messages, administrators still made a point of encouraging them. Pascoe's ethnography highlights how embodying appropriate genders and sexualities become central within school culture.

In *Impossible Bodies, Impossible Selves: Exclusions and Student Subjectivities* Deborah Youdell (2006) explores how students who do not fit normative expectations of embodiment suffer academic consequences. Youdell shows that students are both socially and academically excluded depending on embodiment of gender, sexuality, race/ethnicity, class, religion and ability. So complex are the intersections of these differing social locations that Youdell (2006) introduces the term “constellation” to describe each student’s unique combination of identities:

[S]tudent identity in terms of social, biographical, and sub-cultural markers *and* the sorts of students and learners they are tied together in identity constellations that constrain, but do not determine, who the student is or whether they are intelligible as a student at all. (p. 2)

By highlighting this complex interplay of factors, Youdell reveals how educational institutions take action through various policies and practices to assert the unintelligibility of particular students, based on the student’s embodied presence in the school. For example, Youdell (2006) notes that not all queer students are viewed as bad. Some become more accepted by teachers when they come from high-status backgrounds, such as students who are White, middle or upper-class, and come from intellectual families. Youdell suggests it is not simply that these students’ backgrounds compensate for the liability of queerness, but rather that queerness in the context of those other factors is a positive. She writes, “it is possible they are ideal learners not in spite of identifying as queer, but because they are constituted through a constellation of discourses and identity categories that at once compensate for and valorize queerness” (Youdell, 2006, p. 139-140).

The students in Youdell’s study seem to be aware of their own participation in creating these “established social ‘truths’” and what it means for their educational opportunities (2006, p.

142). Students successfully redefine standards of intelligibility for peers who cross the norms of gender and sexuality; these new definitions then influence how the school sees the particular student as transgressive *and* as a learner. In doing this the students occasionally helped others to transition into a “good (enough) student and an acceptable learner” in the eyes of the school (Youdell, 2006, p. 161). Not only does Youdell connect student embodiment with student achievement, but her investigation also reveals the way students actively work to *rework* how their school has labeled them, pointing to a critical aspect of the role students take in creating “self” in school.

Each of these authors (Ferguson, 2000; Pascoe, 2007; Thorne, 1993; Youdell, 2006) elucidates some specific ways in which schools, as regulating institutions, work to manage, control, and produce student bodies. Together, these works highlight the heteronormative aspects of these regulations, while also acknowledging the complex matrices of gender, sexuality, race, and class that play out in regulation of student embodiment. Intersecting systems of oppression determine the type of student a child is able to become, and relegate many students to the margins. Moreover, students themselves participate in regulating the hetero-gender expectations of themselves and each other, and occasionally in modifying those expectations. Therefore those students who are regulated to the margins (gender and sexual minority youth) are marked by their fellow classmates. This marking can be seen within processes of bullying and the challenges it poses within schools.

“I think they were just teasing”: **Bullying in school.** Social science has predominantly defined bullying as “a form of aggressive behavior which inflicts, or attempts to inflict harm or discomfort in an individual, in which there is an imbalance of power, and the act is repeated over time” (Mills & Carwile, 2009, p. 279). Bullying can be physical (e.g., hitting), relational (e.g.,

rejecting someone from a group), or verbal (e.g., name-calling). A shortcoming of this definition is the lack of consensus on how to define aggressive behavior, as well as the impossibility of measuring “intent” to harm. Without a consensus on these aspects of bullying, identifying it becomes challenging. Additionally this definition fails to account for the relationship of bullying to social inequality. Peguero’s (2010) work identifies that racial and ethnic minorities are more likely than non-minorities to be the recipients of bullying, but teachers are less likely to respond to it because it’s perceived that “bullying and violence are daily aspects of racial and ethnic minority students experiences” (p. 404) and therefore trivial. On the other hand, bullying of White middle- and upper-class students is likely to be taken seriously and addressed. There are also gender disparities in how bullying plays out. Regarding both the perpetrator and the victim, boys are involved with more physical forms of bullying, while girls are involved with more verbal bullying. The verbal bullying experienced by many girls is often perpetrated with the intent to “damage the victim’s social status and self-esteem” (Peguero, 2010, p. 405). Schools may neglect to appropriately evaluate bullying if they lack a thorough understanding of these differences.

The difficulty of distinguishing teasing from bullying brings further complication. Mills and Carwile (2009) suggest it the distinction is critical, noting that prosocial teasing can be very useful. Prosocial teasing conveys a form of intimacy between the teaser and the target. As such, it can strengthen relationships and allow individuals to feel they are part of a group. Mills and Carwile (2009) note, “teasing must have elements of both play and challenge, and it is the interplay of these two elements, and the potential for ambiguity that arises from their interplay, that separates teasing from related acts, such as bullying” (p. 287). As a social tool, teasing acts as a form of play and experimentation with social norms. However, when both parties do not

perceive the tease in the same way – the interplay between play and challenge is not interpreted consistently – the tease becomes harmful. Mills and Carwile (2009) identify there are unspoken rules of teasing, which state that teasing about race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, appearance, or things a person cannot control are *never* acceptable forms of teasing. Such teasing results in “cruel” teasing and is a form of bullying. The “rules” of teasing become evident in the gender differences with teasing. Males tease each other more often than females, and generally believe their tease will be taken and returned in the same manner it is given. Females, on the other hand, tease less often and indicate teasing has a greater potential for harm (Peguero, 2010). These distinctions of teasing signify that cruel teasing is very real and common.

Identifying the variations between bullying and teasing requires significant vigilance on the part of bystanders. Both children and adults may be challenged to read the intentions and significance of teasing or bullying (Anagnostopoulos, Buchanan, Pereira, & Lichty, 2009; Bansel, Davies, Laws, & Linnell, 2009; Mills & Carwile, 2009; Peguero, 2010). Even with the distinctions outlined by Mills and Carwile, it is not always obvious which is occurring. For instance, whereas the standards of bullying require it to be prolonged, cruel teasing may be judged as a rare incident, and an observer of such an incident may perceive it as an innocent joke and therefore not bullying. However, if the target of a cruel tease receives such teasing from several different perpetrators (ex: Jane is “playfully” [perpetrators would suggest] called a slut 6 times in one day, but it was done by 6 different people and at 6 different times), the target [Jane] is certainly bullied. Likewise, it is difficult to account for the impact of “secondary” bullying, meaning the effects cruel teasing and bullying have on bystanders. A student who is not the target of a tease, but who relates or identifies with the target of the tease, can be equally impacted, especially when they witness adults failing to address it.

Teasing (even the prosocial forms) is a significant form of regulation, playing on notions of who is accepted in society and who is not (Bansel et al., 2009). The embarrassment, anger, or unease felt by the target of a tease serves as a warning they have stepped out of place. It is an act of subjection meant to categorize (Butler, 1997; Foucault, 1995). The joke, and its psychic impact on the target, provides a momentary revelation of the coexistence and dependence that exists between the teaser and their target. An individual's existence is bound within "categories, terms, and names that are not of [their] own making," (Butler, 1997, p. 20) leaving them in a position of subordination. Butler emphasizes how such a position makes us vulnerable: "subjection exploits the desire for existence, where existence is always conferred from elsewhere" (p. 20-21). Teasing is the essence of this exploitation. It is a caution to return to the normative expectations of society, or remain outcast forever. Those who "get" the joke, or can "take" it, are able to materialize within the social group.

Regulating the Gender and Sexual Minority Student

The previous section highlights some of the critical research documenting the regulatory force educational institutions have on students' gender and sexuality. Further research in the field has focused on the rules, curriculum, and regulations set forth in schools to specifically manage the bodies of gender and sexual minority students. Our society's demand for heteronormative adherence means that anyone deviating from heteronorms faces rejection and ostracization, which play out for gender and sexual minority students through the day-to-day reality within a school. Three tropes highlight the precarious position some students are put in: the pregnant student, the gender-nonconforming student, and the gay/lesbian student. The experiences of each of these students emphasize the challenges and stigma associated with embodying a non-

heteronormative gender or sexuality, as well as the complex way heteronormativity intersects with expectations of age and family.

The hyper-sexualized pregnant student. The standards of femininity that girls and young women must uphold in our society are strict. Girls are subject to various gendered messages from their families, religions, schools, media and advertising. These messages build into pressures for girls to comply with feminine virtues and ultimately push them into a *hyper-femininity*. The influence of this pressure leaves young women in a contradictory place when it comes to entering sexual relationships. Femininity, as it is deployed by the heterosexual marketplace (Eckert, 1994), represents a complex interrelation between a woman's body, gender and sexuality. A woman displays an appropriate hetero-gender when she is pure, passive, obedient and desiring men (Hauge, 2009; Holland, Ramazanoglu, Sharpe & Thomson, 2004; Tolman, 2002; Youdell, 2005). Additionally, she should try her best to always look thin, beautiful, and desirable; she should be silent about any possible sexual activity; and, above all, she should never show (or appear to show) sexual desire (Hauge, 2009; Payne, 2007; Tolman, 2002, 1994; Van Roosmalen, 2000; White, 2002; Youdell, 2005). For young (adolescent) women, the standards of a silent and invisible sexuality must be rigidly adhered to. It's worth pointing out these standards of hetero-femininity are simultaneously contradictory to expectations of the heterosexual marketplace requiring women to be desiring of and desirable to men. The standard may ease a bit for adult women, however, if the woman enters a committed heterosexual relationship and intends to start a family (Luttrell, 2003; Tolman, 2002).

Implicit in this valued femininity is a woman's disengagement with her body: "a modest femininity requires a young woman to construct a disembodied sexuality that produces her as a passive body, rather than actively embodying feminine sexuality" (Holland et al., 2004, p. 99).

This requirement makes it challenging for young women to experience an affirmative sexuality, one that allows her to express agency in her sexual choices. If a young woman strays from this regulated femininity, she risks being labeled a slut. The damage of this label can be immense for a woman of any age, although the implications for teenage girls are often devastating and long lasting (Tolman, 2002; White, 2002). Beyond the devastation of being labeled is the risk associated with this passivity: girls lacking sexual agency are at a higher risk than boys of becoming (or getting someone) pregnant, contracting sexually transmitted infections, and suffering sexual violence (Fields, 2008; Fine & McClelland, 2006; Mayo, 2004; Tolman, 2002).

Pregnant teens visibly embody a violation of feminine norms. All girls are aware of this. As they begin to navigate the heterosexual marketplace they take caution from the “master narrative of sexuality as the road to ruination” (Tolman, 2002, p. 174). When some girls do become pregnant, it becomes clear from how adults respond (with encouragement of properly committed heterosexual relationships and exemplary mothering/motherhood) that restoration of hetero-femininity is a goal. As Wanda Pillow (2004) accurately points out, “the body of the teen girl, the sexually active, pregnant teen girl – and its constructions literally, metaphorically, and narratively – are key to the development of educational policy and practice for the teen mother” (p. 10). Schools are the main avenue for regulating the “contamination” present in the pregnant body and cultivate any potential redeeming factors available (Luttrell, 2003; Pillow, 2004). Wendy Luttrell’s (2003) study, *Pregnant Bodies, Fertile Minds: Gender, Race and the Schooling of Pregnant Teens*, presents a thorough picture of how pregnant students are stigmatized based on their embodiment and the impact this has on their identity formation. Luttrell’s participants “struggle to find a way to represent themselves and their pregnancies so as to break the gaze of those who would judge or belittle them” (2003, p. 58), and ultimately develop “body-smarts” as

they recognized how “they and their pregnant bodies are being viewed and scrutinized by others” (Luttrell, 2003, p. 58). These high school girls fully understand that they are being judged as young sexually active teens, and particularly judged as visibly irresponsible in that sexuality, and now facing the impending (ir)responsibility of motherhood.

Schools’ solutions for managing pregnant teens are often mitigated by requirements of Title IX, the standard for gender equality in education. Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 was meant to clarify the responsibilities of schools to treat students fairly regardless of sex. Within Title IX there are specific provisions for pregnant and parenting students: no educational program receiving federal funding shall “discriminate against any student, or exclude any student from its education program or activity, including any class or extracurricular activity, on the basis of such student’s pregnancy” (Educational Amendments, as cited in Pillow, 2004, p. 61). Pillow (2004) reveals that even though the statute specifies pregnant and parenting students must have access to education programs equivalent to those of their peers, there has been no case law clarifying what exactly constitutes equivalency. Furthermore, Title IX makes it clear that separate programs are allowed, so long as they are voluntary. Pillow (2004) shows that this provision has largely resulted in schools offering pregnant students an equal but separate education; a decision that emphasizes pregnant students do not belong in school. Luttrell’s (2003) work also shows how such policies play out. The young women in her study were told it was voluntary to attend a separate program, however, few felt there was a real option to stay in their regular school, especially once they were “showing” (Luttrell, 2003, p.17-18). Pregnancy represents a visual embodiment of rejecting hetero-femininity, and consequently represents a threat to the school.

Luttrell (2003) highlights how this movement of pregnant bodies serves to frame the discourse of teen pregnancy in a very raced and classed manner. She observes that while the separate program was an option for all pregnant students, the overwhelming majority were Latina and Black, noting that White girls often opted for the homebound program. Various explanations were proffered, but the overall message of this segregation is “to restigmatize those who enroll...[and] reinforce the public perception that teen pregnancy/teen parenthood is a poor minority problem” (Luttrell, 2003, p. 20). This reiterates Pillow’s (2004) finding that “schools place teen mothers into different programs by race” (p. 72) and “operate under an ideology of ‘equal to what they deserve’ and further [situate] these girls’ education as not for their benefit, but a responsibility they have to society” (p. 74). Pregnant students are seen as having a responsibility to get a job and ensure they will not be on government assistance for the rest of their lives. Education is no longer for the sake of the student, but for the sake of the taxpayer. In operating these separate programs the school manages to frame pregnant student not only as different and lesser students/learners, but also as different citizens, adding to the stigma these young women face.

The pregnant students in Luttrell’s (2003) study are well aware of this judgment and expectation as they endure glares from strangers; being judged significantly impacts their sense of self. During a collage activity organized as part of the research, the students identify dominant norms of femininity including “strength (e.g., ‘strong, black woman’), alternative standards of beauty (e.g., style with an attitude); and respectability” (Luttrell, 2003, p. 88), all of which are marked by how their pregnant bodies perform in public spaces. Luttrell (2003) suggests that the teens’ complex ways of navigating consumerism, womanhood, motherhood, and heterosexuality

show creative agency as they come to understand how they are valued in the world – a valuation directly connected to their embodiment.

Although much of the schoolwork these teens did ended up highlighting this complexity, teachers neglect to engage the students in discussion about the hierarchal structures influencing them. Luttrell (2003) argues that many of the struggles the girls experience are “key to the girls’ self- and identity-making process” (p. 134) and the girls would benefit if “educators and concerned adults could encourage [them] to explore and express their mixed feelings” (p. 143). This type of critical thinking, however, is out of the realm of possibility given the discourse of responsibility administration instructed teachers to deploy. In the eyes of administrators these teens remain pregnant bodies who reject the norms of hetero-femininity and need to be controlled.

Sissy boys and butch grrrls. The standards imposed on the pregnant body by stringent hetero-femininity are not unrelated to those judging the gender-nonconforming body. The effeminate boy and butch girl do not conform to the gender norms of our society. As noted above, an appropriate hetero-femininity is one that is pure, passive, obedient and desiring men; the appropriate hetero-masculinity is one that is strong, active, dominant and desiring women (Bortolin, 2010; Kehily, 2003; Kimmel, 2004; Pascoe, 2007). Youth who do not display a bodily representation reflecting these attributes face significant stigmatization in school. Research on gender-nonconforming youth, especially relating to a school setting, is somewhat hard to come by. One reason is that these students may be lumped together with research on LGBT youth and disaggregating their experiences from this broader group is difficult or impossible. Another

reason is that it can be challenging for researchers to get into schools;¹³ consequently many studies tend to be of older youth reflecting on their past school experiences, or of youth in non-school settings. Therefore, in this section I present some general perspectives on school experiences of gender-nonconforming youth and the policies and discourses impacting their education.

In *Sissies, Faggots, Lezzies, and Dykes: Gender, Sexual Orientation, and a New Politics of Education?* Catherine Lugg (2007) outlines “how particular legal understandings of gender and sexual orientation shape nearly every aspect of public school life” (p. 98). As we consider gender here specifically, we learn that within most schools there are no protections for teachers when it comes to discrimination on the basis of gender.¹⁴ It would be perfectly legal, and undoubtedly has happened, for a male teacher to be fired for acting “stereotypically female” (Lugg, 2007, p. 100). Teachers’ bodies are regulated just as students’ are, because early understandings of sexology held that the sexual orientation of teens “could be corrupted by pernicious or unfortunate influences” (Lugg, 2007, p. 104), and these ideas still linger in schools’ assumptions about appropriate teacher behavior. Lugg (2007) highlights that although little has changed for school personnel, there has been some gain towards protecting gender-nonconforming students. For instance, gay-straight alliances (GSAs) have become more commonplace since the early 2000s and have withstood challenges in court. However the notion of life-saving “safe spaces,” often touted by GSA’s, may be too good to be true. The research of

¹³ Various researchers have documented struggles with Institutional Review Board’s perception of research on sex, gender, and sexuality with minors as inherently risky for participants. For examples see: Fisher et al. (2013), Fisher & Mustanski (2014), Gray (2009), Halse & Honey (2010), Pascoe (2007), and Tolman (2002).

¹⁴ It is important to note that since Lugg’s writing there have been some advances in legal protection for gender and sexual minorities. Currently 19 states have non-discrimination laws regulating protection over sexual orientation and gender identity, while 3 have provisions for sexual orientation exclusively (ACLU, 2016). There is still *no* federal non-discrimination (civil rights) law offering protection for either sexual orientation or gender identity (other than for employment and what is covered under the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission). That leaves a majority of states (28) with no protection for gender or sexual minorities.

David McInnes and Cristyn Davies (2008) suggests that discourses of pride and tolerance may not be as useful as directly addressing the shame that comes with gender surveillance. In *Articulating Sissy Boy Queerness Within and Against Discourses of Tolerance and Pride*, they show how being called a sissy puts an individual into a position of shame. Although spaces such as GSAs offer students a place where they can “be themselves,” they do not disrupt the discourse of masculinity advocating shaming. McInnes and Davies (2008) suggest it is important to recognize how “shame operates to police and regulate gender” (p. 115), and how “making shame an observable element of school interaction might offer some capacity for reflection” (p. 116). By openly addressing shame that arises from gender regulation, educators could create opportunities for all students to recognize their reliance on each other for materializing as gendered bodies.

Of course, such an intervention would require an awareness on the part of educators that may not be there. After all, few schools have instituted mandatory gender and sexuality awareness training (Kumashiro, 2003; Mills, 2004; Ngo, 2003; Payne & Smith, 2011). After all, gender regulation is often covert, and educators may often fail to recognize it. For instance, research indicates that for boys, simple acts such as hanging out with girls too often, engaging in non-sports-related activities, and taking interest in outside school activities make them vulnerable to gender regulation (Bortolin, 2010); likewise, boys may be “hassled because they *look* gay, for saying the wrong things, for wearing the wrong clothes, or wearing their clothes the wrong way” (Ngo, 2003, p. 117-118). These boys are viewed as feminine and these acts are perceived as “failed masculine performances” (Bortolin, 2010, p. 208). Such violations, and ensuing regulations, may go unnoticed by an educator who is only looking for something as overt as a gay student being called a homophobic slur.

Given the patriarchal setup of heterosexuality, girls do not experience gender regulation with the same ferocity as boys. This is to say, in our society to be male and lack heteromascularity is much more threatening than to be female and lack heterofemininity (Bortolin, 2010; Payne, 2007; Pascoe, 2007; Striepe & Tolman, 2003; Thurlow, 2001; Whisman, 1996). Nevertheless, the impact is real. Mona-Iren Hauge's (2009) work highlights some of the ways heterofemininity is demanded of girls, focusing on the challenges they experience with transitioning from childhood to adolescence. As indicated above with the pregnant student, "unfeminine" sexuality is met with accusations of being a "slut" and puts female friendships in jeopardy (Hauge, 2009, p. 301-302). However, the reaction to girls acting "boyish" seems to be more complex: at a young age being "boyish" is tentatively tolerated, and girls develop a balancing act in which they try to ensure they "do not do *everything* [emphasis added] [boys] do" (p. 303). Balancing this boyishness becomes unthinkable in the teenage years when girls feel required to fall in line with heterosexual dating. Therefore, many girls resolve to have a boyfriend in order to avoid scrutiny (Fine & McClelland, 2006; Hauge, 2009; Tolman, 2002). Some girls even understand that it is their duty as a good friend to date a boy, so that they can be a resource in the heterosexual marketplace for a best friend who wants to double date (Striepe & Tolman, 2003). These are just a few examples of how heterogenders constrain youth's expressions of gender nonconformity, in particular through the mechanisms of enforced heterosexuality.

The "out" and proud student. As we turn to the experiences of gay and lesbian students, it's important to again emphasize the significance of heterogenders and the sexgender-sexuality constellation. Gender and sexuality have largely been conflated in our society and as such, bodily representations are assumed to identify a person's gender *and* sexuality. We

see this complex embodiment regulated in our schools. While the feminine boy may be called a sissy, he is also likely to be called a fag, regardless of his sexual orientation (Bortolin, 2010; Pascoe, 2007; Thurlow, 2001). Likewise the masculine girl may be called boyish, she is also likely to be called a dyke (Thurlow, 2001; Tolman, 2002; Payne, 2007). Youth in some studies say they would never call an openly gay or lesbian youth a fag or dyke (Bortolin, 2010; Hauge, 2009; Linville & Carlson, 2010; Pascoe, 2007), but the opposite has been documented through surveys of LGBT youth (Almeida et al., 2009; GLSEN, 2014; Russell et al., 2011), suggesting a rejection of blatantly prejudice language as opposed to the prejudice itself.

The levels of harassment and discrimination lesbian and gay youth face are severe. National surveys of middle and high school students indicate that youth who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender experience significant bullying in the form of verbal, physical and electronic harassment, miss more days of school, have higher health risk behaviors, experience more psychological stress, report challenges with depression, and are more likely to attempt suicide (Almeida et al., 2009; Center, 2008; GLSEN, 2014; Russell et al., 2011). One study found that of lesbian, gay, and bisexual 9th graders, 52% of lesbian/bisexual females and 29% of gay/bisexual males had attempted suicide, compared to 24% and 12%, respectively, of their heterosexual counterparts (Center, 2008, p. 15). The negative mental health outcomes largely stem from bullying and harassment experienced in school, where youth spend the majority of their time. Therefore interventions into school climate are a necessary step to protect the health and safety of LGBT youth.

Popularity with peers is related to the successful performance of hetero-genders for both boys and girls (Bortolin, 2010; Hauge, 2009; Pascoe, 2007; Payne, 2007), and therefore the regulation of heterosexuality becomes a significant part of students' "work" in schools.

Bortolin's (2010) work revealed how "males actively position themselves against the homosexual students, or those perceived to be homosexual, in their schools; [this positioning was significant because they] did not want to be hit on by gay peers" (p. 210). This distancing is particularly critical within sports and locker room contexts where the concern is that a heterosexual student will be "checked out" by a gay student and risks being perceived as gay. Bortolin (2010) notes that the overall atmosphere of homophobia in the school is largely supported by faculty who neglect to address any issues relating to homosexuality (p. 215). The impact for gay students is isolation; they have few options for socializing at school. "Gay or perceived to be gay students were often ignored in conversation and excluded from social activities" (Bortolin, 2010, p. 211). Intersectionality is relevant here as LGBT students of color experience this isolation differently depending on how their race interacts discursively with their sexuality. For some, there is simply a recognition that they do not "fit in" for more than one reason; they may transgress racial, gender and sexual expectations (McCready, 2004). For others there may be a further sense that their race adds to their loss of masculinity, as Kumashiro (1999) found relevant for gay Asian students. The need to understand and account for multiple dimensions of oppression makes it more challenging for school officials to formulate appropriate responses (Kumashiro, 1999, 2003; McCready, 2004; Payne & Smith, 2011).

Lesbian students experience similar occurrences of name-calling, negative locker room attention, and general disaffection for school (Payne, 2007; Peter, Taylor, Ristock and Edkins, 2015). Overall "[y]oung lesbian women report feeling 'disconnected' from peers in school and 'out of place' in the high school social arena" (Payne, 2007, pp. 61-62). This disconnection is highlighted by Peter et al. (2015) in their study, in which lesbian and bisexual female students reported significantly lower school attachment compared to heterosexual female students. Many

indicated feeling unsafe in their school, particularly in locker rooms where one participant reported a lesbian student had to “change in the gym teacher’s office...because supposedly (Obviously not!!!) she would want to stare at us and molest us and shit” (Peter et al., 2015, p. 260). Evidence of unsupportive staff also included an incident where the principal accused a lesbian student who pecked her girlfriend on the cheek of “performing for boys” (Peter et al., 2015, p. 262). This example highlights how even adults are caught up in the demands of “proper” heterosexuality. The locker room example indicates a fear of deviance and same-sex relations. The “performing for boys” accusation highlights the principal’s assumption that a girl could not possibly desire another girl and therefore must be trying to entice boys, and simultaneously punishes and marginalizes the student’s actual same-sex desire and the (in this case imaginary) figure of the hypersexual slut. This homophobic and sexist environment, supported by the school, reinforces the norms of both heterosexuality and hetero-genders.

The individual experiences of these youth – the pregnant student, the gender-nonconforming student, and the gay/lesbian student – may be different, but they share similarities based on their violations of normative sexual and gender performances demanded within a heteronormative society. I have chosen these tropes in order to highlight how each embodiment differently violates the demands of hetero-genders, and to reveal the overlapping ways heteronormative oppression influences lives. Although each marginalized embodiment speaks to sex, gender and sexuality in complex and entangled ways, it is most evident that the pregnant student's transgressions of femininity represent violations of gender; the gender-nonconforming student's transgressions of body represent violations of sex (rejecting the “gender” of their biological sex); and the gay and lesbian students' transgressions of desire represent violations of sexuality. Their teachers, classmates, school administrators, and society

more broadly regard the students' violations as disrespectful and unacceptable, making it difficult for them to materialize as fully participating members of the school or society.

Considering Inclusion: The Power of Critical Pedagogy

Inclusive education in the broadest sense identifies efforts to address “‘human rights’, ‘equal opportunities’ and ‘social justice’” in a way that honors and respects “‘the value and well-being of *all* pupils” (Armstrong, Armstrong & Barton, 2016, p. 1). Here I focus on what inclusion for gender and sexual minority students would look like. However, even with this focus, intersectional aspects of race/ethnicity, class, and ability are crucial. This section considers the complexities of inclusion and suggests critical pedagogy is an essential component in helping school create and maintain an inclusive environment.

If a school truly wants to offer an inclusive atmosphere to their students – one that doesn't label gender and sexual minority youth as transgressive – then they need to enact policies and cultural changes that address the damages of heteronormativity. Social researchers who advocate for safer schools for gender and sexual minority students have conducted various studies in the past two decades, which presented clear evidence of the need for policy change at the federal, state, and local (individual schools) level (Cianciotto & Cahill, 2012; Kumashiro, 2003; Payne & Smith, 2011).

Title IX has brought some protections to gender and sexual minority students: pregnant and parenting students have greater access to education since the policy was enacted (Pillow, 2004), and some transgender students have found protection from the policy as well (Cianciotto & Cahill, 2012). However its parameters are not sufficient to address the complex intersection of gender *and* sexuality as they are regulated through bullying and other mechanisms. Title IX

specifically addresses sexual harassment and gender-based harassment, defined as conduct that “limits a student’s ability to participate in or benefit from the educational program” (U.S. Department of Education, as cited in Cianciotto & Cahill, 2012, p. 64). A gay student who is being bullied (for example through name-calling, physical violence, or being identified as not eligible/welcome to participate because he’s gay) is only afforded protection if school officials determine the harassment has been so severe it impacted his ability to participate at school.

Cianciotto and Cahill (2012) argue Title IX's approach to sexual harassment ultimately means it “does not hold a school responsible for the behavior of students who harass; it holds a school accountable for failing to correct harassment once officials have been notified” (p. 64). In other words, a school that supports a hostile environment – a school that leaves heteronormative expectations unquestioned – is not held responsible for the violence occurring within its wall, unless it has firsthand knowledge of a specific incident. Title IX is therefore dependent on two problematic notions: first, it assumes students have the access and skills necessary to make a report regarding their harassment; and second, it assumes that teachers and administrators have sufficient knowledge regarding the various forms of gender/sex/sexuality harassment to recognize when it occurs and take action. Given these limitations, and the complex ways in which bullying and harassment occur, Title IX ends up doing little to support inclusion.

In *The “Acceptability” of Race/Gender/Sexuality-Based Discrimination in Democratic Schools*, Kevin Kumashiro (2003) reviews the failures of inclusion many schools succumb to even though federal protections are in place. Kumashiro (2003) identifies five discriminatory practices: “discrimination in protection from harmful interpersonal interactions; in social environments; in curriculum and instructional resources; in pedagogy; and in pupil services, programs, and benefits” (p. 2). His analysis suggests that much of this discrimination happens

through small mundane daily practices (microaggressions) that are taken as a matter of unfortunate personal choice as opposed to institutional discrimination. Consequently, little is done to change the status quo and students learn that democracy includes the (rightful) exclusion of some individuals.

Kumashiro's (2003) findings are reflected in later work that suggests the same concerns continue, with added attention to explicit bullying and violence (Cianciotto & Cahill, 2012). Furthermore, even when school districts have acted to condemn bullying, few teachers and/or administrators know how to enforce the policy or feel supported in doing so (Cianciotto & Cahill, 2012; Payne & Smith, 2011). Little has improved over the decade even though we have a clearer understanding of the harm that is taking place. This lack of progress reinforces the idea that although federal and state oversight is important, there is much that must be done at individual schools to provide an inclusive environment. Communities and school administrators can take steps to identify practices that leave individual students out and implement their own local policies to eliminate that exclusion. Cianciotto and Cahill (2012) emphasize that schools have a

significant opportunity to adopt regulations, policies, and curricula that bridge legal gaps and ensure that the daily experiences of students and teachers occur in an environment that not only has zero tolerance for harassment and bullying but also facilitates diversity and acceptance. (p. 177)

Inclusive school practices should make a significant effort to account for microaggressions, as well as remedying exclusions that may exist in policies, curriculum, pedagogy, and overall school culture. Schools looking to create a safer and more welcoming environment must recognize that "homophobia and anti-LGBT discrimination in schools is deeply rooted in

sociocultural history and beliefs about gender stereotypes and how young people should be educated” (Cianciotto & Cahill, 2012, p. 179). Although LGBT students may easily be identified as victims of bullying or unfair treatment, it is important to remember that norms of gender and sexuality adversely affect *all* students. Therefore, schools should implement inclusion in a manner that addresses both the external pressures of heteronormativity, which may conflict with the school’s intentions.

For the purposes of this dissertation, I define inclusion¹⁵ as a mixture of what Kumashiro and Cianciotto & Cahill recommend: I am concerned with identifying inclusive schools as those that recognize and implement policies that hold all personnel (staff, administrators, teachers, etc.) and students accountable for providing non-threatening environments for all individuals, and openly acknowledging when the goal of inclusion is being challenged by hegemony. An inclusive school must address barriers to inclusion with active steps to address and work through struggles. By this definition an inclusive school goes beyond what is federally required (in the Civil Rights Act, Education Amendments, and the Equal Education Opportunity Act) because it seeks to address the shortcomings in those federal standards. An inclusive school also addresses the clashes between their values and those of the outside world.

Attaining this type of inclusion does not come easily. I suggest critical pedagogy is an essential tool for developing inclusive schools. What critical pedagogy contributes to the project of inclusion is an expectation that everyone within the school embrace the complexity and messiness of an inclusion that is juxtaposed against social norms, and continually question the meaning and power conveyed by such a juxtaposition (Freire, 2011; Giroux, 1983, 2010;

¹⁵ Inclusive education has largely been viewed as a movement to dismantle educational barriers that impede learners with disabilities. This is not the exclusive focus in this dissertation. Rather I am using inclusion in the sense of creating an environment where all students feel welcome – which includes a disabilities rights movement, but also goes well beyond it.

McLaren, 2007). Critical pedagogy advocates teaching in a manner that aides student empowerment. First described by Paulo Freire (1983) in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, critical pedagogy seeks to help students (in school and community education settings) critically interrogate their positions in the world and the power structures working to keep them down. Freire contrasts two methods of education: banking, in which teachers believe they can simply “deposit” facts into the brains of their students; and problem-solving, in which teachers work collectively with their students to understand the world around them. The problem-solving method exemplifies critical pedagogy, in that it teaches students to critically think. Critical pedagogy supports students to “develop their power to perceive critically *the way they exist* in the world *with which* and *in which* they find themselves; they come to see the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in process, in transformation” (Freire, 1983, p. 83).

Implementing critical pedagogy with minority students is essential to exposing systems of oppression and advocating change. Many scholars and advocates have noted that “traditional academic instruction can alienate and exclude members of culturally marginalized groups” (Morrell, 2008, p. 3). Instruction continues to be set up to benefit the most privileged students (Ladson-Billings, 2009). As a result, education has become a social agent that maintains and reproduces the social class and status of students, rather than being a source of social mobility (Fine, 1989; Giroux, 1983). Michelle Fine (1989) notes that a major mechanism by which this occurs is “a systematic fear of *naming*” (p. 157) causing schools to avoid topics that can be seen as politically challenging or controversial, thereby maintaining the status quo. Of course, keeping controversial topics out of schools is nearly impossible. Students regularly bring up issues they face in their daily lives and seek explanation or exploration of the systems influencing them. For instance, if on a daily basis students face living in a dangerous

neighborhood, being harassed on the bus, or not knowing if they will eat that night, these concerns will likely enter the classroom. Rather than ignoring issues that come up, critical pedagogy suggests that teachers help students understand and assess the role systems of oppression play in these experiences, which would lead students to engage with the curriculum, gaining knowledge that could make a difference in their subordinated position. When these students are silenced and these conversations are pushed down or ignored, students become alienated and uninterested in school.

The desire to provide students with a passion for learning and thinking critically is the essence of critical pedagogy: “offering a way of thinking beyond the present, soaring beyond the immediate confines of one’s experiences, entering into a critical dialogue with history, and imagining a future that would not merely reproduce the present” (Giroux, 2010, p. 716). Fine (1989) suggests hope for moving past silencing; hope lies in the students who remain endlessly interested and with the “educators who are creative and gutsy enough to see as their job, their passion, and their responsibility the political work of educating towards a voice” (p. 172). When these two factors exist – students keep pushing and teachers brave the topics – students have the opportunity to learn more than rote lessons. Educators who are willing and able to pursue controversial and critical topics can provide minority students with an emancipatory education.

Critical pedagogy plays an essential role in inclusion. It is a gateway to understanding self and other and therefore foundational in securing inclusion among diverse groups. However, this inclusion is not easily reached. Practicing critical pedagogy in a manner that allows inclusion to be fully realized for all members of a classroom is challenging. Elizabeth Ellsworth’s (1989) work highlights the complicated nature of providing inclusive educational spaces. Even when teachers and students are committed to critical pedagogy and providing safe environments, there

are always “asymmetrical positions of difference and privilege” that eliminate the possibility for inclusion to actualize (Ellsworth, 1989, p. 314-315). Although critical pedagogy advocates for students to critically investigate their position within society, it may fail to recognize the authoritative role teachers play in guiding students’ investigations. Ellsworth (1989) notes the power imbalance between teacher and student risks being accepted with critical pedagogy because there is an understanding that teachers know a subject “better” than their students, allowing for an “emancipatory authority” (p. 308). She argues this assumption is dangerous and suggests teachers are neutral bystanders within oppression and lack an agenda.

Ellsworth points out that the diversity within classrooms leads to partial narration from all individuals, meaning no one in the classroom is in a true position of authority to wholly identify the workings of oppression. Rather than ignoring the inherent power dynamics of student/teacher, and the influence of these partial and differential narrations, Ellsworth suggests critical pedagogues embrace the interdependency these relations create within the classroom. She urges us to recognize “a kind of social and educational interdependency that recognizes differences as ‘different strengths’ and as ‘forces for change’” (Ellsworth, 1989, p. 319). As students work to understand their position within society, all participants, including the teacher, contribute in unique ways. Ellsworth’s critiques are valid and reiterate what I believe is evident within Freire (1983) original concept of critical pedagogy and the value of active, critical, and respectful dialogue.

Critical pedagogy is at the root of inclusive education. In order to secure an inclusive space for students to learn teachers and students must first be willing to name the injustices they see around them and explore how power structures work to privilege some and disadvantage others. When students are given the opportunity to understand the impact of hegemony they are

more able to recognize the impact exclusionary norms have on everyone. Understanding power in this way opens up a space for inclusion to grow.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have situated this project within the broader theoretical discussions of identity and embodiment and the impact of heteronormativity on gender and sexual minority youth. I now turn briefly to discuss how the heteronormative discourses mentioned throughout this literature review influence a school that is actively trying to minimize the negative effects of heteronormative discourses.

Poststructuralism highlights that our understanding of identity and subjectivity is socially constructed and highly influenced by systems of power working to hierarchize individuals into stratified positions. Poststructuralist feminism shows how this is done through patriarchy to keep women in subordinated positions. One of the key processes in maintaining this inequality is through the strict demands of heteronormativity, requiring all bodies to follow a cohesive heterosexual sex/gender/sexuality constellation (male/masculine/desiring women, female/feminine/desiring men). When social institutions including schools collaboratively demand compliance with heteronorms, different networks of power intersect to establish control over bodies. We find ourselves under surveillance both externally and internally, ensuring our compliance with the norms of hetero-genders. People who neglect to do so find themselves without social recognition, isolated and ostracized. For each of us, the demands of heteronormativity intersect with social class, race/ethnicity, age, ability, religion, and other social locations. These intersections cause systems of oppression to coalesce in myriad ways, creating complex gender and sexual expectations for different individuals.

Queer theory helps us understand how these demands for heteronormativity leave us in a precarious position. Judith Butler in particular identifies how individuals need to socially materialize through norms, which are not of our own choosing, and presents us with a vulnerability to and dependence on each other. Our only hope for “surviving” is our ability to successfully perform the norms asked of us. Therefore we are all socialized into acceptable gender and sexuality performances that allow us to be recognized within our communities. The experiences of gender and sexual minority youth demonstrate the complex way the regulation of heteronorms infiltrate our lives, which is particularly evident within schools.

Schools are significant regulatory forces within our society. As this literature review has shown, researchers have documented the extent to which schools work to maintain the normative hetero-genders of their students. Those students who do not comply (the gender and sexual minority students) face challenges as they work to understand their positions in the social world, as well as to be a successful student. As these students work through universal questions like “who am I?” their schools, and the treatment they receive inside their schools, influences and frames the options they have for answering questions of self. Critical pedagogy has the potential to illuminate constraints placed on students’ bodies and in return present opportunities for inclusive schools to emerge.

In the remaining chapters I show how critical pedagogy is used in Unity High’s anti-heteronormative approach to supporting all of their students. I use the term anti-heteronormative to express an explicit rejection of heterosexism and genderism. This is to say that the school is not looking to simply create a space where LGBT students are free from harm. Rather, administrators strive to acknowledge the complex oppressive factors that develop given the normative expectations of gender and sexuality, and the impact such expectations have on all

bodies (although to varying degrees), and to reject the norms of gender and sexuality in order to promote acceptance for all bodies and bodily performances.

In the setting of this inclusive school, we see youth developing a sense of self mediated both by dominant heteronormative assumptions and by the school's anti-heteronormative interventions. I suggest that the juxtaposition of the inclusive space provided by Unity High and the heteronormative expectations of the outside world collide in complex ways for students. Even when the school is fully aware of the need to identify and disrupt the hegemonic forces limiting the lives of their students – and does so in a way that also attempts to bring students a consciousness of those structures and their influence – those same forces still confine and constrain their work. Consequently, the students learn to cope with, reject, and reinforce the expectations of a heteronormative society in various ways within the school.

CHAPTER 3

Methodology

Why Critical Ethnography

This project uses qualitative methods to gather insights into how students understand the impact their school has on the person they are becoming. Schools represent significant cultural institutions, teaching and *forming* the students inside them. Schools are significant sites of discursive power, which is often invisible to the individuals enmeshed in the schools' day-to-day cultural and institutional realities. Ethnography is a key tool for understanding such situations. "The ethnographer's goals are to share in the meanings that the cultural participants take for granted and then to depict the new understandings for the reader and for outsiders" (Bogden & Biklen, 1998, p. 29). Doing so brings greater understanding of the cultural significance of materializing within discursive practices. I use ethnography to provide a "thick description" of everything taking place in my research site – people's movements and gestures, their talk and symbols, their feelings and emotions, and the historical, political, and cultural settings in which these interactions takes place – in order to explicates the ways in which power functions to construct students as culturally and socially intelligible.

Critical ethnography describes ethnography that is attentive to power and that seeks to influence positive change. From the start of the research process a researcher should be able to answer, *how will this research make a difference?* A key feature of critical research, and critical ethnography in particular, is the understanding of "the relation of power and truth" (Carspecken, 1996, p. 8). For example, a researcher may collect data about a participant's interpretation of a situation, object or experience. In analyzing the participant's interpretation, the researcher

contextualizes it within the power structures and discourses surrounding it. This step of contextualizing the data – in this case, a participant’s response – elucidates the connection between micro and macro levels of analysis and can articulate new meaning not available at either the individual or institutional level alone. This kind of critical ethnographic analysis does not aim to lay claim to an essential “truth” about the situation. Carspecken helps us to understand that while there are important power structures to reveal with critical ethnography, for the critical theorist there is no distinctive truth claim to uncover. He states, “*for all kinds of truth claims it is the consent given by a group of people, potentially universal in membership, that validates the claim*” (Carspecken, 1996, p. 21). This is to say that the truth of a situation is normatively understood by those who experience it. It is this normative understanding of truth that critical theorists seek to uncover. In this project, I use critical ethnography to highlight the voices of specific youth in a unique situation, and in doing so *allow them* to offer perspective on what is taking place. Revealing this process of meaning making gives me the opportunity to identify how the truths students share are influenced by discourses of heteronormativity. With this research I intend my analysis to further amplify those student voices and influence researchers and educators as they make vital decisions about educational equity, particularly as it relates to gender and sexual minority students.

A Note on Confidentiality

Research with gender and sexual minority youth presents unique challenges around confidentiality. In our increasingly digital world, I have found (and, indeed, my students and participants have taught me) that it is relatively easy to find people, given even a few seemingly insignificant facts about the individual. As I got deeper into this project, I became concerned about what that might mean for my participants, to whom I had promised confidentiality. Some

of the youth were dealing with abusive family relationships, alcoholism, homelessness, unplanned pregnancies, and not being “out” to their families – all while being very digitally “present.” Nearly all of the students I worked with used multiple social media sites on a regular basis. Institutional Review Boards (IRB) make it clear that anyone under the age of 18 is automatically categorized as being part of a “vulnerable population” and therefore in need of particular protection. Although this stipulation suggests some shortcomings on the part of the IRB (which I discuss at greater length in Appendix A), it also has an important function.

In addition to being minors, many of my participants were also vulnerable because of their gender and/or sexuality transgressions, a real concern in our heteronormative society. To protect their anonymity, I have decided to keep the school, town and state where the study took place anonymous. The data and anecdotes I present are true, but fictionalized to maintain anonymity, using a complex form of portraiture (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1983), vignettes, and composites in order to present the stories of the youth involved without betraying their identities. I feel comfortable shrouding these details precisely because I know that what took place at the research site could easily occur in Anytown, USA. In the analysis section below I discuss the specifics of this process in more detail.

Research Design and Site

Snapshot:

It's a beautiful spring day as I head into Unity. The smell of fresh cut grass is in the air, and I can hear a mower in the distance. I see kids far off in the field just past the school. They appear to be smoking. As I approach the front steps, I can hear kids screaming in laughter from the opened second floor windows. “Spring fever,” I think to myself. I enter and walk down the

main hall. A group of giggly girls congregates at an open locker, exchanging lipstick and eyeliner, laughing as they try to assist each other in “putting their faces on.” In the corner there are two girls kissing; one looks up just in time to catch my glance.

“Hey Kat!”

“Hey! Not time for class yet?!,” I tease.

She smiles and returns to kissing. Across from them are two teachers handing out the morning’s breakfast. Any student who asks receives one.

As I make my way to the basement and the Art room, I pass more students I’m familiar with and we exchange hellos. Some are on their way out the door and I joke, “You wouldn’t be leaving for a smoke, would you?!”

“Ah, Kat...don’t worry about that!” they reply.

I finally make my way to the Art studio and am greeted by a simultaneous, “Kat!” from several students. I smile and say hi to everyone. Most students have work out, but a few are on the couch hanging on each other, some are texting, and one or two are sleeping. I put my bag down and settle in for another exciting day at Unity High.

I present this opening snapshot to illustrate how the school is situated, how the students engage with each other, and how I become enmeshed in their space. The nuances of the social environment at Unity High are significant to how my research played out and how this project became what it is.

Unity High is a small charter school in the United States. The school is unusual in that it does not shy away from being considered an “LGBT-friendly” school.¹⁶ Upon opening in the mid-2000, it sought to provide a safe environment for students regardless of gender, sexuality, appearance, or ability.¹⁷ The city’s school district granted Unity a three-year charter, which has been renewed five times, for varying numbers of years (sometimes the renewal was for 2 years with a probationary status, and other times it went up to 4 years). Teachers informed me that the charter renewal process has been contentious. Different superintendents have shown differing levels of support for charter schools overall, and an “LGBT” school in particular has tended to rattle nerves. On more than one occasion Unity High had to lobby – getting students, parents, and community members involved – to ensure the school would not close. Students and teachers commented on school board demonstrations as being full of large numbers of people willing to protest each time school closure was threatened, noting how each time the school board seemed surprised to learn how vital Unity continued to be to the community. One participant, upon relaying this story to me, happily boasted that the school board “never saw us coming!”

The Art teacher I worked with was one of the three founding faculty members of the school. She shared how Unity High got started after a conversation among the three founders that went something like this:

Teacher A: I’m so sick of these kids calling each other “faggots,” getting in fights, and getting suspended. You would think the administration would do something by now!

¹⁶ I would like to note that Unity High is not entirely unique in being a school identified for LGBT students. In addition to the well-known Harvey Milk School in New York City, there are several alternative schools that have served as safe havens for LGBT students (Cosier, 2009, Rofes, 2005). However, many of these schools try not to be seen, labeled, or specifically identified as being for gender and sexual minority students. This is where Unity High differs; they are proud of their reputation.

¹⁷ Details regarding steps the school took to ensure a safe and “inclusive” environment are outlined in Chapter 4.

Teacher B: I know; it's so ridiculous. Johnny's dropping out. He told me the other day it was pointless to keep coming back. No one seems to get how hostile this environment is for some of our students.

Teacher C: Right, just the other day I tried to get the principal to suspend Jenny because she's been harassing Sara, calling her a whore, and giving her number out to other students; he said that wasn't enough for a suspension! Sara has been hiding in my office all day!

Teacher A: This is stupid! Someone should start a school that truly doesn't allow bullying. These kids need more support! Anyone in?

Teachers B & C: Yeah!

And so it was. A few teachers recognized the reoccurring problems at their school related to bullying against gender and sexual minority students (one of whom identified as lesbian). They filed paperwork to get a charter and approached LGBT community leaders for additional support. The rest is history. As they became more well-known within the district several LGBT faculty and allies joined them.

The approximately 175 students attending Unity High span a diverse range of socioeconomic status, race/ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and ability. The 28 teachers and staff of Unity are less diverse, with an overwhelming majority being White and middle class; however they do openly represent diverse sexualities, with at least 1/3 openly identifying as lesbian or gay. In the 2013-14 school year, the school's website reported the following demographics for their students: 45% Black, 26% Hispanic, 25% White, and 4% Asian/Pacific Islander; 28% of students were categorized "disabled," and 76% were categorized as "economically

disadvantaged.” The school offers a free breakfast and lunch to all students regardless of economic status. All the students commented that the food was disgusting (and indeed it did look unappetizing), but I only observed one or two who did not take advantage of this program. When I questioned faculty about the decision to invest in the free food for all students, they simply commented that it was easier that way.

There is only one criterion for being eligible to attend Unity High: a student must have prior experience dealing with bullying, either as the bully or the bullied.¹⁸ John, the English teacher, explained that this criterion was intended to create an environment where students could learn to appreciate diversity and manage interpersonal skills, along with mastering academics. In addition, he stated the school has a philosophy of not forcing academics, believing that when a student is ready, they will come to class and come ready to learn. This philosophy translates into a very laid back environment, with a mixture of students working quietly in classrooms while others socialize in the hall. I chose to study Unity because its non-traditional environment and focus on providing a safe space for LGBTQ students is unique. I believe the students at the school have important stories to share about why they are at the school, what the school’s atmosphere has to offer them, and why and how those opportunities become significant to their sense of self-understanding.

My presence in the school was primarily in the English and Art classrooms. Initially I was observing a co-taught Art-English class, but after the class was cancelled¹⁹, I conducted the majority of my data collection in the Art room. If the school may generally be described as an

¹⁸ In the three years since I started my research, this requirement has been removed. In my last semester at the school a student informed me the school was changing in a manner she disliked because, “now anyone can come here; they don’t even interview you anymore.” An interview with the school social worker had previously been students’ initial entrance to the school.

¹⁹ Since the school is small, class offerings are dependent on what students need in order to graduate. Therefore this class was only offered for one year.

informal educational facility, and the art room is an informal space within an informal space. In the Art room, as well as various other classrooms, students are asked to complete projects that reflect on their identity and their positionality within a hierarchal society. Students are pushed to think critically about social justice issues (same-sex marriage, bullying, school choice, etc.) and their roles in such issues. In this unique setting, I observed and participated in rich exchanges among diverse students, which created a great opportunity to analyze the complex constellations of student identity. I also analyzed curricula and student projects to learn more about the students' understandings of who they are and how their school and school assignments impacted that understanding.

I spent three and a half years observing at Unity High. I initially entered the school as a volunteer, so that I could begin to build rapport with students and staff while I awaited IRB approval to begin data collection. Not only did the students and staff get to know me, but I also began to get a feel for the school. I soon realized it was not like other schools. There were no bells to mark the beginning and end of class. There were no hall passes. It was fully an open campus; students could work pretty much anywhere they wanted. They got longer breaks between classes than at other schools, and ate all the time! Learning these unique traits of the school helped me to realize that my original plans for studying the school were never going to work. The school was simply too relaxed to accommodate the regimented data collection I had initially envisioned (discussed in Appendix A). The semester I volunteered there, I learned that two teachers were considering combining their classes, Art and English, in order to present the students with critical perspectives on the art of writing. Given the way the teachers were discussing the class, I sensed it was being designed to explore more issues regarding identity and would be a good place for me to be. I adjusted my research plan to include the Art/English class.

I spent three years²⁰ as a participant/observer in the Art and/or English classrooms, as well as every social corner of the school.

Participants

I worked directly with 34 participants, observing and engaging with them during class and school social activities (dances, assemblies, picnics, etc.). There were countless more students who I got to know well and interacted with, but did not enroll in the project. Recruitment efforts were limited to the classroom I had permission to be in. At the beginning of each semester, I presented my project to the class and invited them to participate. After telling the students a little about myself, I explained details about my research and made it clear that all participation was voluntary and could not affect their grades. At the time of those announcements, it was not unusual for the majority of the class to express interest in participating. However, gathering parental permission proved challenging. Some students changed their minds when I reminded them that parent/guardian signatures were required. Other students brought the forms home, and it would take weeks for them to get them back to me. Some of this is typical adolescent forgetfulness, but for others I wondered if they didn't return forms because they didn't want to discuss the research with their parent/guardian, fearing their parent/guardian could possibly have a negative perception of the study and/or the student's role in the study. There were several students each semester that never returned a signed permission slip, and therefore did not become part of my data set. Even so, many of them remained engaged with me. I welcomed this interaction, and believed it supported a generally positive rapport with the whole school.

²⁰ After the first year and the cancelation of the joint Art/English class I continued to observed both classrooms separately.

I often wondered if the reason I had lower participation rates than I expected because my project is looking at how youth understand their identity. Although I did not indicate anything specific about gender or sexuality in the consent forms, all of the students at Unity High are well aware their school is uniquely positioned when it comes to LGBTQ students. This makes me wonder if they (or their parents/guardians) “read between the lines” and assumed I was exclusively what I was looking for LGBTQ-related data. With some students, I had deeper conversations about what I was hoping to understand about their experiences, and a few responded, “So it’s not just about the queer kids?” Of course, if a student didn’t want to be involved, I didn’t push them. Even so, on more than one occasion I had students who initially said no to participating come to me later and ask to be in the research. Only one student verbally confirmed for me that it was her parent who didn’t want her to participate, and the reason was not related to the study being about identity.

There were several students who I got to know very well but could not invite to participate in the study. My IRB protocol limited me to enrolling students who were registered for the classes identified (one or two classes each semester). Because Unity is an open campus, students from other classes would often be in the classroom I was studying. Since they were not technically registered for the class, I couldn’t pursue their participation. I struggled with this a great deal because many of those students were significant presences in the research site and could have offered a great deal to the project. As I discuss below, I do make limited use of the knowledge gained from my interaction with these students through my snapshots.

Of my 34 official participants, all were juniors or seniors who were enrolled in the Art or English class I was working with. General demographics for participants are presented in Table 1. (I refrain from listing the specific demographics of each student for the confidentiality reasons discussed above.) My participants were significantly skewed towards female-identified over male-identified, and White and Hispanic over Black and Asian. I consider these limitations below (see the limitations section of this chapter). The majority of my participants were 16 years of age, with a median age of 17. Through casual conversation²¹ I was able to determine that eleven of the students I was working with could be categorized as having some type of gender or sexual minority status due to non-compliance with hetero-genders. Many of the students said they “didn’t like labels,” but found themselves playing with them to describe their lives. For instance, one student commented, “I don’t know what I am. My boyfriend and I just started

Table 1.

Gender Identity*		Age at start of study					Race/Ethnicity			
Male	Female	16	17	18	19	20	Black	White	Hispanic	Mixed
7	27	14	8	5	3	2	8	14	11	1
Words students used to describe sexual orientation							Students describing self as transgender, gender queer, gender fluid	Pregnant/Parenting	IEP	Dealing with Homelessness
Heterosexual	Gay	Lesbian	Bi-sexual	Pan/Poly-sexual	Unknown					
14	3	3	1	2	11	3	2	7	10	

*Gender identity refers to how the student saw their gender and made reference to it.

²¹ My IRB prohibited me from directly asking participants about sexual orientation. Therefore, all information regarding categories or “labels” of sexual orientation was gathered during observations when students made reference to an identity or used descriptive words referencing sexual orientation.

searching on the Internet, and I guess I'm gender fluid, or whatever." Other students claimed sexual identities of pansexual and bisexual. Only six of my participants identified as gay (3) or lesbian (3). The majority of my participants were heterosexual. In addition, I worked with two young women who experienced a teenage pregnancy (one pregnant and the other parenting her infant).

Several of the students I worked with faced challenges at home. Many of them came from single-parent households, where the second parent had died, been incarcerated, or been absent all along. A majority had younger siblings (or other children) in the home for which they were responsible. Only one of my students openly admitted to struggling with homelessness, while some others insisted that because they could always find a place to "crash," they weren't really homeless. Some participants found themselves challenged to find a place to live because of confrontations with family. This type of instability was not uncommon across Unity High. The school enrolled many students who were in the foster care system or living in homes other than that of their parents. Two of my participants spent time living with faculty from Unity, a practice I came to know as both typical and necessary at the school. The challenges students faced in their home lives entered the classroom in a variety of ways.

Nearly a third of my participants held legitimate employment outside of school, while still more discussed underground forms of obtaining income. Those formally employed included various jobs traditionally seen as teenagers' occupations: working in fast food or small family restaurants, lifeguarding or working a festival during the summer, cashiering or bagging at the grocery, and so on. Underground sources of income included reselling items, most commonly cigarettes along with gifts and other items received from family members. Students also sold or exchanged bus tickets (which were provided to low income students by the school district).

Classroom talk often conveyed the importance of having money. Students showed concern with being able to buy their own food (doing so allowed them to hang out with friends at fast food joints), get around town, get new make-up, piercings, or tattoos, and (for some students) buy the latest smart phone.

Nearly all the students in the school, and all but one of my participants, had electronic devices on them at *all* times. For most this meant a smart phone, although there were some students who didn't have a phone and used an iPod or a tablet instead. Cell phones were not prohibited at Unity. Teachers (and occasionally other students) would ask students to put phones away if they were distracting, but overall most students had them out and used them constantly throughout the day. Texting, Snapchatting, posting on Facebook, listening to music, and looking things up on the Internet were the most common uses I observed. The one participant who did not have a phone regularly relied on her girlfriend's phone as her own. In addition to cell phones, electronic gaming was rampant in the school. Although students had school-issued laptops, many of the "gamers" brought their own laptops specifically for this purpose. Some also brought handheld electronic gaming devices (Nintendo DS, PS Vita), which were sometimes used in a "throwback" retro fashion. All of these electronic devices entered the classroom to varying degrees. Some teachers had more tolerance for them than others, but there were no set rules about their use.

Academically my participants mirrored the school overall. Nearly a third of my participants had individual education plans (IEPs). I learned from teachers that many of the documented disabilities were emotional/behavioral in nature: oppositional defiance disorder, ADHD/ADD, and depression were common. I also worked with one student who had mobility challenges, and two others who were on the autism spectrum. The school appeared to be

accommodating and I observed both students and staff regularly supporting students with disabilities in different capacities (pushing wheel chairs, helping with homework, “talking through” social difficulties, etc.). Many students labeled as disabled were the older students in my participant pool, because their IEPs allowed them to stay in school until they turned 21. Some of these older students felt “ridiculous” (as one told me) still being in school and rarely did school work, or simply gave up.²² I worked with other students who were very concerned about their grades, and hoping to attend top-notch colleges. They were wrought with anxiety over homework and tests, and were often the ones helping others with homework. The majority of participants fell somewhere in between, being somewhat engaged, but lax about assignments and slow to respond to teachers’ concerns about grades until it was absolutely necessary.

In a lot of ways I saw my participants as average American high schoolers. They were obsessed with their cell phones and always texting; their social life was of utmost importance. They procrastinated over homework and complained about requirements being too strict. They wanted to be independent, have a job, and be able to do what they wanted with their free time. And even though they may not have readily admitted it, they still valued guidance from the adults in their lives. Where my participants diverged from others who might be attending a traditional high school is that they dealt with challenges in their lives – at home, in school, and more broadly in society. They also statistically represented a higher proportion of gender and sexual minorities,²³ which of course was, part of my project’s design. Even with these differences, the sample of students from Unity High offers a unique perspective on how

²² I believe students’ feelings of being “ridiculous” and challenges with completing work indicate the school continued to struggle with appropriately accommodating (and/or possibly including) students with disabilities.

²³ Although firm numbers are hard to come by, researchers estimate that LGBTQ youth comprise 5-7% of the overall adolescent population (GLSEN, 2014). Given that my sample included 9 out of 34 students who identified as non-heterosexual (26%), and 3 out of 34 (8%) who identified as trans*, this group has a higher rate of sexual minorities than that of the general population.

educational institutions impact one's sense of self, and the specific meaning this may hold for gender and sexual minority students.

Data Collection

Participant observation was my main source of data collection. My observations differed each semester depending on both my and teachers/class availability. The first year I was in the classroom every morning, four days a week. The second and third years I attended one or two classes, each once or twice a week. Although this made for some inconsistency, my rapport with students was good and meant participants were always available when I was in the building. While observing, I generally tried to pay attention to how the students present and talk about themselves (self-awareness) to each other, teachers, schoolwork, and the outside world. My senses were always tuned in to capture references to gender and sexuality and the manners in which students call on, pick-up, and reject common norms. After a few weeks in the field I began to recognize patterns in students' talk about these topics. Before and after class, or before and after teachers' lesson demonstrations, were good times to hear casual talk that referenced gender and sexuality and issues of identity. The Art room overall held more conversations about the students' lives outside of school. Intensive conversations about race, class, gender and sexuality were commonplace, as along with conversations about expectations and frustration students held regarding their position within the world.

I wrote or dictated field notes immediately after each observation session. I became "dedicated to transmitting as much as possible on paper" (Bogden & Biklen, 1998, p. 121), and was often reminded of my former advisor's dictum: *if it isn't written down, it didn't happen*. Each afternoon, post-observation, I immersed myself in writing out a rich description of that morning. I also made sure to create a detailed description of each student shortly after meeting

them, and would add to the descriptions as I learned more about the students. During the majority of my observations I worked on assignments with the students, which provided a natural excuse to have a notebook. I took advantage of this and regularly turned to the back of it to quickly scribble out a quotation or snippets of dialogue. Capturing this dialogue was essential, because it allowed me to make significant use of “reconstructive dialogue” (Bogden & Biklen, 1998), a tool for bringing participant voices to research. Once I had completed factual, “objective,” fieldnotes, I moved on to reflection and observer comments. Bogden and Biklen (1998) note the importance of clearly separating subjective thoughts from the objective happenings at your research site. Observer comments, then, were for “speculation, feelings, problems, ideas, hunches, impressions, and prejudices” (Bogden & Biklen, 1998, p.123). Additionally, I spent time creating memos to record the emerging themes I saw developing, a practice many qualitative researchers note as beneficial for use during analysis (Bogden & Biklen, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Memos became more frequent the further along I got and often became reminders for possible themes to review when coding. I also used the memos as a reflexive process, exploring my relationship to participants and the research in order to identify and address ethical concerns that arose.

In addition to participant observation, I collected data through documenting students' schoolwork. The majority of participants allowed me to make copies and photographs of their coursework. Students provided me with an array of stories, journals, embroideries, paintings, prints, and sculptures. During class I would often request a photograph of their work and engage the student for details. When discussing students' work with them I would ask about how it related to their sense of self or how others see them. These tactics were fruitful, as some students caught on to my inquiries. They would bring something to me before I had a chance to ask

declaring, “It’s just as powerful as I am!,” or stop me in the middle of asking about their project to say, “No Kat! It doesn’t mean anything!” Students joked about how I asked questions about *everything*, which, I saw as a positive aspect of the rapport I built with participants.

I felt strongly about using student work as a source of data, especially given the fact they were artistic in nature and oftentimes directly referenced students’ self-awareness. This project is not art-based per se, however it has components of art-based research, and seeks to value the student’s work in a similar way. Wendy Luttrell (2003) is another qualitative researcher whose work uses such methods. In *Pregnant Bodies, Fertile Minds* she uses arts-based research to explore the complicated ways in which the embodied pregnant student challenges the heterosexual norms of educational facilities. Luttrell deploys a “person-centered” methodology, asking students to create self-portraits and generate collages on the theme “Who I Am,” in order to collect an “experience-near” perspective that could highlight the young women’s subjective experiences (Luttrell, 2003, p. 6). The results provide unique data that emphasize the “body-smarts” the teens develop in order to understand how their bodies are seen and judged both by their school and society. For instance, the portraits “illustrate their struggles to express multiple feelings and truths about their changing sense of self and identity” (Luttrell, 2003, p. 71), and the collages “convey an individual girl’s creativity and agency” as they struggle to understand how they are “‘addressed by’ and ‘answering to’” the world (Luttrell, 2003, p. 78). Luttrell’s results speak to the value of creative, artistic forms of data collection, and I believe my students’ projects similarly add to an understanding of how they make sense of their subjectivity.

Luttrell writes that she “meant to design research activities that would facilitate personal growth for the girls and serve as models for educational practice” (Luttrell, 2003, p. 150), while also uncovering the intricate ways the school impacted the pregnant and parenting students’ self-

understanding. Although I did not design assignments for my participants, like Luttrell, I believe my presence in the classroom, and interest in their work, served to further encourage the self-expressive projects students were already working on. The amount of time I spent discussing projects with students (and at times encouraging further development or expression) conveyed to them that I cared about their work and that it mattered. As a result, students became eager to share, and at times even shared their critical reflections on their own work, indicating a clear understanding of my research.

To document the data collected from students' projects, I created descriptive notes for each piece and referenced fieldnotes that held details regarding discussions with students about the work. For visual art, I also wrote detailed descriptions of the work²⁴ to aid in later coding and analysis. Student projects were categorized by student, as well as by assignment, class, and semester.

In addition to observations and collecting student work, I conducted interviews with 13 of my participants. Recruiting for interviews was relatively easy. Since I had already been observing, students were accustomed to my asking questions about their work and interacting with them on a regular basis. Bogden and Biklen (1998) note that it is often beneficial to conduct interviews at the end of other data collection, when the researcher has clearer ideas about the areas to focus on. Toward the end of each semester I inquired if a student was interested in speaking with me one-on-one. The majority of students I approached were interested. A few others, upon hearing my request to the first student, asked when I would be talking to them, essentially providing a "snowball" effect (Bogden & Biklen, 1998). I was able to get to the

²⁴ Descriptions of artwork included identifying main subjects, their location/position, type of depiction (realist or abstract), location of additional objects, and the colors and textures used.

majority of students who were interested in being interviewed, although there were some who were unable to follow through prior to the end of the semester and research period.

Interviews were semi-structured (see Appendix B). I began with general questions for all students and then moved into more specific questions based on observations of each particular student and their work. Interviews contributed “descriptive data in the subjects’ own words” (Bogden & Biklen, 1998, p. 94), and allowed the students to decide what was most important to talk about. I mostly let the student guide the conversation. This meant that in some interviews we spent the whole time discussing bullying, whereas with other students it never came up. The majority of interviews were casual and friendly conversation between the participant and I, making the interview a safe space to open up about their experiences in school. All interviews were transcribed immediately afterwards. Occasionally, if after transcribing I saw something in an interview that I wanted to follow up on, I attempted to reach the student and do so. I then added the additional comments to the end of the interview as a fieldnote.

Fieldnotes, students’ work, interviews, and memos therefore comprise the sum of empirical data for this project. In processing all these documents, I feel I have been able to successfully triangulate (Bogden & Biklen, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, Fine, Weis, Weseen, & Wong, 2000; Miles & Huberman, 1994) the different sources to create a more in-depth and reliable understanding of students’ experience (Bogden & Biklen, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005) through multiple kinds of information. Drawing on different sources and kinds of information provides a fuller vision of reality. Additionally, the more that different sources of data point to the same conclusion, the stronger a claim can be. Researchers have long looked for, and insisted on, this overlap because doing so adds “one layer of data to another to build a confirmatory edifice” (Fine et al., 2000, p. 118). By presenting readers with various sources of

information, they are allowed to infer validation on their own. I therefore present these sources in order to paint a clearer picture of how the students at Unity High come to a sense of self-understanding.

Data Analysis

I analyzed the data for themes signifying heteronormative discourses and how they impact a student's sense of self. I made use of the N-vivo software program to assist with coding. Computer assisted data analysis is a powerful tool for effectively managing qualitative data that is in digital form (text, transcripts, notes, photographs, video, etc.). Sarah Tracy (2013) notes that a significant advantage of computer assisted data analysis programs "is its capabilities for coding, sorting, querying, and retrieving data" (p. 205), which allow the researcher to run searches and to examine specific subsets of data. It is important to remember that the software does not analyze data. Rather it assists in organizing the data according to themes and relationships that the researcher identifies. Once a theme is defined, the researcher can inspect each example of that theme, creating opportunities to investigate further the theme's meaning and its relationship to other themes.

Critical Discourse Analysis

The framework for data analysis is primarily that of critical discourse analysis. Critical discourse analysis works to reveal discursive powers reproducing inequality in society (Carspeken, 1996; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2002; Van Dijk, 2009). It seeks to identify the "structures, strategies or other properties of text, talk, verbal interaction or communicative events" enabling the reproduction of dominance (Van Dijk, 2009, p. 300). In this project, the focus is on discourses of heteronormativity. During analysis, I was primarily looking for

heteronormative practices (verbal and otherwise embodied performances). Discourse, in the Foucauldian sense, has real consequences:

Discourse, Foucault argues, constructs the topic. It defines and produces the objects of our knowledge. It governs the way that a topic can be meaningfully talked about and reasoned about. It also influences how ideas are put into practice and used to regulate the conduct of others. (Hall, 2009, p. 72)

Therefore, critical discourse analysis seeks to uncover the statements, rules, subjects, and practices of discourse in order to reveal the production of power/knowledge, which in turn influences how individuals are able to understand themselves and to live. Practically, critical discourse analysis begins with carefully combing through and coding the data in order to highlight themes relevant to the discourses at hand.

My coding process began with initial readings and coding of fieldnotes (including notes from student work), before the majority of interviews were conducted. I interrogated the language represented in the data sources in order to identify both what was said and what was implied or "under the surface." In particular, I coded for power relations (focusing on dynamics of race, class, and sexuality), as well as for judgments about appearances and relationships. I also noted casual talk, and expressions of students' attitudes towards school. This resulted in just over 100 codes. Several of these codes were first-level or descriptive codes, which simply described what was taking place (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The second-level codes that appeared in this early stage could be considered preliminary pattern codes. Pattern codes seek to "identify an emergent theme, configuration, or explanation" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 69). For instance, a first-level code of "Critical Thinking" was further broken down into ten second-level codes

including “Race,” “Class,” “Sexuality,” “Gender,” and so on in order to provide descriptive clarity regarding exactly how and what students were thinking critically about.

Once interviews were complete, I adjusted the coding to account for what students revealed as important. For instance, prior to interviews I assumed students had strong connections to their schoolwork and that it held meaning for their identity. However, in the interviews many students said they only produced the work “because [they] had to.” Although their seemingly indifferent stance on schoolwork remains discursively significant, it was important to honor the topics students marked as more critical. I found in interviews that participants were greatly concerned with the power relations they saw within the school, most notably bullying and favoritism. I reworked codes to look for aspects of the hierarchal relationships students identified, which resulted in a total of nearly 150 codes. At this point a second close reading of the data allowed me to re-categorize several items into second-level codes, more clearly identifying patterns. I further narrowed in on themes by utilizing text/word queries and matrixes within N-vivo. Several connections were revealed and a third rereading of highly saturated codes resulted in preliminary themes. I returned to the literature to narrow in on heteronormative discourses being revealed in the themes. Going back and forth between codes and literature, I searched the data for patterns relating to heteronormative practices.

After the process of reviewing literature was complete I code groupings that allowed me to begin what Carspecken (1996) calls reconstructive analysis, to “tease out normative and subjective references, and to articulate normative themes tacitly referenced in consistent ways” (p. 93). This level of analysis works to determine when and how participants references dominant norms without explicitly naming them. It allowed me to narrow in on significant statements and actions by which students addressed heteronormativity. For example, items that

were coded under *Appearance* (first level) and *Gender* (second level) included interactions in which students commented on their or others' gendered presentation, and/or made gestures (rolling eyes, laughing, smiling, etc.) towards others' display or talk of gender presentations. The language and gestures were analyzed to assess an underlying influence of heteronormativity and how, and to what degree, the dominant discourse was influencing the students in that moment. This process led to the creation of "meaning fields," (Carspecken, 1996, p. 95) where several segments of data indicate clear patterns of heteronormativity. The groupings of data that developed from this process revealed several correlations between codes, and key themes emerged (for example, "gender openness" and "informal classroom," "family" and "identity," "gender performance" and bullied," etc.). Chapters 4 through 7 present those key themes and the theme groupings that developed to comprise a working outline.

A significant aspect of critical discourse analysis is the interpretation of the researcher and how they come to make meaning of their data. Researchers have to carefully consider the context in which data emerges and all the possible perspectives within the interplay of context and data. Carspecken (1996) notes, "you cannot know for certain what an actor intended with her act, you cannot know for certain what impressions of meaning were received by those witnessing the act or directly addressed by the act, but you can specify possibilities" (p. 96). Identifying these possibilities is meaningful because researchers and participants are within (and subject to) the same environment working to producing meaning. Therefore, the range of possible meanings should be similarly available to both researcher and participant. The difference is that the researcher is looking for the unspoken meaning and therefore will likely generate an understanding of the situation that differs from that of their participant. A researcher can feel confident in making claims when they are familiar with participants' culture and context

and can find repeated articulations of meaning presented within participant dialogue. Deploying these measures of validity provides an extra measure of confidence in knowing I am representing my participants accurately. The extended period of time I spent with them and the diligence I took in recording fieldnotes and thoroughly analyzing all data lends to my confidence in presenting this work. It is hard for me to believe I didn't know these students well enough – both personally and in the data – to accurately portray their voices. Still, it is crucial for researchers to reflect on the power dynamics inherent within research and the impact one's positionality has on analysis and interpretation (Carspecken, 1996; Fine, 1994; Fine, et al., 2000; Youdell, 2006). I address the complexity of this issue later on in the Field Relations & Researcher's Positionality section.

Creating Snapshots: Portraiture, Vignettes, and Composite Writing

Analysis continued with the writing of snapshots, or stories that represented the theme groupings developed through critical discourse analysis. The process of creating analytic snapshots involved a phenomenological approach, describing the “meaning of several individuals and their *lived experiences* of a concept or a phenomenon” (Creswell, 2007, p. 57). The “phenomenon” in this case is heteronormativity, allowing for an assessment of the heteronormative experiences of students. I assessed the data present in theme groupings in order to construct textual descriptions of “what participants experienced,” and corresponding structural descriptions identifying “how they experienced it in terms of conditions, situations, or context” (Creswell, 2007, p. 60). These descriptive writings then served as the basis for constructing snapshots that “composited” the common experiences of several students. The snapshots contain the essential aspects of critical discourse analysis conducted on empirical data, but are generated

through a phenomenological approach that captures the essence of heteronormativity within Unity High.

In writing snapshots I utilized a combination of portraiture, vignettes, and composites (each of which are described in detail below). I came to this complex approach through a desire to provide my participants as much anonymity as possible. As referenced above, the students I worked with are considered vulnerable for more than one reason. Providing them anonymity in our increasingly public world (due to technology and social media) was challenging. Combining these methods of writing allowed me to truthfully represent their experiences while safely keeping their individual identities obscured. Portraiture, vignettes, and composites all take narrative approaches to presenting data in order to illuminate a contextualized analysis of participant voices. I use these methods in order to foreground the experiences of participants and the meanings they inferred. This form of writing differs from other forms of qualitative writing in that it values an aesthetic presentation, noting the power aesthetically pleasing writing has to evoke emotional connections between reader and text.

Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot (1983) first outlined portraiture in *The Good High School* as a mode of relaying empirical data that marries art and science. One of Lawrence-Lightfoot's goals in using this method was to find a way to "paint with words" (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 4). Portraiture involves a process of entwining multiple perspectives from a research site in order to reveal the insider's view. Lawrence-Lightfoot (1983) suggests "that the truth lies in the integration of various perspectives rather than in the choice of one as dominant and 'objective'" (p. 13). She highlights the importance for the qualitative researcher of acknowledging the value of deviant voices, or the outlier's perspective, as well as the insider's.

Portraiture allows researchers to bring all of these voices together, and in doing so, relay a more accurate picture of a situation.

In *The Art and Science of Portraiture* (1997) Lawrence-Lightfoot and Jessica Davis further explicate the process of portraiture and emphasize both its aesthetic and empirical value.

They note:

Portraiture is a method of qualitative research that blurs the boundaries of aesthetics and empiricism in an effort to capture the complexity, dynamics, and subtlety of human experience and organizational life. Portraitists seek to record and interpret the perspectives and experience of the people they are studying, documenting their voices and their visions – their authority, knowledge, and wisdom. The drawing of the portrait is placed in social and cultural context and shaped through dialogue between the portraitist and the subject, each one negotiating the discourse and shaping the evolving image.

(Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. xv)

This work suggests that when ethnography is relayed through artistic writing we come to know the information in a different way. We come to have a deeper understanding of the participants as actors, making it more generalizable to our own lives, and we come to have a deeper understanding of the researcher and their role within the work. Portraits, then, take small freeze-frame perspectives of an encounter and illuminate its significance to the whole. Painting this type of picture helps to bring the work to a broader audience. In addition, Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis make it clear that one of the goals of portraiture is to find the positive, or goodness, of a situation even though doing so may be complex or even contradictory.

Vignettes are similar to portraiture in that they also tell a story of a researcher's data. Miles and Huberman (1994) describe vignettes as "a focused description of a series of events taken to be representative, typical, or emblematic" of a researcher's case (p.81). One use of vignettes is in data collection, when they may be presented to participants in order to get their feedback on a particular scenario (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Tracy, 2013). A researcher may construct a vignette to represent an event or issue that is typical at a research site in order to gain further insight into participants' perspective on a plausible but fictional, hypothetical example. "The research (re)constructs the example by purposefully collecting and piecing together data" (Tracy, 2013, p. 208) in order to gather additional rich data about a situation.

Vignettes can also be used as a means to present data. In *On Writing Qualitative Research: Living by Words* Ely, Vinz, Downing, and Anzul (1997) present various uses for vignettes:

Vignettes are compact sketches that can be used to introduce characters, foreshadow events and analysis to come, highlight particular findings or summarize a particular theme or issue in analysis and interpretation. Vignettes are composites that encapsulate what the researcher finds through the fieldwork. (Ely et al., 1997, p.70)

Vignettes are incredibly useful for shaping the story of one's data. They can be used to draw connections between what the researcher has learned from participants and how the researcher came to make their interpretation. Ely et al. suggest it is the job of the researcher to work as a narrator and editor of empirical data, using a participant's own words to present an accurate picture of what has taken place. A vignette provides a "figurative representation," where the researcher presents necessary details that allow the reader to see the bigger picture (Ely et al., 1997, p. 74). Researchers have noted the usefulness of creating character vignettes, as well as

composite vignettes (Ely et al., 1997). This highlights the usefulness of combining these three methods (portraiture, vignettes, and composites) in qualitative work.

Composite writing in qualitative work speaks to the need for participants to feel confident their identity will not be revealed. As a means to protect participants and provide anonymity “a researcher develops case studies of individuals that represent a composite picture rather than an individual picture” (Creswell, 2007, p. 174). Using empirical data, the researcher compiles like experiences of participants in order to reveal the essence of what has taken place for all participants. “This description consists of ‘what’ they experienced and ‘how’ they experienced it” (Creswell, 2007, p. 76), allowing the reader to walk away feeling that they understand the people and experiences presented. Composites can provide deep descriptions of empirical data while masking individual identity.

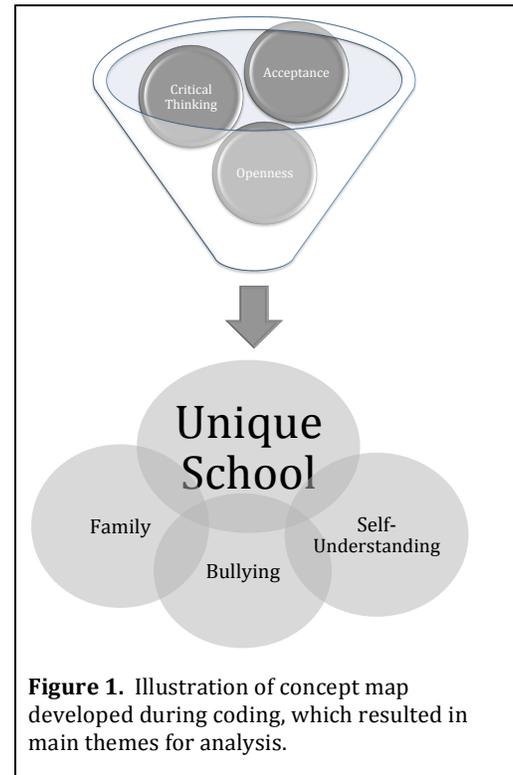
Patton and Catching (2009) eloquently describe the unique need for confidentiality in their study of Black student affairs workers. With so few African American student affairs workers on campus, it was absolutely essential for them to find a way to mask participant identities. They chose to create composite stories, using data from all participants to create one representative narrative. This method has been popular for some researchers using critical race theory. Solórzano and Yosso (2002) note that compositing data is necessary for presenting counter-stories and a valued aspect of critical race methodology. By compositing they are not “developing imaginary characters that engage in fictional scenarios. Instead, the ‘composite’ characters are grounded in real-life experiences and actual empirical data and are contextualized in social situations that are also grounded” (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 36). The composite therefore “protects the identities of individuals within populations who might otherwise be easily identified” (Patton & Catching, 2009, p. 717), while still presenting real-life circumstances.

The composite is similar to portraiture in that it seeks to find aesthetically pleasing ways to illuminate the voices of participants through storytelling, but in a manner that offers more protection to those who do not want, or cannot afford, to be found out (Creswell, 2007; Patton & Catching, 2009; Rasmus, Allen, & Ford, 2014; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Compositing is similar to both portraiture and vignettes in that it allows for unique specificities to arise, while seamlessly bringing together major themes. Patton and Catching (2009) notes that compositing brings together similar themes across narratives “to present a more cogent picture of the participants’ experiences, while simultaneously allowing unique experiences to unfold” (p. 717). Furthermore, Solórzano and Yosso (2002) emphasize the need for composites in order to present the stories of minorities and ensure “majoritarian stories” do not continue to distort and silence those who have been oppressed (p. 29). For all these reasons I make use of this unique and creative form of writing.

I use the term “snapshot” to refer to this form of writing, which has been influenced by the methods of portraiture, vignettes, and composites. To say they are solely portraits, vignettes, or composites would be a misrepresentation of how I have combined the methods. My snapshots celebrate and utilize the aesthetic value, thick description, and balanced voices modeled in *portraiture*, the valuable exemplary scenarios within data that shape critical stories (as evident *vignettes*), and a complex *composite* of all data contributing to those portraits/vignettes in order to secure anonymity. Therefore this method truly is a combination of the three. I also make use of the term snapshots because I feel it better represents the fast “freeze-frame” representations I put forth in order to illuminate specific examples of what I observed in the school. This is to say that each snapshot represents a very specific moment in time at Unity High. However, they are also fully contextualized in a way that allows the reader to see the story as a critical reflection of

the whole environment of Unity High. Each chapter presents snapshots that work to provide rich descriptions of students, classrooms, and the school.

Constructing snapshots. My method for creating snapshots started with the data analysis described above. After identifying basic themes (school, family, bullying, and self) I focused in on the correlations between codes and how codes shaped each theme. I approached this process of examining correlations by creating a concept map. It became clear (as indicated in Figure 1) that much of the interactions taking place in the school revolved around the school’s enacted values of acceptance, openness and critical thinking. Those values serve to



create an environment that supports students’ experiences of family, bullying, and self-understanding. How those values coalesced and mitigated student experiences represented the “big picture” I saw emerging from my data. I revised the map through several versions, reworking it to ensure the data was adequately represented in each theme. Analysis of heteronormativity and self-awareness were central to how the organization of the map materialized. The final result also provided the outline for Chapters 4 through 7.

In compiling snapshots, I reviewed the descriptive writings I had already compiled and looked for similar stories and experiences, as well as similarities between participants. During this close reading I noted the context of each situation (e.g., art room, relaxed Friday, casual work and conversation, etc.), and the specific actions taking place (i.e., talking about prom, cross dressers’ dance, students sleeping, student projects that represent themselves, etc.). I then

brainstormed composite stories that exemplified the experiences represented in the data and the discourses revealed. To make sure my analysis would accurately represent the original data, I carefully crafted stories that combined parallel examples while staying true to the original context.

With a basic representative story in mind I considered different options for composing non-central descriptive aspects of the original data. For example, if a class project was on oil paintings, I may have changed it to charcoal drawings. If a student wrote a rap song, I may have changed it to a haiku. Likewise, when composing students I considered the similarities as well as unique characteristics and personalities of each participant. If a participant had features, mannerisms, dress, or stylized talk that was particularly distinct, I considered ways to represent the characteristic through a different example or in a generic way. For example, a student who always wore platform shoes may have changed into a student who always wore hats. A student who had a distinctive “catch phrase” might be represented with a different “catch phrase.” Finding ways for these unique aspects of participants to show through within composite characters was essential for maintaining the essence of the original data and analysis. I considered any change that would allow the intention and impact of a participant’s actions to remain, while also adding additional anonymity. I did not change students’ race, ethnicity, gender, or sexual identities, as this would likely have an effect on the overall analysis. This presented a challenge for some students who may have been the only person in the study (although certainly not the only person in the school) who identified their gender and/or sexual orientation in a particular way. For those students, I decided not to create a composite character (represented in Table 2 as “non-composite” characters). They are present and represented anonymously in snapshots with stylistic and character changes as indicated above. When this

was the case, I made a greater effort to change the student's surroundings, such as the work they completed, the people they interacted with, or the classroom they inhabited to make sure that they would not be identifiable in vignettes.

Table 2 outlines the composition of each snapshot. Two distinct examples of snapshots exemplify how this writing process came together. In *Snapshot Two* I discuss prom and the different ways students thought about it. The snapshot was constructed from several separate conversations about prom that took place over a few weeks (*composite*). The dialogue presented is verbatim from my observations, however I combined the interactions in order to emphasize how discussions of gender and sexuality seamlessly entered the space of Unity High (*vignette*). Conversely, in *Snapshot Seven* I constructed a fictional interaction between John (a teacher) and Arianna (a student) (*vignette*) in order to depict both the experiences and feelings Arianna relayed in her interview *and* the behaviors and culture I observed in that particular classroom (*composite*). Both snapshots are written with the intention of immersing the reader in the details of the empirical data (*portraiture*). Therefore, as I constructed snapshots I moved between these two methods, either combining like experiences and situations into one exemplary story, or creating a fictionalized example to illuminate students' experiences.

All snapshots derive from empirical data and can be traced back to specific interviews, observations, students' projects, or memos. Although this method does not create the continuity that can develop from presenting one student at a time, it lends itself to painting a more holistic and critical perspective of the environment overall. Compiling a view of the whole milieu of Unity High enables me to speak to the question of how heteronormativity impacts students in Unity High despite institutional intentions to disrupt it, in a way that a more direct presentation

Table 2.

Snapshot	Character Composition*	Dialogue Composition	Storyline Composition
1	Zak – composite Skylar – composite Sierra – composite Bobby – non-composite Jaime – composite	Fieldnotes	Composite
2	Quinn – non-composite Tori – composite Jenny – composite Skylar – composite	Fieldnotes	Composite
3	Candi – composite	Fieldnotes	Original
4	Alejandro – non-composite Riley – non-composite Jenny – composite	Fieldnotes & Interviews	Composite
5	Jena – composite Destiny – non-composite Jeremy – composite	Fieldnotes & Interviews	Composite
6	Jena – composite Tori – composite	Fieldnotes	Original
7	Arianna – non-composite	Fieldnotes & Interview	Composite
8	Jacob – non-composite Destiny – non-composite Rachel – composite Skylar – composite Sierra – composite	Fieldnotes & Interviews	Composite
9	Zak – composite Skylar – non-composite Jenny – composite Quinn – non-composite Mel – composite	Fieldnotes & Interviews	Composite
10	Riley – non-composite Josh – composite	Fieldnotes & Interview	Composite
11	Bobby – non-composite Adam – composite	Fieldnotes & Interviews	Composite
12 (Parts 1 & 2)	Quinn – non-composite Rachel – composite Je'mal – composite Skylar – composite Brooke – composite	Fieldnotes & Interviews	Composite
13	Alejandro – non-composite	Fieldnotes & Interview	Composite
14	Candi – composite Zak – composite	Fieldnotes	Composite
15	Brooke – composite Rachel – composite Tori – composite	Fieldnotes	Composite
16	Sierra – composite Jaime – composite Arianna – non-composite Je'mal – composite	Fieldnotes	Composite

Composite character indicates the student character is representative of two or more participants who embodied/expressed the same characteristics, concerns, and/or interests.

Non-composite character indicates the student character is a portrayal of one specific participant, and only identifying information has been changed.

Composite storyline indicates a setting that was compiled from various different interactions throughout the school, as well as (where indicated) in interviews.

Original storyline indicates a snapshot that reveals an incident as it originally took place in the school.

* Sara and John, the teachers, are non-composite characters

of data could not. Additionally this method is useful for addressing large amounts of data in that it allows for consolidation and representation of like experiences.

I believe this method of storytelling brings forth an accurate representation of student voices. My snapshots make significant use of dialogue, much of it taken directly from interviews or observations. Because youth often feel disempowered by adults, it is important to amplify their voices through these stories. As adult researchers, we are the gatekeepers (Leonard, 2007) to the insights that youth voices can offer. This role presents a significant power imbalance, which various researchers have addressed within their work (Ferguson, 2000; Leonard, 2007; Luttrell, 2003; Pascoe, 2007; Tolman, 2002). I worked diligently to manage these power relations while in the field (discussed in the following section), as well as through presentation of data drawing on students' voices, while offering an appropriate respect for the knowledge students have to offer. Moreover, student voices strengthen the data presented and reveal the extent to which youth understand the broader implications of discourses deployed in their school.

For snapshots to be effective, they must not only contain accurate content that reflects the context of a situation and parallels specific interactions, but also be aesthetically pleasing. Snapshots should evoke feelings as well as convey information. By enabling the reader to develop an emotional relationship with the data, the significance of the analysis will be more effectively communicated.

Field Relations & Researcher's Positionality

Over my three and a half years of presence at the school I developed a very good rapport with everyone including teachers, administrators, students, and parents. Building these relationships was challenging at first. There had been several student researchers who conducted

research in the school previously, and initially many students, and some teachers, may have been skeptical of me. My social location may have contributed to this skepticism. I am White, middle class, and present myself as normatively feminine, which led one student to tell me I come across as a “priss.” This first impression, coupled with my introduction as a PhD student, led many Unity High students to view me as a privileged White girl looking to use them for my own purposes to graduate. It wasn’t until I began talking that the perceptions changed. In the art room this came quickly when the loud and rather intrusive art teacher (also White and middle class) bombarded me with personal questions on my first day. I met her tone and engaged with her playful banter, answering honestly about my identities and history.

I was open about the fact I consider myself a queer heterosexual²⁵ (which several of them challenged, resulting in an enjoyable discussion), and that I am partnered but not married. I shared that I had a teen pregnancy and placed a child for adoption, and that I had a gay uncle who died of AIDS when I was a teen, which shaped my perception of LGBTQ issues. I talked about my sex education work with LGBTQ kids and my counseling work with pregnant teens. Students were surprised and appreciative, and began seeing me in an ally role similar to that of their art teacher, and slowly became more comfortable with me. My history lent credibility to my interest in the school and in learning more about their experience, and to the possibilities my research held for helping others.

Through sharing honestly about myself, and other rapport building techniques, I worked hard to change misperceptions about my motives. I made a point of volunteering whenever assistance was needed. I brought in goodies to share at lunch, and baked for different school

²⁵ I presented this terminology to the students not as an active political role or theoretical stance (as outlined and critiqued by Kitzinger & Wilkenson [1994]), but as a goal to “fuck gender” (Butler, 1999; Kitzinger & Wilkenson, 1994) by rejecting the notion of natural male/female bodies with corresponding masculine/feminine genders that display heterosexual desires.

functions such as prom or the year-end picnic. I also made a point of using the skills and resources I had from my other positions within the community, as a home visitor and educator,²⁶ to offer referrals and support to students. In doing so I developed relationships with the youth that have lasted past their graduation. I was proud to be able to help the students in this regard and am happy to say many of my participants continue to represent meaningful relationships in my life.

Because I worked hard to become friendly with the students, I was sometimes mistaken for a paraprofessional in the classroom. I reminded the students often that I was there to do research, to which they would reply, “oh yeah, I remember signing that thing.” However, even though students were aware that I was a researcher, I rarely appeared to be one. The notebook I carried and regularly took notes in was similar to the students’ school supplies, and my use of it did not stand out; students could assume I was writing or drawing just as any of them might do. Therefore, my role in the school became complex. When students needed support and kindness from a trusted adult, I became their counselor and confidante. Occasionally I covered a class for a teacher who had to step out for a few minutes. And often I was positioned as a peer, or someone who “gets” what being a teen is all about. The fluidity of these positions meant I was thoroughly accepted in the school. The trust students placed in me was a lot to bear and became challenging to address at some moments during observations and analysis. Memoing was an essential tool in documenting and working through the challenges of these moments.

The occasions when my position became most concerning were when students shared very personal information. For instance, one day a student who was normally upbeat and social

²⁶ Over the past three years I have held a few different positions. I was a home visitor for a child protective agency, providing in-home pregnancy and parenting education to young women and their families. I no longer hold the position, but continue to be on citywide committees interested in reducing teen pregnancy. I also have been teaching part time on and off during my research.

appeared to be very down. I took a moment to say hi and inquired if everything was okay. She replied that her grandmother, whom she was very close with, had just passed away after a battle with cancer. After I expressed my sympathy, the student continued to talk about her sense of loss and her anger about the cancer. Cancer was also relevant in my life at the time, and I shared the student's feeling of anger; my mother had just been diagnosed and was in the middle of chemotherapy, a process that was emotionally draining for everyone in my family. I shared this with the student and we continued talking for nearly 20 minutes. In that moment, I was not an objective observer. Similarly there were other times that one-on-one conversations revealed information about students' struggles with family, relationships, and self-esteem. These conversations left me with a responsibility to offer resources to the students, and also left me feeling unsure how to represent the data in my project. While I was in the school I always considered myself "on duty" as a researcher, and made a point of recording everything. However, it was clear to me that in such moments I was not being seen as or treated as a researcher. Therefore I decided I would only document incidents like this in memos, as opposed to in fieldnotes.

Memos served as a venue in which to reflect critically the ethics of presenting this type of data in my research. Since I was aware the students did not see these conversations as part of their research participation – given they were one-on-one, reciprocal, and sometime involved problem solving and resource referrals – I felt it unethical to explicitly share these stories with the outside world. At the same time, I saw how these moments contributed to the richness of my data overall. Not only did these moments serve to increase trust between the students and myself, allowing them to be more open during interviews, they also strengthened my frame of reference for the types of challenges students at Unity High faced. I ultimately decided not to include any

specifics of these personal stories in my analysis. Rather, I integrated the core elements of these stories in snapshots, although to varying degrees and in different ways. For example, the circumstance with the student sharing with me the story of her grandma passing may have surfaced as a reference to the struggles students face with the loss of family members. Therefore, personal interactions may have entered snapshots by way of general references such as students' families experiencing economic hardship, students' challenges of being in a blended family, or students struggling with romantic relationship issues. Presenting one-on-one personal interactions in this manner allowed me to feel I was maintaining confidentiality while also allowing the data to accurately represent the outside forces impacting the everyday experiences of students at Unity High.

My acceptance and integration into the school community also meant I was present for many intense conversations about race, class, gender, and sexuality. At times, students would stop themselves from swearing, disclosing illegal (or questionably legal) activity, or openly disrespecting a teacher in front of me. Often these pauses were met by other students laughing at the hesitation and saying, "don't worry, Kat's cool." That the students so easily took for granted my presence in such conversations made it challenging for me to stay in the "observer" position. I struggled with deciding when or if I should interject when students may have been doing something they probably shouldn't. I questioned my responsibility to intervene. But I also struggled with whether or not to interject during moments I could tell were data rich, at which point I may have wanted clarifying information, or simply to ensure the conversation continued. Often, in those moments I did interject (as depicted in some snapshots). At other times I decided not to interject for fear of being seen as an authority figure, which may have served to shut down the conversation. When I witnessed behavior that I knew a teacher would have stopped – such as

when I saw a student preparing to pierce another student's ear – I tried to assess the possible harm of the situation. If I felt danger was imminent, I would intervene; otherwise I let the students continue (as I did with the ear piercing). This judgment was difficult at times, but I felt it was important for me to remain as undistruptive as possible in order to observe how students normally interacted in the school.

The dynamics of my role were certainly challenging at times, but also were advantageous, since the trust of students enabled me to hear what they truly wanted to say about their experiences in school. However this trust also brings with it a significant responsibility, and is an important reminder of the hierarchy that exists between the researched and researcher (Fine, 1994; Fine, et al., 2000; Youdell, 2006). Feminist researchers have long considered concerns about how a researcher's social location, including race, class, gender, sexuality and age, are perceived in the field and the effect of such locations and perceptions on empirical data. Reflexive analysis is one tool that seeks to account for these complexities (Fine, 1994; Youdell, 2006).

Fine (1994) describes reflexive analysis as a practice whereby “researchers probe how we are in relation with the contexts we study and with our informants, understanding that we are all multiple in those relations” (Fine, 1994, p. 72). Youdell (2006) adds that reflexive analysis “position[s] the researcher and the researched as knowing subjects” (p. 63). She discusses the complexity of the researcher's role given the discursive constitution of both researcher and researched:

I talk to students and teachers, and participate...I am seeking to identify, unpack, and untangle the effects of the discourses that are deployed. While at times discourses and their effects are clearly evident, more often these are subtle and oblique, needing to be

teased out, inferred. This is not the collection of 'real' or 'actual' discourses but is wholly constrained by my own discursive repertoire...I am, then absolutely entangled in my research data, data that are deeply implicated in the very constitutive processes that it is trying to understand. (Youdell, 2006, p. 56)

As noted at the beginning of this chapter, identifying this discursive relationship is essential to critical research; however doing so is complicated by the fact that both the researcher and the researched are always implicated within a discursive context. Youdell (2006) emphasizes the need to address the complexities of a discursive situatedness within reflexive practices, advocating for transparency in presenting research findings. All critical researchers find a way to present reflexive findings in their work, acknowledging their own implication within the research. Reflexive memoing served some of this purpose for me, and even so, there is always a hierarchal relationship within research, and I must recognize the responsibility my position holds.

I worked diligently to manage the impact this hierarchal relationship would have on my participants and my data. As mentioned earlier, there were many opportunities within rapport building that allowed me to be vulnerable with students and present myself honestly. At times this was personally challenging, evoking strong emotions. For instance, in the very beginning of my research I shared with students that I had experienced a teen pregnancy and placed my son for adoption. Thereafter it was known among students and would come up from time to time. In my third year of observations, I made a comment about my son and the students were shocked – I am not parenting and therefore rarely mention my son. As I looked around, I realized it was a new group of students who likely had not been around the last time I had shared the story, so I explained. The initial shock they showed is not uncommon; as a birthmother I am used to trying

to explain my experience to others. But there are times when the conversation can go awry. A student who had been texting away on his cell phone and was at the edge of the table (and so I thought wasn't privy to the conversation) unexpectedly blurted out, "Does your son hate you?!" Again, this is nothing I hadn't heard before, but it is still annoying and hurtful each time. I took a deep breath and tried my best to engage the students in a real conversation about adoption, teen pregnancy, and motherhood. Interestingly enough, it was a fruitful conversation that turned into a discussion of kids who experience family trauma and revealed some important stories about the students. I believe this example represents the value of being honest and vulnerable with participants. The power relations in that moment seemed at least partly neutralized by the openness both the students and I shared. Although I know the hierarchal relationship can never truly be neutralized, it was moments like this, along with my reflexive memoing, that I believe bring the project a measured and respectful balance regarding the inherent hierarchies that appear between participants and researchers.

Regardless of these efforts to minimize my position of power, I am certainly aware my positionality has influenced my interpretation of the data. Not only has my own personal experiences (and desire to improve the circumstances of gender and sexual minority youth) influenced my analysis, but so too have the relationships I developed with my participants. I had to struggle with my position and my hierarchal status of the researcher in order to come to an interpretation I felt was reliable.

Limitations

All research has its limitations, and it is impossible to account for all possible readings of one's work. The three main limitations I will discuss are: 1) the participant sample is nonrandom, 2) the research site may limit generalizability, and 3) some readers may see my choice of

presenting data through snapshots as having an ulterior motive or lacking ethical (scientific) rigor.

The participant pool is nonrandom because of inconsistent interest students showed in my work. The participant pool is largely composed of students who found the work interesting. This may have been because of an interest in research generally, an interest in identity generally or in gender and sexuality specifically, or simply an interest in me as someone interested in them. Regardless of the reasons, I have to assume the group is not representative of all students in the school. As noted earlier, participants were majority female and White, disproportionate to the school demographics. Although there were also a significant number of Hispanic girls who participated, the group still does not mirror the overall demographics of the school, which has a majority of Black students. My hunch is that this skewed sample occurred because I spent the majority of my time with the Art teacher, who was heavily favored by female students of all races and ethnicities. This made it very easy for me to befriend these students. However, when it came time to collect participation forms, a greater number of the White and Hispanic students returned them, as opposed to Black or Asian students. Although this certainly presents a limitation, I worked hard to use all of the observations that took place in order to include the perspectives of male and Black students. Additionally, the seven males who did formally participate were very vocal, which also helped to balance out this difference.

The research site itself also presents some limitations. This project seeks to illuminate the heteronormative practices within schools that influence how a student understands him or herself. Because this school was known as an “LGBT” school, there are many things about the environment that are different from traditional schools. I am aware of this limitation but chose the site anyway in order to examine *how even a school working to minimize the impact of a*

heteronormative culture can still be challenged by it. Additionally, my decision to explore how heteronormativity impacts gender and sexual minority youth in particular required finding a larger than average sample of such students. Still, I am sensitive to this limitation, and in the data chapters I make a point of noting the areas where I feel it has been particularly influential.

Lastly, it is important to note common critiques of portraiture, vignettes, and composites, which compose the snapshots I present. Critics have questioned each method as to the researchers' ability to frame a given topic to support their agenda. In other words, presenting data through this type of storytelling is seen as vulnerable to bias. It relies heavily on the researcher's discretion and therefore the power of the researcher to frame the data. Regarding portraiture, for example, Fenwick English (2000) opines that Lawrence-Lightfoot's method conceals a significant "politics of vision" that gives the portraitist the right "to situate, center, label, and fix in the tintured hues of verbal descriptive prose what is professed to be 'real'" (English, 2000, p. 21). He suggests that just as the artist painting a picture paints what they envision, so too does the qualitative portraitist. English (2000) goes on to argue that Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis's (1997) claim that the process of portraiture leaves much open for the reader to decide makes a false assumption: once the portrait is created and read, the reader cannot *unread* it. English strongly believes the portraitist is the final creator, and that that is problematic. Similarly, some researchers have suggested that vignettes should only be used for data collection, that their use in presenting analysis risks "co-opting" a participant's voice (Ely et al., 1997, p.71), and that composites are a form of "cheating" because a researcher chooses only the bits and pieces that make their case (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000, p. 96-97).

Much of this concern has to do with the researcher's position and their aim. Each of the proponents of these methods who I have referenced in this chapter (Creswell, 2007; Ely et al.,

1997; Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997; Patton & Catching, 2009; Rasmus et al., 2014; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002) acknowledge that a researcher's positioning significantly shapes their methods. Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) are explicit about how the researcher's own identity and position is always relevant to the portrait that develops; it is more transparent than in most other methods. They note that this influence is inevitable because it is the self of the portraitist that helps the story develop; therefore, the portraitist "must be that much more vigilant about identifying other sources of challenge to her perspective" and making the counterintuitive interpretation present at all times (Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis, 1997, p. 13). These methods therefore require vigilance on the part of the researcher. Ely et al. (1997) suggest there is a "vicarious introspection" that develops within a researcher as they become solely dependent on their observations and interviews in order to interpret accurate vignettes (p. 72-73). Composites too depend on the researcher's ability to identify lifelike stories in order to capture the "essence" of their data (Creswell, 2007).

While I acknowledge the potential liabilities of portraiture, vignette and composite, even their most vocal critics admit that these liabilities are not unique: the researcher's must always be diligent to stay true to the empirical data as it is and not as they want it to be. Miles and Huberman (1994) refer to the risk of "holistic fallacy," when a story begins to take on a life of its own and researchers present their data in unrealistic neat packages (p. 263). I believe I have been successful, through the triangulation of different data sets and reflexive analysis, in presenting an authentic representation of the data.

In considering the limitations of portraiture, vignettes, and composites, it is also important to remember the power structures at play in validating "good" research. As Solórzano and Yosso (2002) note, "if methodologies have been used to silence and marginalize people of

color [and other minorities], then methodologies can also give voice and turn the margins into places of transformative resistance” (p. 37). Resisting new methods, especially those that seek to provide voice to marginalized groups, can be seen as a form of backlash to researchers challenging the status quo. This in itself does not necessarily mean the method or research is valid. It does mean that we must consider the power structures working to maintain current hierarchies as we assess the validity of *any* scientific research.

Finally, various researchers, including each I have already cited in this chapter, have noted the challenges of positionality and objectivity. It is my hope that by clearly indicating my aim (as this is a critical research project *with* an aim), and acknowledging my positionality, I give the reader an opportunity to make their own assessments about how this influences the work. I also hope that even with my framing of the story, the snapshots and analysis provided will allow readers to imagine their *own* varied interpretations. I truly believe that regardless of which perspective is valued (mine or the readers), this work presents important information that can impact the future of educational policy and research.

CHAPTER 4

A Unique School: Foundations for Building Inclusion

It is impossible to understand the varied ways youth of Unity High come to perform identity without a clear perspective on how the school is uniquely positioned as an inclusive space. It is Unity High's stance on inclusion, most directly seen through a stance of anti-heteronormativity (i.e., being against heterosexism and genderism), that allows students to embody gender and sexuality in ways that, outside of the school, would not be acceptable or even intelligible. I therefore begin with an outline of how this institution is uniquely positioned to impact the lives of gender and sexual minority students. In this chapter I set the stage by describing how the school creates an inclusive space, the safety it suggests, and how it positions students to explore different aspects of gender and sexuality for themselves, others, and society over all.

Anti-Heteronormative Principles

I argue that Unity High upholds three foundational pedagogical goals that allow them to provide an inclusive and explicitly anti-heteronormative environment for all of their students: openness, acceptance, and critical thinking. Each of these goals is expressed in nearly everything the school does – curriculum, policies, formal and informal programming – and students come to recognize the value of these principles both in and outside of school.

Openness, the first pedagogical goal, represents the importance Unity places on students' right to explore different modes of being. For example, the school does not have a dress code. Students are not restricted from swearing or expressing their views in other colorful ways that would be considered inappropriate if not banned outright in more mainstream schools. Students

are encouraged to try new things and investigate subjects they are interested in; no topic is off the table. Openness at Unity means that students who are interested in cross-dressing are able to do so. Students who want to wear a mask covering their face are allowed to do so. Students who think an assignment is “fucking stupid” are allowed to say so. And students interested in discussing abortion, different types of sex acts, the HIV crisis, rape culture, or any other politically charged topic, or topic often considered unsuitable for young people or for school settings, are more than welcome to do so. Unity’s goal of openness is also reflective of critical pedagogy, in which freedom of expression and exploration is key tenets (Giroux, 2010). In critical pedagogy educators strive to meet students where they are at and allow student experiences and interests to guide the lessons. Students develop a critical understanding of their subjectivity, bringing prospects for empowerment (Freire, 2011; Giroux, 1983, 2010; McLaren, 2007). Furthermore, openness provides a freedom to explore countless subjects and forms of expression. In doing so openness creates a discourse of inclusion that allows authenticity. Individuals are expected to be and present them selves as desired.

For teenagers it can be a challenging to present an authentic self when surrounded by peers ready to pounce on those who don’t conform, a concern many teens face in ordinary schools. However this is not the case at Unity High. The school’s second pedagogical goal of acceptance limits the challenges associated with presenting an authentic self. Acceptance is central to Unity High’s mission of providing a safe environment for *all* students. From day one students are taught to go beyond mere tolerance and really deeply accept others. At the beginning of the school year Unity High provides small workshops for all incoming and new students. These workshops are set up to explicitly educate students on LGBT issues, including history, different identity categories, and basic “etiquette” on how to interact respectfully with LGBT

individuals. Therefore, students are immediately acclimated to the anti-heteronormative and inclusive expectations of the school. These orientation workshops serve as a mechanism for the school to reinforce the goals of openness and acceptance, and students quickly learn they are free to be whom they want within the walls of Unity High.

The school utilizes talking circles,²⁷ a democratic form of community sharing, in order to recognize and address differences and facilitate acceptance. In school-wide circles²⁸ students have an opportunity to discuss difficult topics such as bullying, effective communication, forms of respect, valuing difference, and accepting tragedy. These circles serve as community-building activities and often end up addressing issues of sexuality, gender, race, ethnicity, class, and dis/ability, thereby supporting the anti-heteronormative atmosphere of school. Unity High also offers a Restorative Justice class, which complements the school-wide circles. In this class students learn more about the theories behind circle practices, and are invited to be leaders within the school by modeling acceptance and peace among the students.

The third goal, critical thinking, complements and supports the others. Students may not be able to be completely open or accepting without first thinking critically about the power structures working to constrain particular individuals – particular bodies and performances – in society. The school therefore manages any struggles with openness or acceptance through critical thinking, acknowledging and embracing the complexity and messiness of building inclusion. Unity has worked hard to formally implement critical thinking skills within the curriculum, as well as informally through the personal relationships between teachers and students. Faculty

²⁷ The school's circles are loosely based on Restorative Justice practices, which seek to address transgressions by repairing harm to individuals and communities, as opposed to punishing those who have done harm. See Vaandering (2010) for details on how Restorative Justice has been practiced in schools.

²⁸ School-wide circles are held on a regular basis, quarterly or more depending on what is happening at the school. Faculty decide on a topic to be addressed. Students are then assigned to small circles, which allow everyone the opportunity to speak (if they choose to). Anywhere from 10-15 circles take place simultaneously. Ninety minutes is allotted for these school-wide circles.

members encourage students to question assumptions they may have taken for granted. Unresolved disagreements or conflicts are addressed in Restorative Justice circles that require getting both sides of the story and asking students to consider how their thoughts and actions go beyond the individual - a task that can be challenging for adolescents. In addition to this practice, the school regularly offers students opportunities to get politically involved in civil rights issues and school policy issues. Groups of students regularly speak out at school board meetings about concerns they have for their education. Teachers and staff at the school also invest significant amounts of personal time not only helping students through challenges, but also stimulating their understanding, encouraging students to question the social structures influencing the challenges they face. The integration of critical thinking in formal and informal ways throughout the school is another dimension of how the school actively practices a critical pedagogy.

In upholding the pedagogical goals of openness, acceptance, and critical thinking, Unity High creates a discourse of anti-heteronormative inclusion in which students are expected to refrain from judging others and instead to examine the systems of oppression that have worked to define difference. Students are taught to consider the power structures that constrain individual lives. Initially they learn about the concerns impacting the LGBT population, but through such an approach it sets a precedent for students to examine the complex intersection of gender and sexuality, as well as race, class, ability, and other constraining forces, for all students.

Furthermore, the school is decidedly anti-heteronormative because the way they approach each goal demands specific questioning of the norms of gender and sexuality, focusing on the oppressive constructs of heterosexism and genderism. Strangers to the school often refer to it as the “gay school,” assuming a monolithic gay enrolment, and potentially reinforcing a particular type of “acceptable” (i.e., white, middle class, monogamous) gayness. However that assumption

fails to understand how what the school is doing goes beyond the gay student, and beyond students who fall under the umbrella of LGBT. Unity High implements an inclusivity that directly challenges the oppressive forces of gender and sexuality and its intersections. As a result, non-LGBT students (the pregnant student, the “slut,” the “dumb jock,” etc.) also experience an inclusion that accounts for how they have been restrictively categorized under the norms of heteronormativity. Unity’s environment of questioning seeks to withhold judgment, and by doing so celebrates diversity.

In what follows I present two basic principles of practice the school deploys in order to reinforce the values of openness, acceptance, and critical thinking: 1) maintaining an informal educational space, and 2) attending to the needs of the whole student. Each practice reveals how students are given a freedom and respect to embody various aspects of gender and sexuality. Each practices also reflects the academic responsibility bestowed on students and the guarantee of support offered to students from the school. The students of Unity High come to understand these principles as inclusion and identify their school as a safe place to inhabit, to learn, and to be themselves.

Informal Educational Space

Academic Autonomy: The Value of Giving Students Freedom

Snapshot 1:

John, the English teacher, has an odd feature in his classroom: one third of the room is (or was formally) a theatrical stage. There are three steps to get up to it, and John has converted it into a lounge area, complete with a loveseat and several comfy chairs and beanbags. The main floor of the room looks like a typical language arts classroom, with desks clustered together. A

few computers and bookshelves line the two interior walls, while large windows in the other walls allow light to stream in. John makes a point of never turning on the overhead lights. On dreary days he turns on the lamps scattered throughout the room.

Today the classroom is busier than usual. John has warned the students that parent-teacher conferences are coming up. Everyone is in a frenzy to get some work done. They have had three assignments so far in this Art/English class: 1) create a collage that describes something about you, 2) create a book telling about everyday things in your life, and 3) create a manual on how to do something (such as bake a cake or play a particular game). Some students have asked to go down to Sara's room (the art studio) to work, and John permits them to do so, but most stay in John's room.

Zak is bubbly and in a good mood as he hops between desks, socializing with some girls near John's desk one minute and popping up on the stage the next. He eventually settles down on the floor of the stage, lying on his stomach, typing away on a school-issued laptop. Suddenly I see him leap up, run down the stairs and stop short by slamming himself into John's desk. John looks up, irritated. "Yes Zak?" He responds calmly, but his jaw appears clenched.

"Um," Zak smiles big. He hesitates a bit as he hops from one foot to the other - thighs pressed together, knees bent, doing what looks like a preschooler's potty dance in front of John. "Can we swear in our book?"

John's demeanor shifts, making it clear that his apparent tension was just for affect. He replies, "Well if it's appropriate and necessary to relay what you need to relay to the reader, I don't see why not."

“Hee-hee, good!” Zak says with a mischievous smile and turns to run back up to the stage. John smiles and shakes his head as he returns to his work. The girls sitting next to John’s desk have overheard the exchange, and begin to philosophize with him about vulgarity and how language has changed over the years.

Skylar: Why is ‘bitch’ always the go-to for insulting a woman? Where did that come from?

Sierra: Or the ‘fuck that bitch’ – think they bein’ orig’nal. Don’t they know that mean they the ones fuckin’ a dog?!

John: Well what do you think the historical relevance is?

Skylar: It’s about a bitch in heat, so women are as slutty as a dog in heat. But still...it’s so popular to say. Like it don’t even really mean that any more.

John: And how do you think that might have shifted with the start of the women’s rights movement?

I see the wheels turning in both Skylar’s and Sierra’s heads, and chuckle to myself at the exchange. I’m impressed with how the girls are willing to consider the issue so deeply, and at John’s skill at engaging them.

I decide to head up towards Zak to see if I can find out what his intensions were with profanity. I sit down next to him and ask, “So, what do we need to swear about?”

“Well, the other day when I was riding the bus these two kids wouldn’t stop cussing. Everything was ‘fuck this,’ ‘fuck that,’” he says in a mocking voice. “I wanna put it in my book.”

“Well, that sounds reasonable,” I say.

“Yeah, I just wanted to make sure. I mean...I may spice it up a bit,” he says to me with a side-glance and a smile – that smile kids give when they know they are suggesting something they could get in trouble for. I chuckle and shake my head no. I have come to know Zak as the type of person who always plays around and pushes boundaries. He likes that I have acknowledged his devious suggestion and smiles back at me before returning to typing.

On the other side of the stage, I notice Bobby writing in a notebook. Bobby has been inconsistent in his attendance this semester. Teachers have alluded to this attendance issue as a result of legal troubles because he has been drinking more than usual, and drinking more means he rarely makes it to school. When he does make it in, he rarely works. I ask him how he has been doing.

“Ah, you know. Hangin’ in there I guess.”

Bobby is 20 and has an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) to address his attention deficit and anger management issues. He technically has enough credits to make him a junior, but his absenteeism suggests he will still be a junior next year. “What are you working on?” I ask.

“I don't know. John jus’ want me ta’ write something. Anything I guess.”

“How's it going?” He gives me a blank stare as if to say ‘Don't you see this empty page in front of me?’ I have been challenged to build rapport with him. “Want some help?” I ask.

“Nah. ‘Iz alright.”

He doesn't make eye contact with me. I take the hint and leave him alone.

I head down to Skylar, who has an elaborate manual she has been working on for her assignment. I ask her how it's going.

"Great. I'm pretty much done. Wanna see it?" She slides it over to me.

As I begin to look it over, I hear John loudly call up to the kids on the stage, "Get to work!" They have been talking and giggling loudly, and I now see that many of them are no longer working, but are playing on their video game consoles (including Zak). I return my attention to Skylar's work and see that she has created a manual on "How to Keep it Real." She explains that she is sick and tired of people refusing to acknowledge emotion and trying to hide themselves.

"What's the point in being fake?" she questions. Before I am able to respond to Skylar, we are interrupted by Jaime, who exclaims,

"Ah! I'm gonna make a manual on "How to be a Pretty Boy!"

Jaime is a petite boy who is almost always smiling (although shyly). The first time I met him, I could barely catch his name because he spoke so softly. He introduced himself as Jaime and then added, "but my friends call me Aime." Although he offered this clarification about his name, I did not take it as an invitation to call him Aime, so I (as did the other adults in the school, and those students he wasn't close with) called him Jaime.

Jaime, and the friend next to him, can't stop giggling about his declaration that he will make a manual on "How to Be a Pretty Boy." He tries to talk through his laughter, slowly calming down and returning to his usual demeanor to say more seriously (and in his usual timid voice), "No, for real. I think I'll start with the eyebrows. Why can't boys acknowledge they pretty eyes?!"

He directs his question towards Skylar and I. Skylar, who wears bold and theatrical makeup and takes great care in presenting herself, agrees with him, assuring, “Amie you would be the perfect person to write about it!” Jaime is excited and he and Skylar begin to discuss the different standards of beauty for men and women.

“I mean, if guys could just tweeze they eyebrows every once ‘n while the world be a better place,” Jaime says.

“I don’t know. I’m kinda annoyed that I have to. That’s why I jus’ shaved ‘em off. It’s easier to paint ‘em on,” Skylar admits.

“Yeah, but girl...it so works for you!” Jaime assures Skylar

“Yeah but sometimes I hate that I even have to do that much,” Skylar replies.

Several minutes later, John, who has been listening to this whole exchange, chimes in with friendly but directive sarcasm, “Always with the drama. Just...write...something!”

Skylar retorts, “Oh, shut up, John! You know you love it.”

John tilts his head and glares at her for a few seconds before sternly, but again jokingly, declaring, “Back to work!” in a deep Darth Vader voice.

Both Skylar and Jaime laugh as they grab their notebooks, but continue whispering to each other, now commenting about John’s appearance. I see John roll his eyes.

Not many schools encourage unstructured classrooms (or classes), and even fewer appreciate giving students the independence to work at their own pace or address any topic they choose. The above snapshot highlights how Unity High places significant value on providing

their students academic freedom. Freedom can have a positive impact, as seen with students who get excited about their work (Zak and Jamie), and it can have a negative impact, as seen with students who disengage from their work (Bobby). However, independent of the immediate impact on students' academic achievement, granting this freedom itself shows a respect and trust of students that allows them to explore topics they may not be able to otherwise.

I offer this snapshot to paint a picture of the informal environment of the school. All teachers and staff are called by their first names. Most classrooms are not set up with traditional rows of desks facing forward and the majority have lounge areas, in addition to the lounge areas in the hallways. Students have the freedom to move about the school. If they want to work in a different room or space, they typically are allowed to do so. Teachers take great effort in encouraging students to engage with academic work, but it is not forced. This reflects the philosophy John had shared with me early on in my fieldwork – you cannot force a child to knowledge; they must come willingly. Many students become acclimated to this teaching philosophy through experience, sometimes failing their first semester (or year) and spending the rest of their high school career catching up.

The snapshot illustrates some manifestations of the school's values. Students feel open to questioning themselves and their teachers, as demonstrated in Zak's request to use profanity in his book. John empowers Zak to deduce for himself whether or not it is appropriate. Zak's request is not taken as a question in need of control. Rather, John expects Zak to think critically about the use and value of profanity. Additionally, the two girls sitting near John begin to debate the status of profanity in society, beyond Zak's specific question. The three of them are open to each other's perspectives and genuine in their questioning. I interpret these interactions as

revealing a depth of critical thinking on the part of the students, supported by John's skillful interventions.

The exchange between John and Zak may seem mundane and irrelevant, but it reflects the expectation of openness and critical thinking that touches everything the students do, particularly in terms of questioning the norms of sex and gender. This is boldly demonstrated when we consider Jamie's idea for creating a manual on "How to be a Pretty Boy." Jamie's gender expression could be described as gender-nonconforming. Jamie's petite body, quiet voice, and interest in looking nice all go against normative expectations of masculinity. Further, his insistence that boys should be able to "acknowledge their pretty eyes" indicates an active rejection of the standards of masculinity that require men not to care about how they look, more than just not happening to fit the expectation. Even if Jamie had not suggested this project, I interpret his confidence in having his friends call him Amie (a traditionally female name) as a sign of a continued rejection of masculinity, or an expression of transgender female identity. These performances suggest Jamie embodies an ambiguous (non-normative, binary rejecting) sex and gender. As Butler (1999) suggests, the demands of the heterosexual matrix place strict expectations of intelligibility upon bodies. Since Jamie's physical body relays that he is male, the expectation of masculinity and heterosexuality follow. When he rejects the standards of masculinity, both his sex (physical body) and sexuality are thrown into question. A heteronormative reading of Jamie would mark him as a body that fails to materialize as male (Butler, 1993). However, in the space of John's classroom this has not happened, at all. Rather he materializes as a male who has an important perspective to offer regarding non-normative masculinity.

Skylar allies with Jamie in questioning the standards of masculinity and accepts his desire to break the rules of gender. Her own project and interrogation of how to “keep it real” inspires Jamie’s exploration of self and the prospects of critiquing the standards of masculinity. Skylar’s openness encourages Jamie’s openness, and their exchange encourages both to critically reflect on standards of gender. Additionally, Skylar’s suggestion that Jamie would be the “perfect person” to make such a manual suggests that she has accepted his non-normative embodiment of masculinity, and values his perspective on the topic. I believe this exchange exemplifies the kind of inclusion the school seeks to attain; both students come to value and practice openness, acceptance, and critical thinking as they consider their projects for class.

While this interaction certainly highlights the way gender and sexuality present itself at Unity High, I want to focus in more specifically on the significance of Jaime’s idea as an academic project. Jamie has proposed to write a manual on “How to be a Pretty Boy,” which he plans to submit for high school credit. His teacher, John, gives no indication that this would be unacceptable or even unusual. Rather John encourages Jamie (as well as everyone in the class) to “just write something.” The fact that Jamie has the ability to openly present his perspectives on gender in an academic setting suggests an indisputable acceptance of the legitimacy of his thoughts on the part of his teacher, the school, and acceptable as a form of knowledge. This is to say that Jamie’s transgressive perspectives on gender are regarded as an acceptable way of thinking, and an acceptable form of *representing* knowledge. Jamie’s voice has value. A “how to” manual promoting non-normative gender expression is accepted as a form of assessment for the knowledge and skills he has acquired in the Art/English class, and the manual a powerful counternarrative to heteronormativity. Furthermore, Jamie’s prospects for expanding his knowledge of gender are increased because he has the freedom to explore it. The academic

setting allows him to investigate the norms of masculinity, how those norms are regulated, and how it impacts him and other individuals who do not enact traditional masculinity. The school becomes a space where Jamie can explore, examine, and communicate his critical perspectives on the subject.

My understanding of the interactions within this snapshot indicates Jamie's manual idea serves as an example of how Unity High enacts a critical pedagogy to transform the lives of students. The primary goal of critical pedagogy is "to empower the powerless and transform existing social inequalities and injustices" (McLaren, 2007, p. 186). In allowing a flexible curriculum and cultivating critical thinking, the students of Unity are given access to empowered ways of thinking. Central to the practice of critical pedagogy is continuous dialogue between teacher and students (Freire, 2011; Giroux, 1983, 2010; McLaren, 2007), including continuous engagement with the historical, cultural, and social significance of all sides of an issue. Such dialogic engagement is visible when John urges on and steers deeper the conversation about profanity with his students, as well as in Skylar and Jaime's discussion of gender. These exchanges are both informative and affirming for the students, and would be virtually impossible if not for the supportive and informal space provided by the school.

Openness and Acceptance: Allowing Gender and Sexuality Into School

Snapshot 2:

I'm down in the Art room during lunch and everyone is talking about the upcoming prom. The school received a small grant to rent out a little hall at a local restaurant. Preparations are underway for a theme and decorations. Sara, the Art teacher, is recruiting volunteers to help, but gets little response until she reminds students they get to attend for free if they help. Suddenly

everyone is interested! Otherwise, the tickets cost \$25 dollars, and some students will struggle to afford it.

Talk centers on who is running for positions in the prom court. I learn that there are four categories: King, Queen, Prince, and Princess. Anyone is allowed to run for any of the positions, regardless of class year or gender, and all students get to vote on who should win. The only rule is that contestants cannot run for more than one category. "So, no nominations?" I ask the group.

"No, you can tell who wants it. Like some people will make flyers and hang 'em round to campaign. But that's stupid. I jus' put it on Facebook. People know. –Oh! Or send out a Vine. I might do that," says Quinn who is running for Prince.

"Yeah, but that's stupid too because not everyone checks that stuff or has a phone or whatever. And it should be about here at school, not how much you can harass people online!" says Tori, who doesn't even know if she is going to go to the prom yet. Her friends coax her, "It's your senior year, Tori. You need to go."

"Well, if I'm going then I'm running for King," she says with a witty confidence and a giggle.

"Yeah, do it. Why not?" everyone agrees. They've turned serious. No one seems to think twice about Tori's proposition.

Tori laughs at the thought, but keeps the conversation going and seems to be thinking it is a good idea after all. "Well, if I can get the money together, and find a dress," she begins with a timid chuckle. "There's not a lot of dresses at the big girls store."

“Oh please! I find you one,” says Jenny. Tori is overweight, but this is the first time I have ever heard her make reference to her body size. Jenny is also overweight, but less so than Tori. Another friend adds, “It do suck for us big girls, but Jenny right. You can find somethin’.”

Tori is shifting in her seat and playing with her lunch. I sense she has become uncomfortable and very aware the group may be assessing her weight. “That’s alright. I’ll figure something out.” She turns to Sara and works to change the subject, “So Sara, what are we doing for decorations anyway?”

Not long into the conversation about decorations, we are interrupted. Three students skip into the art room, singing and giggling about their outfits. “How my boobs look Sara?” A tall boy yells. He is wearing a tight leotard and a short skirt that looks like it’s meant for playing tennis. He is wearing a bra stuffed with something and keeps handling it, adjusting its position. Two other boys, also dressed in women’s clothing, accompany him. All of them wear long flowing wigs and carry large purses over their shoulders. Only the first boy boasts a stuffed bra.

Sara smiles as she lets out a deep belly laugh and shakes her head. She has a grin on her face as she returns to her drawing. Sara does not respond verbally to the students’ entrance.

Skylar jumps up, saying, “They crooked, girl.” She then proceeds to adjust the bra into a more acceptable position. Another student yells, “And pull your skirt up. I can see your panty line.”

“Eww!” the boy screeches in horror and begins to adjust his skirt. “Sara? How I look, girl?”

“I’m not answering that,” she replies through laughter, turning to make eye contact with me and rolling her eyes. Several other students yell out, “You look great!”

“Don’t you know it!” he says as he swooshes around with a snap of the head and flip of the wrist, seemingly aiming his strut at Sara, who again lets out a laugh. The student heads out the door. His entourage follows. Sara turns to me and says through laughter, “Only at Unity!” The students return to talking about prom as if nothing had happened.

Skylar and Quinn are discussing what they will wear. Both are looking forward to the evening. It will be the first dance they have attended as a couple and they are running for court together: Skylar is running for Princess and Quinn for Prince. Jenny and Tori are amused at Skylar and Quinn’s conversation.

Jenny comments, “you guys better win.”

Quinn agrees, “I know, right? I get kicked outta my last school for being a dyke, and I come here and not only do I get to go to prom with my girlfriend, but I get to run for Prince too!”

Unity High’s informal learning environment means that students more openly present, discuss, and enact gender and sexuality. As discussed in Chapter 2, issues of students’ gender and sexuality enter schools on a regular basis, which schools most commonly try to manage through practices of avoidance or strict regulation. Prom is a common site of contention that highlights the rigid gendered and heterosexual norms supported by most schools. Conflicts arise about the acceptability of same-sex dates, appropriate formal wear, and providing a welcoming experience for all students. The above snapshot reveals the ways non-normative gender and sexuality regularly entered Unity High, and the ways in which it is taken as commonplace, a non-

issue. Queer and gender non-conforming identities and presentations are taken as a norm within the school, neither questioned nor regulated.

For several years Unity has worked hard to provide their students with a prom. On more than one occasion I heard teachers referring to their own experiences of being unable to attend prom (due to restrictions on same-sex dates) and the need to provide the students of Unity a sense of “normalcy” by giving them one. This ideal is largely supported by the local community, which has provided donations each year to make the prom happen. I had the pleasure of attending two of Unity High’s proms. The planning, discussion, anticipation, and celebration of prom at Unity is in many ways similar to that of other schools: it is a significant marker of seniors’ last year of high school, dating and romantic relationships are central, it involves excessive displays of commodities, and it provides a venue for students to display individuality and rebellion (Best, 2000). The only significant difference between other school proms and Unity’s prom is that at Unity there is an explicit understanding that a wide variety of gender expressions and sexualities would be represented and welcomed.

I view the practice of having four categories for court (King, Queen, Prince, and Princess), each open to any interested student, as a good example of how the school provides an open and accepting atmosphere for the dance. My initial assumption was that the positions were meant to celebrate two seniors (King and Queen) and two juniors (Prince and Princess), a practice I had heard about at other schools. However once the students explained that class ranking had nothing to do with it, having the four positions of honor available seemed to be more about providing opportunities for more students to be appreciated, and allowing students more choices for recognizing each other. Having the opportunity to adequately recognize students could be challenging at a school like Unity given the diverse array of genders and sexualities

represented in the school. A prom court reflecting binary gendered positions (e.g., only having the King and Queen positions and requiring they be filled by a male and female respectively) neglects to factor in the students who reject that binary. At the first Unity prom I attended a gay male won King, and a gender-fluid heterosexual (presenting as female that night) won Queen, a genderqueer gay male won Prince, and a heterosexual female won Princess. Because each student got to choose the category they wanted to run in, they were able to select the category they felt best represented who they were (or how they wanted to be seen). Students voting had the ability to elect a representative who best fulfilled their expectations of the category. Although the vote created an opportunity to regulate the court into heteronormative representations, in my observations this did not seem to happen. In the two years I attended the prom, openness and acceptance was always conveyed, with each crowning being greeted roaring approval from the crowd. I believe this signifies how the school made use of prom court in order to elicit an open (and sometimes critical) reflection around gender and sexuality expectations. My perception of this acceptance was that students had no inclinations to stay within any norms of gender or sexuality – whether heteronormative or homonormative.

The snapshot reveals that students may begin to think about the possibilities of running for court in jest, as when Tori says she would only go if she ran for King. Although her contemplation begins as a joke, perhaps as a call for attention, her peers quickly validate that she absolutely could and *should* run for King. They do not question her as to why she would want to, rather they question, “why not?” Tori’s response, expressing concern about her body size and ability to find a dress, reflects traditional feminine gender expectations (concern for figure and pleasing appearance), while also contradicting them with her desire to be represented at her prom as *King*. The vision implied is that of a beautiful woman, “dressed to the nines,” boasting a royal

crown and sash, standing next to a Queen. However, Tori's suggestion of being King could also be read as a way to reconcile the effect of her body image – if as a bigger woman she cannot be womanly “enough” then why not be “manly,” and run for King? Such a reading emphasizes the regulatory impact of gender expectations. Whether this was the case, I do not know. Regardless, I believe the result is the same: her transgressive desire is not questioned by anyone at the school, but encouraged. Tori's friends sympathize with her concern about a dress (acknowledging the harsh demands of appearance society imposes on women), guarantee they will be able to make her beautiful for the event, and encourage her to run for King. The possibility of a “big” girl being beautiful materializes, as does the notion a girl could be King.

The openness, acceptance, and support demonstrated by Tori's friends is echoed when the rowdy drag queens interrupt the classroom. The boys enter the room to show off their outfits, as well as to get praise for their performance. The observing students immediately begin giving advice: “[your bra] crooked,” “pull up your skirt,” “you look great!” However the attention the boy most avidly wants is from his teacher, Sara. Twice he asks her to comment on how he looks. While Sara offers positive acknowledgement (smiling, laughing, talking with me about his presence), she refuses to directly advise him, saying, “I'm not answering that.” Although Sara's response could be interpreted as a rejection of the drag queen, she stands by and does nothing as the students assist him, and expresses appreciation of the interaction, saying, “only at Unity.” Her laughter, amusement, and solicitation of my acknowledgment suggests she sees the incident more as a “kids will be kids” type of occurrence rather than a gender transgression (or unacceptable classroom disruption). The boy, on the other hand, disapproves of Sara's silence. His efforts to disrupt the class or “shock” Sara do not work. He therefore takes his compliments

from the students and dramatically leaves with a gesture to suggest he didn't need Sara's acknowledgment or approval anyway.

Each of these examples, Tori contemplating a run for King and drag queens interrupting class, illustrate the ways in which Unity High students are able to freely enact and perform a range of conforming and nonconforming gender identities, and in doing so influence discursive representations of gender and sexuality. The students here embody very different understandings of gender. Each enact different aspects of gender norms as they see necessary for their particular need. Tori enacts a self-surveillance as she negotiates her ability to embody an appropriate hetero-femininity. Her concern with finding a dress is skewed by her desire to be king, and be king *within* her femaleness (while wearing a dress and looking pretty). Tori's performance reveals competing demands of self-surveillance, gender experimentation, and peer group attention, all of which work to challenge the norms of hetero-femininity. The discussion with her classmates largely assumes that Tori is seen as a gendered being, although this gender may be queered, and ultimately not read within a binary framework. The acceptance Tori receives from her peer group allows her to materialize, to be visible, as a legitimate (and potentially desirable and attractive) person.

This vignette demonstrates how the school's ability to provide a space of openness and acceptance has the potential to shift prevailing discourses of gender and sexuality, even if only within the school walls. Shifting these dominant discourses is a complex process. As Youdell (2006) notes, "discourse and its effects exceed the intent or free will of an agent, but the performatively constituted subject can still deploy discursive performatives that have the potential to be constitutive" (p. 49). Students' behavior can resignify the norms of gender and sexuality, and in doing so reconstitute (or *differentially* constitute) themselves. Tori's

resignification may only be provisionally effective, but its acceptance suggests there is the possibility for further resignification. Furthermore, her peers' acceptance of her transgression indicates a community, a relation to others, that allows for alternative readings of gender. The role of the peer community in this interaction highlights Butler's (2004b) understanding of the double effect of norms – not only are they regulatory, but they are also relational, marking our reliance on others in order to materialize. In my observations at Unity High, the school community was routinely supportive of gender-transgressive performances, allowing students who express non-normative embodiments to be fully recognized within their community.

Similarly, I interpret the performance of the drag queen as a transgressive act working to resignify the norms of gender within the school. The student's performance is hard to interpret given its brevity and my lack of relationship with him. However, Sara later informed me that this was a "typical" practice for him (and his friends), and again reinforced the uniqueness it suggested of their school. In this example, the Art room became a space for a dramatic performance as well as a gendered performance. By doing drag, the student presents himself as transgressing gender, and doing what Butler (1999) and many queer theorists consider a performance of a performance. Drag can be seen as a mockery of the performance that *all* gender requires. However, as David Valentine (2007) highlights in *Imagining Transgender*, drag has a very complicated relationship to the transgender community and is often conflated into a representation of transgenderism. In other words, to assume that anyone doing drag is transgender negates the complex relationship drag has with both gender and sexuality. Valentine's work reveals there is a significant range of motives for doing drag. Doing drag in school is relevant considering that "practices such as 'drag' do not stand simply as practices but are imbued with different meanings in different context" (Valentine, 2007, p. 104). Therefore, a

student doing drag in a school that accepts the drag performance holds significance both for the student and for the school and is different from what it would signify in the absence of the widespread approval from teachers and peers.

There is little research analyzing the drag practices of adolescents, and none can be found about drag in high school. However, my practical experience (working in different LGBT youth resource centers and Unity High) suggests that it happens on a regular basis, whether formally or informally. In Mary Gray's (2009) work on rural LGBT youth, she finds that "performing drag...was a rite of passage for those entering the local gay scene" (p. 97). For the rural youth in her study, a given youth's drag performance is usually short-lived and confined to the aisles of a local superstore. Other scholars highlight the significance drag holds for young adults as they come to better understand their identities (Markson, 2008; Regales, 2008). Were the Unity High drag queens trying to express gender? Sexuality? Or perhaps just looking to "cause a scene?" Nonetheless I believe it is relevant that the school willingly provides space for the performance to take place. Students are supportive and encouraging, again contributing to a relational aspect of gender norms that suggest drag is appropriate – boys can and do wear women's clothing. This drag performance has enabled a space to open up for resignifying the norms of gender. Therefore, I find the school's open and accepting environment supportive of the resignification made possible through the relational functions of norms (Butler, 2004b). The acceptability of non-normative student performances creates possibilities for the resignification of gender and sexuality and new possibilities for being gendered in school.

Attending to the Whole Student

Snapshot 3:

Candi and I are wandering around the school, looking for supplies. She's hoping to find some fabric to wrap around a cardboard sculpture she has made. "Paint won't do; it need to feel nice!" We're not having any luck, and so head to the principal Amy's office to see if she has any ideas.

"Here's the keys to goodwill, you can look in there. Just be sure to lock it up after," Amy says as she holds out a set of keys. Candi grabs the keys and heads out the door.

"Goodwill?" I ask as we walk towards the gymnasium.

"Yeah, that's where we keep all the donations. Some of the clothes all raggedy, but that mean it don't matter if I cut 'em up."

We come around a corner in the gym to a door I had always assumed led to a maintenance closet. Candi unlocks it and turns on the light. It is an eight by ten foot space filled with piles of clothes, shoes, toiletries, bedding, books, and games. I had no idea "goodwill" existed.

"So people just donate this stuff to you guys?" I ask.

"Yeah, you know, for like the kids who need som'in."

"Can anyone come get stuff?"

"Pretty much. Like I remember when I start wearin' women's clothes, Amy told me come get some. I found a few things, but you know," she looks at me with a scrunched up nose, "most it ratchet! And you know... I'm not name names or nothin', but like some these kids," she leans in and whispers, "they smell, girl! Amy like take 'em aside and be like, 'Here boy," she grabs a

pack of toiletries sitting next to her and holds them up. “Put on some deodorant. Brush your teeth. Tss. Come on...really?!” she says with a wide-eyed exclamation, as if in disgust.

I laugh at Candi’s dramatics as she explains the uses of the goodwill. We start sifting through piles of clothes. It does not take long before she finds an ugly old sweater that will work for her project. “Bingo! Okay girl, lez’ go!”

Students enter our public high schools with various forms of trauma and/or emotional baggage. Some have abusive families, or families torn apart due to drugs and alcohol, crime, or financial hardships. Some do not have a place to live, enough food to eat, or water for showering. Still others struggle with depression, anxiety, abusive relationships, eating disorders, drugs and alcohol addictions; sadly, the list of struggles could go on and on. Most teachers and administrators quickly learn that if they cannot find a way to address these outside troubles, students will not have the capacity to learn. However, few schools take direct steps to make available, in the school, resources that can offer immediate solace to a struggling student. The goodwill at Unity High did just that. Furthermore, the perceptive faculty and staff try to ensure students have both academic and personal support. Unity urges staff and faculty to see each student as a whole person, with a range of personal, academic, and other needs that the school should strive to meet.

Supporting the Emotional and Physical Needs of Students

Decades of research have shown that students’ needs go beyond the academic. Students who come from low-income families tend to face difficulties due to hunger and poor nutrition, lack of a safe environment, homelessness and/or frequent mobility, and challenges arising from

single-parent households (Armstrong, 2010; McHugh, Horner, Colditz, & Wallace, 2013; Murphy & Tobin, 2011; Nicoll, 2014). Additionally, many children face adverse childhood experiences (ACE's) such as abuse, neglect, deaths of family members, and witnessing violence, which have significant impacts on their cognitive and behavioral functioning and require special attention in order to adequately serve their educational needs (Nicoll, 2014). Schools most commonly address these needs through special education programs (McHugh, et al., 2013; Nicoll, 2014), however such programs do not address the needs of students' families, nor do they account for students who may be struggling with such challenges but who don't have a diagnosis that would warrant an IEP.

Enhancing school "connectedness" is a common approach to tackling the physical and emotional needs of students. Connectedness describes the relationship an individual student has with teachers and the school (McHugh, et al., 2013; Nicoll, 2014; San Martin & Calabrese, 2011; Wegmann & Bowen, 2010), which of course impacts the level of comfort a student feels coming to school, being in school, talking with teachers, and seeking support from the school. Research indicates that students who are more connected to their schools have higher academic achievement (McHugh, et al., 2013; Nicoll, 2014; San Martin & Calabrese, 2011; Wegmann & Bowen, 2010), but also that gender and sexual minority students struggle with making these connections (Bortolin, 2010; GLSEN, 2014; Payne, 2007). Building healthy connections with teachers can be challenging. Many students acknowledge the need for boundaries between students and teachers (McHugh, et al., 2013), however some students also say that a teacher's intervention is what keeps them coming to school (San Martin & Calabrese, 2011). The student-teacher relationship is an important but delicate one, but also laden with power differences.

Teachers need to make judgments about how well they know a student and when it might be an appropriate time to intervene.

Unity High has worked hard to strengthen the school's connections with both students and families. Involving families in school activities and school outreach has been shown to be effective in increasing school attendance, participation, and overall connections (Wegmann & Bowen, 2010). Unity employs a community outreach worker, whose position is specifically designed to enhance family relationships with the school. Staff members also work to improve connections with youth by keeping each other informed of developments in students' lives. Many students have a favorite teacher who they trust in times of need, and regular communication among staff was essential in enabling all staff to accommodate students' needs. Below are two examples of how these connections impacted the students and how they contributed to the overall feeling of inclusion in the school.

How family struggles enter the classroom.

Snapshot 4:

When I arrive in the English room this morning, I see two older men working with two different students. They don't look familiar, so I inquire with John, "Who are our guests?"

"Oh, it's Dad's Day."

I learn that each year Unity holds a day for dads to attend school with their children. The hope is it will get fathers invested in their children's education. I am dismayed that there are only two dads in a classroom of 20 students. Neither of the students whose fathers attend are my participants, so I grab my notebook and sit down with a group of kids I regularly work with. I cautiously ask, "So, no dads today?"

“Ha!” Alejandro says. “You serious?”

“Well, I don’t know.”

“No Kat, we try keep ‘em as far away as possible,” Riley quips.

“Oh, come one. Can it be that bad?”

Riley starts to tell me that her dad is the most homophobic person I would ever meet. “He run home get his shotgun he ever saw what goes on in this school.”

“So how do you get to go here?” I ask.

“My momma jus’ never tell him,” she says.

“So he doesn’t know that you’re...” I stop myself. Riley has never officially “outed” herself to me and I’m not sure how she identifies. I luck out because she begins to finish my sentence.

“Gender fluid? No!” She starts to laugh, “He think me datin’ a guy is the best thing that ever happened. Fooled him,” she jokes. The others laugh.

Jenny breaks in, “Kat, you know it ‘aint like that in the Black community. No Black father wan’s to see his son gay because that’s- that signifies to Black community, a sissy!”

“Oh really? How’s that work out?”

“It don’t!” Jaime snaps. “Why you think none of ‘em here right now?” I can see Jaime is upset. We have never discussed his family before, and I begin to realize there is a reason it has never entered our conversations. Before I can say anything, Jenny jumps back in,

“Please, Kat! You probably one those White girls grown up in the ‘burbs with both your momma and daddy watchin’ every step you take. We ‘aint like that round here.”

“OK, well wait a minute,” I venture. “Yes both my parents were around. And yes I grew up ‘in the burbs’ but do you really think homophobia is a class thing? Or a race thing?”

“I jus’ sayin’ ...most us don’t even see our daddies. Either they in jail, living with anotha’ momma, or working 24/7. They don’t care what we doin’ in school.” She says.

“OK, but how does that relate to homophobia?”

“Oh, they jus’ prejudice,” she quickly replies. Everyone busts out laughing. Jenny laughs too. It seems she intended to be funny in pointing out the “obvious.”

“It complicated, Ms. Kat. They like- it like minority keepin’ minority down or somethin’,” Alejandro adds.

John interrupts us before I am able to respond. He has been walking around checking in with everyone and finally made it to our table. “So, how we doing over here?”

“We jus’ givin’ Ms. Kat a lesson in why our daddies ain’t here,” says Alejandro.

“Oh really? Please, enlighten me,” John replies.

“John! You really want my dad to come here?” Riley asks.

“Oh yeah, I guess I do remember hearing about some incidents,” he says with a frown.

Again, Jenny interjects, “John, don’t you think there more homophobia in the Black community?”

John grins as he grabs a chair and shoves his way in-between Jaime and Jenny. I can tell he's happy to dive into this controversy. John works to engage the students in a dialogue about oppression and civil rights, pushing the students to address race, ethnicity, class, gender, and sexuality. "Whoa, whoa, whoa! Why would this be just a Black thing?" he says, reminding the students not everyone in the room is Black and they too had issues with their fathers. Then, "So why might minorities want to keep other minorities down?" And, "Wait, so gay White people don't have problems anymore... 'It's different'?! They still 'got more privilege' ... So what's that mean? What else is going on?" Voices rise, then ebb back down. John pushes; the students push back. Even with signs of discomfort (hesitating to speak their mind, wiggling in chairs), no one leaves the conversation. The students are interested; they want to work through the complex issue.

"Do you think these problems are unique to you just because you are at this school?" John challenges. After about fifteen minutes of discussion, the students continued to circle back around to their initial questions about inactive participation from fathers, unwavering. John stood up, "Alright. All of you," he says, pointing to the four students at the table, "One page on the difficulties LGBT kids face with their families and how you think culture impacts it." A resounding groan rises over the table. "To be continued!" he says with a smile and walks away.

Alejandro turns to me, "Look what you did!"

"What?" I try to look innocent.

"Yeah, thanks, Kat!" Jenny growls. They are only half joking. I say I'm sorry and promise to help with their papers.

All teachers have opportunities to embrace the life experiences of their students as learning opportunities, or ignore them and stick to the lesson plan. Faculty and staff at Unity made a point of embracing the experiences of their students. There is no stopping the impact family struggles have in the classroom, so those struggles often became teachable moments; teachers look for opportunities to make connections between what they have already planned for the day and what students bring into the room. The diversity of the student body means that the family issues presented are diverse as well. As a result some students find themselves contemplating the hierarchical relationships of social status in ways they have never previously considered, a task Unity High is more than willing to guide them in.

The Dad's Day event was an effort on the part of the school to get parents more involved, especially dads. A significant number of students have involved and supportive parents, but the majority of the most involved parents are mothers. The school's community outreach worker is always looking for different ways to get dads to the school, and to work at increasing their awareness of the hardships some LGBT students face. However, the Dad's Day I captured in this snapshot seems to have been a failure in this particular classroom. Students are skeptical from the beginning – their dads aren't around, and even if they are, they don't care. The students immediately identify the problem as homophobia, which soon translates into an issue of race and class as they contemplate which students are most likely to have homophobic family members, and why. This development, and the ensuing discussion, may have evolved because the group was diverse: Alejandro is gay and Hispanic, Jaime is gay and Black, Riley is gender-fluid, bisexual, and mixed Black and White, and Jenny is heterosexual and Black. The fact that Riley initially suggests homophobia as the reason dads are not involved in the school may be due to the fact she has had interactions with her father, many of them abusive, that made it clear to her that

gender-fluidity, and her previous relationships with girls, are not acceptable to him. The school is aware of these incidences and regularly works to ensure Riley has a safe place to stay (hence John's reaction after Riley jogs his memory). For Riley, the issues have nothing to do with her race or the race of her father, who is White. She sees her father as homophobic and knows she needs to keep him as far away as possible from the school. I interpreted her reaction to suggest she regards homophobia (sexuality) as taking precedence within the hierarchy of power and oppression.

Conversely, Jenny sees the issue as being more about race than sexuality. She interprets Riley's initial statement as being about race, referencing her knowledge that in the Black community it is not okay to be gay. This interpretation is reinforced by Jaime, whose defensive response to my question of "How's that work out?" was a stern, "It don't!" Jenny then further reinforces perspective that it is about culture by suggesting that both my race and class (as White and middle class) wouldn't allow me to understand the severity of this regulation within the Black community, implying that those privileged through race and class don't have to deal with homophobia or with absent/indifferent fathers. Although Jenny is heterosexual and not directly impacted by the rejection that gay kids in her community face, this cultural rule is so pervasive that she immediately "knows" it is what has prevented fathers from being more involved with the school. Rather than considering the complex relationship of race and sexuality, Jenny feels confident in asserting race as the primary structure influencing this phenomenon.

As if on cue (and perhaps he was listening to our conversation), John interrupts, jumping at the chance to have the students further interrogate the issue. His prompts work to challenge the group's either/or thinking and consider the ways in which sexuality, gender, race, and class collide to create very specific experiences for different individuals. By doing this John helps the

students see the hierarchal relationships between positions of privilege and oppression, and the complexity involved given individual intersectional interpretations. The group is willing to concede his suggestion that not all White people *always* have privilege, but dispute “they still got more privilege,” to which John pushes, “So what’s that mean?” John has to find a way to get them past a micro-level analysis and see how the issue pointed to something bigger. His solution to their narrow focus is to ask the students to reflect further by writing one page on their thoughts. I saw this as a tactic by John to find a way to come back to this discussion at a later time; perhaps a stalling tactic so he could think of a new approach, but even so, it reaffirmed the validity of the ongoing dialogue. Although the students remained undecided, and were frustrated with his assignment, they stayed engaged.

I find this interaction characterizes the practices and values of critical pedagogy. The students’ lives and experiences are valued and there is an effort to connect micro and macro perspectives on inequality. The dialogue between teacher and students reveals trust, which is necessary when discussing sensitive topics such as one’s disadvantages. Given the school’s struggles with reaching fathers, it is important that John takes the time to help the students consider the hardships their fathers face and the forces impacting their ability to engage with their children’s education. John works to encourage the students to think more critically about the structural forces working to constrain their fathers, the cultural aspects of those structures, and the complex ways they may collide and interact with each other. For example, even though Jenny’s assertion that race is the main factor preventing fathers’ engagement with their LGBT school could be seen as historically accurate (Cohen, 1996; Neal, 2006), John urges her to deconstruct the history and significance of that in-group regulation.

John succeeds in getting the kids thinking. His interest in their perspectives serves to keep a dialogue going. His efforts to continue the conversation, by having them write a reflection, creates an opportunity for the students to continue to think about it, as well as to feel comfortable returning to their teacher for further dialogue (while incidentally practicing academic skills). In this way, John has reinforced the expectation of critical thinking. Freire (2011) reminds us that “only dialogue which requires critical thinking, is also capable of generating critical thinking” (p. 92). By attending to the whole student and incorporating their experiences and interpretations into the classroom, John sets a standard that their knowledge counts, and in doing so inspires their continued knowledge seeking.

How personal struggles enter the classroom.

Snapshot 5:

Many high school Art rooms have a laidback feel to them. Desks and tables are not always lined up, different corners have different uses, and students often compete for the perfect space to sit and draw. The Art room at Unity shares these features, with a few added components making it even comfier: there is a small kitchen area with a mini fridge, microwave, and electric teapot; and it has a few alcoves (cornered off by bookshelves and other cabinets) to serve as relatively private temporary studios for students. Most important is Sara's old couch, draped in a light pink throw from the late 70s to hide the rips and stains. Two armchairs flanking the couch bracket a dark brown and dingy area rug. Although all the furniture is old and worn, the room truly has a “living room” feel. In the morning when students file in, they rush to lay claim to a seat on the couch. Exceptions to couch claiming occur when Sara can tell a student is troubled and feeling down. In those cases she will find a roundabout way to get the troubled student a spot on the couch. The couch is figuratively and literally a restful place.

This morning, Jena walks in and I'm surprised by her look. Her hair is tangled and held back with a bandana. She has dark circles under her eyes, and perhaps most alarming, since she is known as a fashionista by her friends, she arrives in sweatpants and a zip-up hoody. All indications are that something is wrong. Jena plops down on the couch, squeezing her way in between two other students, pulls her hood over her head.

Meanwhile, Destiny, who is six months pregnant, is quietly complaining to Sara that her back hurts.

"How much more do you have to do with your charcoal [drawing]?" Sara asks. Destiny has been working on a charcoal still life for a few weeks now.

"I'm almost done."

"Go lay down. You can work on it tomorrow," Sara says, and turns to holler at the first two students who had claimed the couch this morning. "Hey guys, come here. I forgot to show you this." Sara fumbles on her desk for something interesting to show them while Destiny proceeds to put her supplies away and head to the couch. She lays down adjacent to Jena. Neither of them say a word to each other.

Jeremy, who has been doing little more than play video games all class (and most classes) complains to Sara, "Why she get'ta sleep during' class?!"

"Because she gets her work done. Show me some real work and you can do whatever you want, too!"

"Give her a break," says the boy sitting next to Jeremy. "My god, she's six months pregnant!" Jeremy rolls his eyes and returns to his video game.

When class ends, Sara walks over to the couch and nudges both of the girls, "Class is over." Destiny stretches and gets up to head to her next class. Jena doesn't move. Sara nudges her again. "What's going on?"

"Nothing, I had to work late last night," Jena says.

"Well, you can't sleep on my couch all day."

"Whatever, Sara. You don't know the half of it."

"Well then, start talking."

Sara settles in on the couch next to Jena, as Jena explains that her mom has kicked her out because Jena's boyfriend was spending the night too often. Sara learns that the only reason he was spending the night was because he had been kicked out of his house. Now, neither of them has anywhere to live. Last night, Jena had gone to work and then slept in her car with her boyfriend until school started.

Now that Sara has the basic story, she works at engaging Jena. "Well, what are we going to do about it?" By now, the next class has filed in, and students have started to work on their self-portraits. I sit with some other students, but continue to keep my ear toward Sara and Jena's conversation. I am impressed with how Sara juggles the needs of the class while also staying focused on Jena's troubles. In between assisting, managing, and directing other students, Sara continues to gather more information about Jena's situation: How has your relationship been with your boyfriend? Don't you two fight a lot? Did your mom kick both of you out, or just him? Do you think your mom has been concerned about your safety? How is your relationship with him different from the ones your mom has been in – the ones you always complain about? Do you think love makes it okay to hit someone? Jena shifts awkwardly on the couch, sometimes

hiding under her hood or refusing to talk for several minutes – but she does engage. She listens to Sara, as well as to some of the other students who join the conversation, and she opens up. Eventually, Jena is ready to take action.

By lunch, Sara, Jena, and the school social worker have coordinated next steps. Jena has spent some time on the phone with a domestic abuse specialist, as well as with her mother. It is agreed that Jena will return home that evening, but Jena refuses to let her boyfriend stay out in the cold. The social worker helps Jena get in touch with a shelter and arranges for her boyfriend to have an intake there. Once all of this is settled, Jena returns to the art room and remains there – on the couch, sleeping on and off – for the rest of the day.

At Unity High, there is always time to address the personal troubles of students. Even when a student is skilled in pushing adults away, the faculty and staff at Unity seem to find a way in. Some students see the attention as intrusive, while others find it a relief. I interpret Jena's story as an example of Unity students appreciating the emotional support and practical assistance provided at their school.

The couch in Sara's room comes to symbolize safety for students, a sentiment Sara has worked to encourage through her monitoring and selective privileging. For some students the couch is a reward for doing their work; they earn the "right" to be lazy. For others, it's offered as a needed respite. The students share the space without complaint, respecting the necessity of the couch as a safe haven. In this snapshot both Jena and Destiny have the "right" to occupy the couch, although for different reasons; neither makes any motion to disturb or dislodge the other.

Just as we saw family struggles reflected in Snapshot 4 with a pedagogical intervention, here we also see the skilled work of a teacher who knows they need to intervene on a personal and practical level. In Destiny's case, the intervention is simply about a physical need; her body needs a break and Sara understands this. However, the meaning of the interaction goes beyond "just a break." As a pregnant sixteen-year-old, Destiny faces stigmatization both generally and in the school (addressed at length in Chapter 5). Her embodiment invites specific judgments of sexuality and character (Luttrell, 2003; 2011) within a heteronormative framework. However, any potential judgments of Destiny are forestalled by Sara's acknowledgment that she is a stellar student who *deserves* to rest on the couch. Sara makes a point of presenting Destiny's move to the couch as a reward. Jeremy's disregard for Destiny's efforts prompts another student – ignoring Sara's reference to Destiny "earning" the couch – to proffer a different explanation, that Destiny's physical state warrants her right to rest. Whether this comment conveys empathy or acceptance, it reinforces the respect held for the couch as a special place that students may need for a variety of reasons. Even if they don't get the couch today, someone else in need does, and perhaps tomorrow they will be the person in need.

Sara's intervention with Jena is slightly different. Sara knows that Jena's need is for more than physical respite. Her intervention becomes an engagement to help Jena think critically about her situation. Sara knows Jena doesn't want to be told what to do, and that telling her what to do would not help her solve similar problems that might come up in the future. Instead, Sara sifts through the details of the situation, hoping Jena will realize some of the contradictions in her story and some of the valid concerns her mother and others have. Sara is already aware of some of Jena's past history – her fights with her mom, the abusive relationships her mom has been in, and the questionable relationship between Jena and her current boyfriend. The trust they have

built means that Sara is able to use this knowledge to push Jena to think more critically about her situation. Although it takes nearly the whole morning, Jena is able to acknowledge the need to confront her mother and her boyfriend and takes steps to resolve the immediate problem. Her “reward” for doing so was being able to remain on the couch, sleeping, for the rest of the day. Allowing Jena to remain on the couch and in the comfort of the classroom also suggest the “work” of managing her housing was as important as any school work she could try to wade through that day.

I view this snapshot as a good representation of the extent to which teachers acknowledge and support the wellbeing of their students as whole people. Each of the students described in the snapshot face complex personal problems. Sara does not have the power to solve them in a long term way, but she also does not ignore them. Sara honors her students by acknowledging their struggles, giving them a break, and offering resources when she can. In those moments they are not “students,” but rather youth with complex lives, needs, and priorities. Attending to the whole person means that Sara continues to build on the safe relationships she has with her students, contributing to school connectedness. Additionally, Sara’s approach of urging the student to problem-solve on their own, to think past their immediate concerns, and to see the bigger picture remained aligned with critical pedagogy.

Conclusion

The vignettes presented and analyzed in this chapter demonstrate some of the practices Unity High uses to support the goals of openness, acceptance, and critical thinking. In particular, the use of informal academic space and focus on students as whole people contributes to the safe and inclusive atmosphere.

Critical pedagogy is evident throughout Unity High's practices in its emphasis on critical thinking, continuous dialogue, confronting hegemony, and seeking justice (Freire, 2011; Giroux, 1983, 2010; McLaren, 2007). Perhaps the most powerful mechanism for both critical pedagogy and inclusion at the school is how the informal setting accommodates a flexible curriculum. This flexibility is one mark of the school's value of "openness," a value which is also expressed through the ongoing celebration of a students' freedom to express themselves as desired, and to explore topics as desired. Because the school finds value in openness, students come to understand they have important perspectives to offer within the classroom.

By teaching the students of Unity through a critical pedagogy, the school positions students as their own knowledge brokers, particularly with regard to discourses of gender and sexuality. I argue these snapshots indicate some of the ways in which students come to question gender and sexuality norms, in formidable ways that can bring about new ways of being in this world. Students allow each other to materialize in non-heteronormative ways, shifting the norms and expectations that prevail within the school community. When Butler (2004a) emphasizes the double function of norms (as both regulatory and relational), it highlights their vulnerability – they are always shifting and changing as individuals reiterate norms differently. The vulnerability of norms reveals how the possibility of a shift in both regulated norms and relational norms occurs. This actively happens at Unity as students accept each other's transgressions. Their performative acts work to bring about a new norm. When their performance is accepted and encouraged by others, they succeed in reiterating a norm differently. However, their performance is still "immanent to power, [as opposed to in an] external opposition to power" (Butler, 1993, p. 15). Power – dominant discourses allowing those performances to be interpreted – remains in effect. Therefore the discursive effects of transgressive performances of

gender and sexuality cannot be fully known. At the very least, students' transgressive performances become incorporated into the school's local norms.

The relational work of norms provides Unity students a rare connection with each other. Students find themselves surrounded by others who also reject and/or violate the heteronormative expectations of the outside world. This commonality can be very comforting. It creates a familial relationship within the school. Within this family, students come to see different possibilities for how to "be" in the world. These relations become central to their understandings of self. Yet as Butler (2004a, 2004b) suggests, such dependence creates a precarious relationship – *without you, I cannot be me* – dependence on the other ultimately reinforces hegemony as individuals continue to be sorted and categorized (Foucault, 1995). This raises the question of how a safe and inclusive environment such as Unity High still falls prey to the discursive powers of regulation and control. In the next chapter I consider the omnipresence of heteronormative gender and sexuality within Unity High. I review how the inclusive spaces of the school, primarily created through familial relations, reinforce and reinscribe normative expectations of gender and sexuality.

CHAPTER 5

“They’re Like My Family”:

Familial Relationships Sustaining Heteronormativity in an Inclusive School

Familial relationships offers individuals various forms of necessary support and socialization, and many of us find “family” with people other than those of blood relation. In this chapter I highlight the familial relationships nurtured by Unity High’s atmosphere, from two perspectives. First, I discuss the importance of maintaining familial connections, regardless of whether or not those connections are biological and/or legally recognized. I do this by reviewing experiences in which adults in Unity are positioned as parental figures and experiences in which students are positioned as siblings. I work to situate these relationships within the broader context of a heteronormative society in order to emphasize the enduring impact of heteronormativity within the school. In the second part of the chapter, I show how prevailing heteronormative discourses contribute to both positive and negative aspects of maintaining familial relationships in the school. I accomplish this by highlighting the complicated way the familial closeness of the school creates vulnerability and regulates student embodiment.

School as Family

Snapshot 6:

It’s the last day of school before the winter break. As soon as the announcement comes over the loud speaker that class is over, everyone rushes out of the room and into the gymnasium. I follow the crowd. Upon entering the gym, I find myself surrounded by voices and laughter coming from what seems like every student in the school. Lunch tables are set up around the perimeter of the room, each with a paper tent in the middle identifying a class year.

The students ignore them. I hear a teacher's voice over a megaphone, saying, "Please sit at a table matching your grade. This will help us find you." Other teachers, trying to manage the crowd, reiterate the request and gradually students begin to make their way to tables.

The room continues to be loud and chaotic. Students are fooling around, chasing each other playfully, and screaming in laughter every now and then. Again, from the megaphone, "The sooner you get to a table, the sooner you will get your gift." Each teacher is now standing at his or her designated table. Each holds a large box or bag full of gift-wrapped presents. Some have begun to hand them out.

I lean against the wall behind Sara's table and watch in amazement. How do they manage to get a gift for every student? Do they really take their time to shop and wrap all these gifts? Jena and Tori are nearby. I catch their attention, "Is it always this crazy?"

"Yeah, pretty much," Jena grins. "I remember my first year...I thought it was insane that we all got gifts from our teachers. But now it kinda seems like a cool tradition."

"Yeah except they're crappy gifts," Tori adds. Jena gives her a friendly whap on the forearm. "What? It true," Tori whines.

"It's the thought that counts," Jena insists. "Besides, some kids really need this stuff." Jena is a senior and seems to get sentimental, "I'm gonna miss it," she says quietly. I sense loss in her voice.

Some students have started unwrapping their gifts. I see that one girl receives bangle bracelets; another gets lipstick and eye shadow. I see a boy holding a sweatshirt up for size.

"It's alright," he says, clearly unimpressed. Sara walks over to Jena and Tori, and hands them their gifts. "Thanks," they say in unison as Sara walks away.

“Whatchya get? Whatchya get?” I ask, overly excited, trying to get a laugh out of them. They both roll their eyes at my dorkiness, and start unwrapping their gifts.

As she tears the paper away, Tori says, “I know what I got. I been beggin’ Sara for a few weeks.” She holds it up; it’s a large pack of gel pens. “Cool,” she says.

Jena shows hers, “A journal and a gift card to Starbucks.” She shrugs her shoulders with indifference and says, “That’s nice.”

“That is nice,” I say.

“I know,” Jena replies indifferently. She stares off at the group. She looks sad.

“You okay?” I ask.

“Yeah... Just can’t believe this is the last time I’ll get to do this.”

Tori pats her on the back. “We’re still family. Don’t worry.”

An inclusive school that takes the time to know and honor everyone creates a unique opportunity for deeply meaningful relationships to develop. On a regular basis I heard the adults and youth inside Unity High refer to each other as family. Sometimes it was meant as a joke: “Oh my God! Stop acting like my mother.” Other times it was overtly positive: “She’s like a sister. I would never let anyone hurt her.” The school becomes a concrete and dependable form of family for many of the students at Unity. As with all family relationships, there can be interactions that affirm nurturing connections and there can be interactions that negate the usefulness of connecting with others. These experiences of connection highlight our social

dependence on each other and can lead to vulnerability. As Butler (2004a, 2004b, 2010) identifies, our inherent social dependence leads to a “precarious life.”

As noted in Chapter 2, families of choice can be incredibly important in the lives of gender and sexual minority youth. The family-like relationships youth develop can offer acceptance they may not otherwise feel in their life. For some youth, families of choice are their only meaningfully and supportive relationships. The relationships at Unity form families of choice, especially for students in their junior and senior years who have been with each other for several years. For instance, Weston (1991) describes how families of choice show “commitment to ‘working through’ conflicts” (p. 113), which is demonstrated at Unity through the practice of restorative justice circles. Likewise, families of choice are comprised of “people you can count on emotionally and materially” (p. 113). At Unity High, students comfort and celebrate with each other at dances, picnics, and field trips. Additionally, students support each other materially by sharing food, bus tickets, rides, and money (especially when needed to participate in a dance or other social gathering). Lastly, Weston (1991) highlights the significance of having a shared past, which provides the comforts of “common experiences [that lead] to common understandings” (p. 114). For the junior and senior students at Unity, common experience is exactly what they came to depend on from each other. For example, if a substitute teacher does something insensitive (such as calling a student by the wrong pronoun), students can simply give each other a look and seem to know exactly what the others are thinking. Their shared history at the school leads to a common interpretation of the substitute’s behavior, allowing the students to weather or respond to the difficulty together rather than in isolation, just as members of a family may commiserate about shared challenges.

Research indicates that families of choice serve as a method of survival and self-actualization for many gender and sexual minority people (Bregman et al., 2013; Weeks et al., 2001). These support systems are crucial for healthy identity development. Gender and sexual minority youth, even those with supportive families of origin, often lack role models to provide non-heteronormative cultural socialization (Almeida et al., 2009; Bregman et al., 2013, DeHaan et al., 2013; Driver, 2008). I suggest the “family” represented within Unity High serves to fill this gap by providing affirmative representations of gender and sexual minorities that students can reference as they explore their senses of self. Identity formation is an ongoing process that requires familial (whether original and/or chosen) acceptance and support in order for teens to develop a positive self-concept (Bregman et al., 2013; Côté, 2009; Johnson 2015; Nadal et al., 2011; Smetana et al., 2015). Among Unity students, tight, sibling-like friendships provide this support. Weeks et al. (2001) remind us that “friendships are most important when they are ongoing, when they have been embedded in ‘taken-for-granted’ assumptions and patterns, when you are accepted for who you are” (p. 60), and it is these types of friendship that easily become familial. I believe the opening snapshot and Jena’s reflection on the school’s tradition of providing students with gifts reveals this type of taken-for-granted, family-like experience. The social norms of family (a heteronormative family) dictate that holiday celebrations are central traditions. Family norms even recognize celebrations may be imperfect. When it comes to gifts, there are times when a family member gets us the perfect gift, and other times they miss the mark, and we politely say “thank you” and move on. Even in negotiating such mundane dynamics, the normative expectation is that family members recognize that “family” will not be around forever, and in fact, we might even “miss it” when it’s gone.

Parenting: The Significance of Teacher Influence

Snapshot 7

Arianna has been working on her fictional story for several weeks. She has written over 9 single-spaced pages. Today she has a laptop in front of her and is reading over her story. I sit down next to her and she asks if I would like to read it. I say yes and begin reading.

The story is about a girl who is trying to figure out who she is: who she wants to be, how she wants to look, who she wants to love. Part of it reads:

I claim to love women, mostly because when I say I am heterosexual, it does not sound right to me. I say I am a lesbian, and that sounds even worse. I say I am bisexual, and I don't like that either. So I am pansexual, I have the capacity to love just about anyone, but only one person at a time.

And then later on, she writes,

I am a feminine girl who embraces masculinity in a subtle way. For example, I would go hunting with fishnets [stockings] underneath a blaze orange jumpsuit. I suppose it is healthy to embrace both the masculine and the feminine.

When I'm finished reading I ask her about the story.

"That's some pretty deep stuff. I like the way you write."

"Thanks," She smiles.

"So can I ask...is this about you?"

She laughs, "Yes. I don't know how to write fiction. No need for it."

I was curious, "Do you really identify as pansexual?"

Again, Arianna laughs, as if to imply I am in for a long story. She begins fidgeting with her pencil.

“Well, not really anymore. When John [her teacher] read it he joked with me about it...I mean, we just talked about it. What it really means to be pansexual. And he talked about the derivative of the word, like where it comes from. You know, the etymology. And I was like ‘ok that makes sense.’ He didn’t discourage me, but... he has a tendency to do that [change her mind].”

She pauses. I stay silent and hope she continues. I think she can sense my anticipation. She begins again, “Um, I thought about it a lot and I was like...” Again, she pauses. “I guess I just don’t necessarily agree with it anymore. I kinda go with the queer title now because it’s undefined. ‘Cuz I don’t feel as if I know who I am... gender-wise anyway. Like if I...like if I’m really honest about it, I feel like a male who’s transgender, you know? I feel like biologically I am a male, but everything else about me is female, but I’m not biologically a male, but I don’t feel biologically like a woman.”

“Wow, that’s really complex.” Arianna is female and tends to perform femininity, wearing skirts, low-cut blouses, high-heels, and vibrant make-up.

“Yeah, I know. And like John has caught on to that a lot and says to me a lot, ‘Stop acting like a man. Stop acting like a man.’” She says this in a mocking voice, moving her shoulders squarely and shaking her finger in the air at an imaginary person. “I’m like, ‘I can’t help it!’” She turns to make eye contact with me, “I’m such a guy sometimes. But, outwardly I’m like really, like, feminine. And I enjoy my femininity.”

She's still looking directly at me, smiling brightly. But I sense anguish in her eyes. The smile seems forced and empty. I wonder how long she has contemplated this – been challenged to understand her gender, her sexuality.

“But,” she begins to doodle on her paper, “at the same time... sometimes I really just feel like a guy. But it's...it's on...it's on this level that's not exactly conscious or subconscious. It's probably like really deep in my psyche... Trying to figure that out still,” she says casually, as if it's just another thing to think about. She keeps doodling.

“Has it been helpful to talk to John about it?”

“Oh, super!” she exclaims. “And being here [at Unity] in general. Like I've realized that gender and sexuality are so much more than what I had originally thought. Like, so much more than what the media likes to convey.” She's shaking her head as if in disgust of the media. “Like, there are more than just two genders. There are more than just, you know... more than just like four different things you can identify yourself with. You can be lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender... But there's so much more to it... it's so much more complex than that!” She becomes more animated, moving her arms and hands, making big gestures as if she needs her audience to be sucked in by the importance of her words. “There's like a biologic level, a...a chromosomal level. There's a physical level, an emotional level, like... And you have to think about how you feel on all these different planes and it's so much to digest and take in that it...it takes a long time to process. So...” Her arms calm down and she returns to doodling. “That's why I'm taking my time...there's a lot to think about.”

This snapshot illustrates how students contemplate the complex ways they understand gender and sexuality, as well as the acceptability (and helpfulness) of doing so in this particular school. It also points to the guiding force John becomes in Arianna's life. She trusts him and so shares very personal thoughts with him about her gender and sexuality. His influence is real and direct, in that we can see she has changed her mind about how she articulates her identity. Her statement that John "has a tendency to do that" signifies a regular guidance and authority over her self-perception. In this scenario I likened John's role to that of the parent, offering guidance to his child. In my interview with Arianna, she notes that John was "way more helpful than my real parents." Although most involved teachers work to build trusting relationships with their students and may offer guidance, the circumstances at Unity tend to be different. Students ask their teachers for advice about what to do in their romantic relationships, what job to take, how to spend their money, or how to settle disagreements with their parents. Like a parent, John's advice explicitly and implicitly socializes Arianna into a particular perspective on gender, – in this case, aiming less for an "acceptable" gender and sexuality than for a thoughtful and reflective one. Arianna welcomes John's guidance and says that it helps her to openly explore her identity. However, there are aspects of his advice that further prescribe heteronormative thinking. For instance, he is willing to critique and remain open minded about concepts of sexuality Arianna presents, but not necessarily gender. As a result, Arianna continues to struggle with her sense of being a gendered person.

The excerpts from Arianna's writing reveal the voice of a "girl" who is adamantly questioning both gender and sexuality. It is almost as if she is playing with each. She highlights the labels for sexuality – heterosexual, lesbian, bisexual – but insists none of them fit, and reasons, "So I am pansexual." Likewise, when she speaks of gender it's in regards to her fluidity,

identifying a desire to “embrace” both masculinity and femininity at the same time. Some adults may interpret this writing as a call for help – *clearly this child is confused* – but John takes it as an invitation to push Arianna to think critically about the labels she has assumed. Their relationship is so close, he “jokes” with her about it. Both John and Arianna identify this joking as a learning activity. They discuss the etymology of pansexual in order to discover “what it really means.” Arianna also identifies this activity as the precipitating factor in her decision to take on the label of queer instead of pansexual. This movement is significant, and Arianna recognizes it as such by acknowledging John’s role (“he has a tendency to do that”) in shifting her thinking.

While John advocates for Arianna to think critically about labels, I believe he may have also intended (consciously or unconsciously) to guide her thinking in a particular direction. Arianna’s initial understanding of pansexual, of an individual who “love[s] just about anyone,” contrasts with her understanding of queer as someone with “undefined” sexuality. In a heteronormative world, it may be seen as more acceptable to be undefined – that is, *still figuring it out* – as opposed to being attracted to *anybody* (any embodied performance of gender and/or sexuality). The citational value of both of these labels, queer and pansexual, echo the norms/transgressions of heterosexuality. Whatever John intends, the excess history and valuation of these labels (the pervasiveness of heteronormativity within them and about them) may creep into John’s guidance. Like a parent, John may encourage “his” kids to practice independence in making their own choices, but only up to a point, offering guidance that strongly implies the “correct” choice.

The impact of John’s influence becomes apparent when Arianna begins to describe how some of the things she discusses in her story come out in real life. For instance, she names her

desire to embrace both masculinity and femininity at the same time. She confirms that she doesn't know who she is "gender-wise" and makes the complex statement that "I feel like a male who's transgender." She continues by noting that this hybrid (trans)gender expression comes out in class, and John tells her to "stop acting like a man." She insists, "I can't help it!" I find John's attempts to discourage Arianna's masculine disposition suggest a discomfort with her performance of masculinity, and perhaps particularly with the way Arianna's performance blurs the lines of gender binaries. John seems to respond to Arianna's gender expression as a failed performance of hetero-femininity, rather than as a successful/legible performance of fluid gender. Given that she has presented this struggle in her writing, which she knows John will read, I interpret his rejection of her performance as indicating a limited interest in helping his students unpack the complexity of gender and sexual identities. Even if his rejection is kind and joking, or intended to encourage critical thinking, it also serves to reinforce binary expectations of hetero-genders and limits Arianna's options for coming to understand herself.

I suggest the regulatory impact of John's guidance demonstrates the discursive power working to construct both John and Arianna. Both John and Arianna are *subject to* and *subject of* various discourses: There is a discourse of age, which positions an elder as more knowledgeable and deserving of respect, and demands the youth's subordinate compliance. Aligning with this is a discourse of the social roles of teachers and students. Likewise, the familial and quasi-parental relationship that has developed between John and Arianna contributes to a discursive regulation that amplifies the power of John's guidance. Finally, the discourse of heteronormativity influences their exchange, lending more legitimacy to some understandings of gender and sexuality over others. The acts of labeling that take place here position Arianna as the youth, student, and child who needs to be informed of her identity, while also insisting that she take

caution in asserting a permanent non-normative identity, while John is positioned as the knowing adult who can help her.

The playfulness and trust that exists between John and Arianna exemplifies their tight connection and reveals how their subjectification comes about. Butler (2004a) reminds us how crucial relationships are in establishing recognition; personal “ties constitute what we are, [they] compose us” (p. 22). I perceive the relational, co-constitutive effects of these discourses as precisely what bring John and Arianna a sense of comfort, even while the discourses reinforce hierarchy. John and Arianna have been recognized by each other, accepted by each other, through these discourses. The terms they call on to construct their identities and roles have a citational effect they both find acceptable, and as such are able to successfully perform their given roles. The successful recognition between John and Arianna highlights “our fundamental dependency on the other, the fact that we cannot exist without addressing the other and without being addressed by the other, and that there is no wishing away our fundamental sociality” (Butler, 2005, p. 33). This requirement for sociality leaves us in a space that constantly seeks recognition, and so leaves us in a vulnerable position of accepting the terms of recognition offered. “Thus we sometimes cling to the terms that pain us because, at a minimum, they offer us some form of social and discursive existence” (Butler, 1997, p. 26). Working within the confines of existing discourses, John and Arianna are able to construct each other within acceptable positions that bring forth their collective intelligibility, but perhaps at a cost. Although pain is not obvious here (Arianna insists she is happy with the result of her and John’s exchange), such conversations certainly do cause pain for many gender and sexual minority youth who long to be recognized in ways their elders can’t or won’t do.

Considering Arianna's experience specifically, it is important to acknowledge how this act of constitution allows her to learn a great deal about gender and sexuality. She admits to thinking about it in a much more complex manner than she had previously, suggesting that she herself has acknowledged the discourses working to construct the normative assumptions of gender and sexuality. In this regard, their exchange has no doubt been a positive experience. However, it is important to acknowledge the discursive function of heteronormativity that continues to enter their conversations, insofar as John's guidance works to steer Arianna's gender and sexuality toward a less transgressive embodiment, and in doing so reproduces heteronormativity as a regulatory discourse. This presents a significant foreclosure for Arianna, and the possibilities for how she can envision herself.

Supporting Each Other: Students Looking Out for One Another

Snapshot 8

During lunch, Sara's is absent from the Art room and it is loud and rowdy. Jacob is by far the loudest student. Destiny, who is pregnant and uses lunch time to rest, has twice asked him to keep his voice down.

"You're just a fat, stupid bitch!" Jacob screams across the room to Destiny. Rachel gasps in horror. Destiny just shakes her head and keeps eating her lunch.

Rachel yells to Jacob, "Jacob, that was rude and mean! Say you're sorry." He ignores her. Rachel starts to grumble about him to Destiny and the others sitting at their table. Destiny doesn't say a word. Jacob is now talking to himself about how stupid people are. Sierra walks in, sees the girls' grumpy faces, and hears Jacob's rambling. She sighs and shakes her head no, as if ashamed of someone, as sets down her lunch. She looks to Rachel.

“Wha’ he do?”

“He jus’ call Destiny a stupid bitch!” Rachel replies.

“Fat stupid bitch,” Skylar corrects her.

Sierra tilts her head back and groans, “Ughhhh.”

“I told ‘im to apologize, but he didn’t,” Rachel insists.

Sierra shakes her head and starts to walk over to Jacob.

As she walks towards him, Rachel warns, “He need to learn to shape up or that boy’s gonna be outta here.” Destiny still has not said anything. Sierra sits down next to Jacob and tries to discuss with him why he cannot say what he said.

Jacob is new to the school this semester. He has some cognitive and behavioral challenges, such as a tendency to talk to himself, an inability to determine appropriate/inappropriate comments, and a habit of interrupting others. I suspect he may be on the Autism spectrum, although his disability was never disclosed to me. I have noticed several students being challenged by his presence. He often makes loud outbursts that are distracting to other students. Often the outbursts consist of insults or of socially inappropriate comments or questions. The approach most of the teachers have with him is to remain positive and remind him, “less is more, Jacob.” This approach, however, has irritated many students even more. “All they ever say is ‘less is more, less is more.’ Gim’me a break. He’s a rude asshole!” Rachel ranted one day.

The school has worked hard to get students on board with supporting Jacob, and helping him acclimate to his new environment. School-wide circles were held, in which Jacob

participated, to discuss his particular needs and disabilities more broadly, in order to explore the benefits of having students with varying abilities a part of their diverse school. Throughout the year I watch carefully to see how everyone is adjusting.

Towards the end of the semester, after Jacob had been at the school for 7 months, students were discussing their experience at a conference they attended the prior week. The conference was for inspiring young writers. I overhear Rachel laughing and say, "Yeah, until they mess with Jacob!"

I butt in to find out what's so funny, asking "What are you talking about?"

"Nothin', we jus' sayin' how it was cool to work with kids from other schools until they started smart-mouthin' and talking smack about Jacob."

"Yeah," Sierra adds, "they didn't like his loud mouth and started talkin' shit about 'im."

At this point Rachel can't stop laughing. She struggles to get words out as she shares the story, "He... He like 'you ugly bitches don't know how to write.'" She mocks Jacob and bursts into laughter as soon as she gets the last word out.

Sierra takes over. "They were so pissed! They started talkin' shit and gettin' all up in his face and shit- "

"Yeah," Rachel interrupts, "an' we all run over there and beat their asses!"

Sierra stops her, "You lyin' girl. Shut up." This makes Rachel laugh even harder. She's wiping tears from her eyes when Sierra explains, "We jus' stop 'em. We pull some circle shit on 'em and get 'em calm down. They don't know him. We tell 'em like it is. Say he need some space. He jus' different, that's all."

“So you guys were standing up for him?” I ask, surprised that they came to his defense.

“Yeah. I mean, he jus’ a little slow. He stick up for me if I need it,” Sierra says.

“Still,” Rachel says, calming down from her laughing fit, “you should’a seen their faces. It was hilarious.”

As if on cue, Jacob walks in with a pizza from Little Caesar’s. The girls yell at him to give them some. He yells back, “No! I bought this with my own money. You bitches can get a job and get your own pizza!” Rachel busts out laughing again. Sierra joins her.

Overall, these exchanges condensed into one snapshot highlight the struggle of accepting newcomers, the varied acceptance of students with disabilities, and the way students come to protect each other. There are many different reasons new students would have some difficulty transitioning to Unity High. Some new students might experience some culture shock about the informal environment, and unsure how to act. Others might feel out of place given how tight-knit everyone appears. However, after two or three weeks, for most students these difficulties melt away. Rarely is there a new student who has ongoing difficulty because they don’t know how to “fit in,” but for Jacob this appears to be the case. His social/emotional difficulties make it challenging for him to simply adjust after a few weeks as most students do, and means a difficult transition for the school as well. This snapshot reveals that even when Jacob struggles to “fit in,” the school finds ways to accept him. Furthermore, even though his classmates are often challenged by some of his behaviors, they are able to let him into the “family,” offering him protection when others threaten him. This acceptance can be challenging because Jacob’s acceptance into the family sometimes disrupts the inclusive atmosphere. The students have a

difficult time differentiating Jacob's inappropriate behaviors – offensive statements hurled at others – from those behaviors that are “just the way he is.” His disability often becomes an excuse to let homophobic and sexist comments slide.

The first exchange in this snapshot shows Jacob calling Destiny, who is pregnant, a “fat stupid bitch.” Jacob hurls this insult after Destiny has asked him twice to be quiet. His comment is met with immediate disapproval from other students, but he ignores their requests to apologize. Destiny's appeal for Jacob to be quiet singles him out, and fails to account for his presumed inability to regulate his “inside” volume. Jacob's reaction may be a response to the impatience he senses from others in the room, a lack of understanding of the social norms of the Art room, or a frustration with the lack of understanding he receives in the school. As a new student, everything is new to Jacob - in particular, the freedom to move around the school, the casualness of social interactions, and the variety of performances of gender and sexuality. Likewise, the students have not become acclimated to some of Jacob's behaviors.

At the beginning of the snapshot students make an effort to “train” Jacob into the norms of respect and inclusion upheld in the school. Different students approach the project differently. For instance, Rachel is rather mean in her assertion that if Jacob can't “learn to shape up” he should be removed from the school. Sierra, on the other hand, becomes something of an interpreter for Jacob. She tends to be the one other students look to in order to reason with him. Sierra does have a gift for communicating with Jacob, and eventually a strong friendship develops between them. She takes the time to talk with him and explain the problems with some of the unacceptable behaviors he displays. By the end of the year, Sierra is the one most readily able to affirmatively support him by acknowledging, “he jus' different, that's all.”

As the students work to understand Jacob and his different behaviors, challenges arise with some of his outbursts. This is clear in the beginning of the snapshot with his insulting words toward Destiny. Jacob's insult stigmatizes Destiny and labels her as transgressing acceptable forms of hetero-femininity. I believe his comment expresses three distinct transgressions: she is "fat," contradicting the dominant expectation for women to be slender; she is "stupid" for having been presumably reckless enough to become pregnant; and she is a "bitch" because she refuses, in her transgressive (pregnant) state, to be hidden away or cease asserting her right to be accommodated (in this case, by asking Jacob to quiet down). Although Jacob may not intend the insult to carry these historical weights – he may not understand the citational force behind it – he does say it with the intention of stopping Destiny from asserting her preferences about his behavior that is impacting her and the space. He wants to make it clear to Destiny that he doesn't care if she thinks he is being too loud – perhaps asserting his own needs and possible discomfort at being in a new school, surrounded by strangers who do not understand him.

However, for the students (especially Destiny), the insult is shocking. An added component to Jacob's hurtful comment is Destiny's racial identity as African American. The contours of race, class, and gender lead to various depictions of teen pregnancy. Though pregnancy is considered by society as a transgressive act for all teen girls, the most damning effects are on racial minority and poor young women. Luttrell (2011) highlights how historically, White middle-class girls' pregnancies were seen as redeemable, while Black girls' pregnancies were seen as "an extension of either a promiscuous or a damaged black female sexuality" (p. 299). This sentiment echoes what others (Collins, 2004; Roberts, 1997; Solinger, 2013) have found regarding the social construction of Black female sexuality in the United States. Luttrell

(2011) argues that media representations of teen pregnancy perpetuate a differential social construction of sexuality along racial lines that negatively impacts young Black women.

This racial-sexual stereotyping is further complicated for pregnant students, who face extreme stigma, whether in a separate program or a traditional school (Luttrell, 2003; Pillow, 2004). Research suggests that separate programs intended for pregnant and parenting students are utilized more often by Black and Latina students than White, which is a pattern that reinforces the perception that teenage pregnancy is a minority issue (Luttrell, 2003; Pillow, 2004). Destiny's continued presence at Unity, as opposed to a specialized program for pregnant students, implicates her in this discourse and means she must face the "gaze" of judgment from those around her (Luttrell, 2003, 2011). Jacob likely does not intend for his comments to be taken as racially charged, but the excessive power they symbolize remains in effect and impacts the other students. The racialized components of his comment may be particularly impactful on Destiny, who already must deal with stereotyped discourses of Black female sexuality and teen pregnancy. Destiny's refusal to speak throughout the rest of the conversation suggests the powerful impact Jacob's words have had on her.

I believe the other students' responses to Jacob's comment suggest they are aware of the power behind his insult. Rachel immediately identifies Jacob's words as rude and mean, and Sierra tries to speak with him about why the comment was inappropriate. Their interjection is supportive of Destiny, and may suggest a lack of acceptance of Jacob. However, efforts to welcome Jacob into the inclusive environment of Unity High (for him to feel accepted and for others to accept him) do continue. By the end of his first semester, the majority of students come to at least tolerate Jacob, and most whole-heartedly accept him. This is evident in the story that Sierra and Rachel share regarding the incident at the writers' conference.

Rachel and Sierra readily admit that they (along with other students from Unity High) stood up for Jacob when students from another school (outsiders) were threatening him. This threat came about because he told the outsiders “you ugly bitches don’t know how to write.” Rather than identifying Jacob’s statement as sexist and requiring an apology, as they had done for Destiny, Rachel and Sierra frame the incident as an effect of his disability. They reason that they just needed to explain to the outsiders, “he jus’ different, that’s all.” I believe this shift suggests that the students have come to accept Jacob and his disabilities. They see his actions towards the outsiders as normative for the Jacob they have come to know. They are able to accommodate his outbursts (mostly through ignoring them) and believe the outsiders need to recognize his difference and do the same.

However, Rachel and Sierra’s recounting of the incident also indicates the students may have stopped trying to socialize Jacob into the respectful (and anti-heteronormative) culture the school advocates. Rachel and Sierra present the story as enthralling, and the consensus is that the incident itself was “hilarious,” framing Jacob’s statement as a humorous byproduct of his disability rather than as a sexist statement that may have truly injured the other students. On one hand this confirms that Jacob has become a part of the trusted family of Unity, as indicated when Sierra says that she stuck up for him because “he stick up for me if I need it.” On the other hand, in the close relationship that develops between Jacob and the other students, the efforts to help him reflect on the injurious aspects of his behaviors seems to have fallen by the wayside. I wondered whether the students could continue to defend each other from Jacob (as they initially did with Destiny), while also protecting Jacob. Or, must protecting Jacob require allowing his harmful comments to go unaddressed?

I suggest the students resolve this dilemma by prioritizing Jacob's disability over other students' needs to not hear harmful comments and over the school's desire to eliminate such comments. That is, the school did not appear to recognize how Jacob's behaviors were being constructed as problematic (and to the girls hilarious), and that in finding more appropriate accommodations the school may have been able to both support Jacob and eliminate any hurt that may have come from his outbursts, as opposed to ignoring his outbursts and focusing on his disability. Therefore, although the bond that develops between Jacob and the other students is supportive, it is not reflective of the supportive feedback and back and forth challenges apparent within most other relationships in the school. The acceptance that develops between the students and Jacob becomes *contingent* on his disability. While there are some attempts to help him understand the sexist and homophobic (as well as racist, classist, and ableist) nature of his comments, the more common response is for a student to roll their eyes ("there he goes again") and walk away, or laugh that he doesn't "get" how hurtful he is being. I saw both of these tactics deployed as a form of accepting Jacob as he was, as a disabled individual who "could not" know the difference between harmful and harmless comments. In effect, the way the school includes Jacob poses challenges to inclusion for him and others: Jacobs inclusion in the school does not arise from critical reflection and dialogue as it did for other students, but from an obligation to "accept" and "accommodate" his disability. Likewise, the accommodation of ignoring his outbursts meant the students used his disability as an excuse to ignore the harm some of his statements may have incurred, in effect allowing the force of his statements to continue and reinforce harmful limitations on others.

The downside of how students accept Jacob's behavior can be emphasized through a review of how language is essential to our social materialization. In *Excitable Speech*, Butler

(1997) evaluates the force of language and the impact of hate speech. This text builds on her previous work, reiterating that individuals come to be socially recognized by others through/within discursive norms. Language enables and solidifies this recognition, or the matching of norms to bodies, in order to bring someone into being. Hate speech calls on “this inseparable and incongruous relation between body and speech” (Butler, 1997, p. 12), but also highlights its vulnerability. Since all language is a resignification of prior language (of discourse), there is a “gap that separates the speech act from its future effects” (Butler, 1997, p. 15), revealing an unfixable effect of all speech. Therefore hate speech can only be “successful” when it has the force of prior citations and the historical effects behind them, and when those who are addressed by the speech neglect to call on that citational force to reveal its foreclosures. When students make light of or ignore Jacob’s harmful statements, rather than engage in a critical discussion (with him and/or each other) of the force behind the words, the full forces of prior signification carry through and constitute the students around him. That the students regard his disability as minimizing or neutralizing his words does not absolve them from the obligation to critically reflect on those words. On the contrary, a critical reflection on disability needs to be a part of a dialogue confronting his harmful speech, recognizing both his limitations in understanding the discourses he cites, but also the continued harm they may produce.

The close relationship that develops between Jacob and the other students reveals the extent to which students come to trust and protect each other, as well as the school’s success in implementing pedagogical goals of openness and acceptance. However, the closeness also serves to make Jacob exempt from critique of his behavior. The students’ acceptance of his disability blurs their understanding of the forcefulness of his harmful words, or at least of how to respond to them. I believe this is evident in the relationship between Jacob and Destiny. Throughout my

duration at Unity I never witnessed the relationship between them heal. Destiny came to tolerate Jacob, but she did not interact with him in the same carefree way she did with other students.

Family as a Double-Edged Sword

In the first part of this chapter, I described how the close personal relationships within Unity High are influential in the students' lives and school experiences. In this section I explore how these relationships leave students vulnerable, which I show by highlighting the fine line between teasing and bullying. Clearly differentiating between teasing and bullying provided a clearer understanding of the complex ways in which close relationships call on these forms of social interactions in order to solidify insider and outsider status. The family feeling of Unity High leads students to interpret teasing as a marker of belonging and therefore as acceptable. It is only occasionally that teasing is seen to go beyond the mark of acceptability into the realm of bullying. Whether these social interactions are labeled as teasing or bullying, they often serve to reinforce heteronormative values and to regulate family (insider/outsider status) within Unity.

The previous two snapshots (Snapshots 7 and 8) involve interactions that some students may interpret as teasing and others may interpret as bullying. As noted in Chapter 2, bullying is defined as “a form of aggressive behavior which inflicts, or attempts to inflict harm or discomfort in an individual, in which there is an imbalance of power, and the act is repeated over time” (Mills & Carwile, 2009, p. 279). For the purposes of this dissertation I broaden the definition of bullying to include any cruel or aggressive behaviors or acts that are *perceived* by the target or bystanders as harmful, as well as behaviors that depict another person in terms of debasement (devaluing their humanity). Expanding the definition in this way acknowledges the harmful effects of cruel teasing and more directly identifies it as bullying, while also acknowledging the effects of *disbursed* (small acts over several occasions) cruel teasing.

Additionally this definition accounts for “secondary” victimization that may take place when bystanders are still subject to its force. It is critical to add the perceived impact of bullying to the definition precisely because of the “unfixability” of language (Butler, 1997). In not knowing the effect of our words, we cannot know whom we hurt, but that does not make the pain any less impactful. Acknowledgment of that pain (of the citational force of our words/actions) provides a more realistic picture of the impact of bullying.

Likewise, I believe it is important to add depictions of debasement – any derogatory term used to reference a human being as a means to devalue their humanness – to the definition of bullying in order to account for the disrespect and normative violence involved in cruel teasing. This is to say that whether everyone is “in” on the joke or not, the act of purposefully naming another individual in terms of debasement serves to further constitute that individual (or others) in such terms. The force of that constitution is communicated to all who observe the performative act, not only the target. It is important to remember there is power eminent in acts of teasing and bullying. They are both forms of subjectification. Through playful or harmful recognition, the teaser/bully names, labels, and calls into being their target (Bansel et al., 2009; Butler, 1993, 1999, 2004a, 2004b, 2005, 2010; Foucault, 1995).

In what follows I examine how the close familial friendships that develop in Unity High allow teasing and bullying to become mechanisms of regulation within the school. Students, come to interpret teasing and bullying as a form of social control dictating how they are to embody gender, sexuality, race and other social locations.

The Innocence of Joking and Teasing: Unintentional Regulations of Sex and Gender

Snapshot 9

Today, in the English room, Zak is in a playful mood, as he very often is. Already John has scolded him four times to be quiet. Zak is sitting up on the stage in the corner with Skylar, Jenny, Quinn, and Mel. They laugh and holler at each other nonstop. Then all of a sudden I hear Jenny angrily say to Zak, "Nah, forget it! You jus' a lil' bitch!" and she storms out of the room. Jenny's exit has caught everyone's attention, and now everyone is mumbling about what just happened. John tries to calm the class.

"Alright...show's over. Back to work." He looks towards Zak and motions for him to come down. Zak slowly comes down and walks to John's desk.

"What'd you do?" John asks.

"I didn't...I mean..." Zak shifts from foot to foot in front of John's desk. John gives him a stern look that says, come on, give it up. "I might'a called her a muffin top," he says quietly. The girls next to John's desk gasp. Zak looks their way and then back at John. He talks more quickly as he tries to explain himself. "But I didn't mean it. We were all joking and I thought she would think it funny. I called everyone a muffin top. I'm a muffin top." He grabs at the sides of his waste, presenting evidence of his "muffin top." John is shaking his head no. Zak makes a pouty face at John – his bottom lip pressed out and mouth in a full frown. John keeps shaking his head no. Finally Zak whines, "I told her I was sorry and that's when she told me off and left."

"Well, you better figure out a way to fix this."

Zak looks down in shame. "I know. I will." He says quietly.

John shoos him away, with a "Get back to work."

Zak returns to his group of friends, who also start to scold him (“smooth move,” “dumbass...I told you to stop”). I decide to go look for Jenny. I find her sitting in one of the plush chairs in the hall, playing with her phone.

“Can I sit with you for a little while?” I ask. She shrugs her shoulders, but doesn’t say anything. I sit. “I guess it’s all fun and games until someone gets hurt,” I say.

“He jus’n idiot!”

“Are you ok?”

“Yeah. I’ll be fine. I’m jus’ sick of his stuff. He thinks it’s funny, but it’s racist. I don’t know why they don’t get that.”

“What do you mean?”

“Like...say like if somebody made a gay comment, everybody would hop on that and be like ‘Oh, well don’t call him a fag, he identifies that-’ But like when a gay person calls a girl fat, it’s ok. And that’s not... not ok!” She returns to looking at her phone. She is clearly still upset.

“And you see that as connected to race?”

“Yes!” She says with a soft laugh. “They always say, like, African American women are mostly unhealthy and obese and they’re fat and ugly and... You know, we’re weak, and all that other stuff.”

“Like who says that? Society?”

“Yeah! Media and stuff. That’s all they think.”

“So somebody calling you fat – it’s not only about your weight. You see that as directly about your race as well?”

“Yeeesss,” she whines, her irritation with my questioning clear. “I’m sick of always tellin’ everybody, like, ‘Um, excuse me. That was so not necessary.’ You know? But everybody like, ‘Ah, Jenny strong, she can deal with it.’ Or ‘Well, she still gonna be somebody in the future, so whatever.’” She again gives a soft, skeptical, laugh, “like it don’t mean anything,” and shakes her head no, as if ashamed of the world’s ignorance.

“Do you want to talk to John about it?” She gives me evil eyes. “What?” I ask.

“He don’t care.”

“What do you mean he doesn’t care?”

“He’d be like, ‘oh Zak has a hard time, give him a break.’ The gay kids always get away with stuff like that. They [teachers] play favorites with all them.”

Teasing is a normal part of most friendships. Teenagers like to joke and tease, and it is mostly done in a good natured and harmless manner; this is as common at Unity High as I’m sure it is at most high schools. Students joke with each other on a regular basis. At Unity the teasing takes on a particular flavor, because many students feel that the closeness fostered by the school gives them license to joke and tease with anyone about *anything*. Unlike in Mills and Carwile’s (2009) research (described in detail in Chapter 2), topics such as race, class, gender, sexuality, and appearance are not off limits in teasing at Unity. When teasing goes too far it is either ignored by the targeted student (who plays along as if it doesn’t bother them), or the

student blows up, as depicted in this snapshot. Although these reactions are typical of adolescent relationships, it is significant that these forms of teasing are counterproductive to the inclusion the school prides itself on, in that they contribute to regulating sex and gender, as well as other relations of power. I believe teasing as a form of regulation is deployed to further solidify the family relationships within the school, clearly delineating insider/outsider status. This snapshot reveals how teasing reproduces regulatory discourses of race, gender and sexuality, and highlights the vulnerability of both Zak and Jenny.

In this snapshot, Zak has been joking with three other students – friends that he hangs out with often, and who frequently joke with each other about various things. Yet today’s conversation takes a different turn. The teasing about weight (being a “muffin top”) gets out of hand. Since appearance becomes a regulating factor within the tease, it is relevant to describe the appearances of the students involved: Zak is a light-skinned biracial (Black/White) boy. He is gay and relatively masculine. He has struggled with being “chubby” on and off, but currently would be considered an average weight. Jenny is a dark-skinned Black girl. She is heterosexual and normatively feminine in her gender expression. She is short and has described herself as overweight. Skylar is biracial (Black/White/Puerto Rican), and very light skinned - she can “pass” for White. She is a lesbian and sports a “punk” feminine style. She is very tall and slender. Mel is a light-skinned Mexican boy who is heterosexual, normatively masculine, tall and gangly.

This group of friends tease each other on a regular basis about who they date, what they wear, where they work (or their unemployment), and so on. Zak and Mel, the two boys in the group, are usually the instigators of the joking. Their personalities could stereotypically be defined as the “class clowns;” they always have a joke ready and everyone likes them. In this

sense they are what Ellwood and Davies (2010) would consider “classic” bullies. These classic bullies have popularity on their side, allowing them greater authority in designating social status of other students, and thus getting others to conform to their will. It would not be uncommon for a classic bully’s tease to be met with a roll of the eyes, or a laugh that plays along, because the target does not want to be singled out and excluded from the group. Teachers do not see this type of bullying as aggressive, but rather as relationship building, and therefore the harm usually goes unaddressed. Although occasionally I saw a student from this group walk away in annoyance, this was the only time I saw one of them get truly upset and leave.

This snapshot shows how joking can quickly move from humor to insult. Jenny becomes fed up with Zak’s teasing, hurls a misogynistic insult at him, and briskly leaves the group. We hear Zak justify his actions by indicating that he was picking on everyone, not just Jenny, even including himself in the insult. His reasoning suggests an assumption that even hurtful insults are acceptable if they are evenly distributed. This logic depends on there being consensus from the group as to whether the joke was hurtful or funny, which would be indicative of prosocial teasing (Mills & Carwile, 2009). The reason this does not work in this situation is because Jenny receives the insult as being about more than weight. She is the only Black girl in the group. Zak is the only other person who may be seen as being overweight; he has worked to get rid of his chubbiness and currently he does not appear overweight. Jenny experiences being called a “muffin top” as a cruel tease, and later articulated that it represents harmful insults she and other Black women have received in the past. Zak’s act of naming her a “muffin top” holds a symbolic force that for Jenny calls on discourses of race *and* gender.

Jenny’s sense that the comment is about race and gender stems from her understanding of a stereotype that Black women are unhealthy and overweight. She identifies media and society as

regimes of truth (Foucault, 1995) upholding and reproducing this stereotype, noting they see Black women as “unhealthy and obese and they’re fat and ugly” as well as weak and “all that other stuff.” The strength of this stereotype is complexly reinforced when students justify its usage by asserting its insignificance. She highlights the irony of this logic when she mocks her classmates’ statements: “‘Ah, Jenny’s strong, she can deal with it,’ And, ‘Well, she’s still gonna be somebody in the future, so whatever.’” These statements serve to neutralize the reiterative value of the tease and minimize the harm it may cause. The message behind this justification is that even if Jenny aligns with the stereotype of the obese Black woman, it’s inconsequential because she may additionally follow the stereotype of the strong Black women who is going to make something of herself, regardless of her obesity. Jenny is being boxed in by contradictory norms of Black femininity, a pressure she clearly feels and does not believe is shared by anyone else in the conversation.

The lack of response from John, and the school more broadly, marks an additional impact of this interaction on Jenny. Jenny believes this form of teasing is not taken seriously by the school because it is based on race, rather than non-conforming gender or more specifically, sexuality (which she sees as more forcefully monitored). She insists that talking to the teacher about it will not do any good, and points to a stronger protection and privileging of the “gay kids.” Jenny understands that Unity makes significant effort to thwart anti-gay bullying, immediately shutting down homophobic epithets. However, she does not believe the same is true about gendered/raced bullying (calling a girl fat), and notes specifically, “The gay kids always get away with stuff like that,” suggesting the gay students are privileged in the school’s enforcement of bullying, whether in the role of bully or bullied. This unequal regulation of bullying is consistent with what research has shown regarding schools’ differential responses

based on race and gender (Meyer, 2009; Perguero, 2010). Jenny clearly understands that when a gay student is called a fag (targeting sexuality), it is defined as bullying and reprimanded, but when a girl is called fat (targeting gender and race), it is defined as teasing and goes unnoticed. I believe Jenny challenges the school's analysis of bullying, which neglects to account for the intersectional functions of hegemony. Jenny regards this pattern as an unacceptable double standard. She begins to mark herself as an outsider by questioning this double standard. The failure of either her friends or the school to recognize the intersectional complexities of this offense leaves her at a loss.

When the school neglects to address the intersectional components of systems of oppression, either by responding to incidents or by helping students develop a critical intersectional analysis, it allows derogatory and defamatory assaults to hold their citational force. This neglect reaffirms the subordination incited by the assault (Butler, 1997). In this snapshot, John does reprimand Zak's action, showing clear disapproval and insisting he "figure out a way to fix [it]," but there is no formal punishment for Zak's harmful comments. I suggest this lack of formal response on the part of the school serves to reinforce the normative violence conferred in the tease. Additionally, Jenny's concern that the statement is racist is left completely unaddressed. Jenny asks Zak to acknowledge and apologize for the racist and sexist implications of his statement, and when he does not, she responds with her own insult, "You jus' a lil' bitch!," which can be interpreted as demeaning both his gender and sexuality. Both Jenny and Zak are calling on heteronormative discourses to put each other down.

Zak's insistence that he was just teasing, and that everyone was in on it reveals a complicated aspect of the familial relationships that develop at Unity. I interpret Zak's reaction as an acknowledgment that the group of friends represents a collective ethos (Butler, 2005)

conferring acceptability of this type of teasing. The teasing becomes a necessary form of prosocial play that contributes to bonding within the group. That Zak and Mel continually engage in this type of teasing suggests the group has adjusted their moral understanding of the teasing in a way that condones the violence that may emerge. This demonstrates Butler's (2005) observation that "violence consists in part in its indifference to the social conditions under which a living appropriation might become possible" (p. 6). The fact that the group ignores the racial and gender implications of the tease allows its violent effect to remain. (I examine the full implications of this stance in Chapter 6 with a review of bullying that is deemed acceptable because students are "just kidding.")

The fact that Unity positions itself as an inclusive school adds additional weight to such ostensibly prosocial teasing that reinforces heteronormativity. The violence incited by teasing damages the overall inclusive environment of the school and can create a false sense of security for some students. Attending this inclusive school Jenny had a reasonable expectation that she would not be teased/bullied regarding her gender/race. This incident leads Jenny to question her relationship with her friends and to contemplate the hierarchy of inclusion within the school. However, the exchange is also observed by 20 other students in the classroom. This leads to a secondary effect of teasing/bullying – the effect on bystanders. The heterosexist, sexist and racist discourses called up by the tease are reinforced not only upon Jenny and Zak, but upon all the bystanders as well.

Appearance as a Significant Marker of Gender Compliance. I posit that the frustration and hurt Jenny experiences in this snapshot is representative of a broader discourse of gender regulation happening at Unity. Although students are accepting and welcoming to diverse forms of gender expression, their interpretation of gender continues to rely on a heteronormative frame.

Joking and teasing are reliable forms of regulating behavior, including gender. Walking through the halls of Unity High I would often hear students regulating each other's gender performances: "*Man up. You're not gonna let him talk to you that way, are you?*" "*Girl you know you too tiny to pull that [look] off!*" "*Honey I don't care if you're gay, straight, trans, queer... whatever! But you gotta be able to pull it off, and she's too fugly to pull it off!*" "*Nah! You gotta tell that bitch like it is!*" Although most of these comments are framed as a joke, as innocent teasing, or even as helpful advice, the force behind them remains. Students push each other into positions of normative hetero-genders.

The inclusive environment of Unity High, with its extensive openness and acceptance, makes it difficult to believe that this type of regulation would still occur. However, it is important to consider how students' performances of gender remain unequivocally influenced by the forceful expectations of hegemonic heteronormativity. Being subject to heteronormativity, there is "a mode of self-crafting that takes place in the context of the norms at issue and, [students are required to negotiate] an answer to the question of who [they] will be in relation to these norms" (Butler, 2005, p. 22). To use one of the examples above: "*Honey I don't care if you're gay, straight, trans, queer... whatever! But you gotta be able to pull it off, and she's too fugly to pull it off!*" This statement comes from a transgender girl (a male-assigned student who performed femininity) who thinks she is being supportive of the diversity in the school, but at the same time she advocates a beauty standard that reinforces a gender binary. The message is clear: be whoever you want to be, but make sure it fits the binary.

Many of the transgender and cisgender students at Unity perform their identities along binary lines. Even if a transgender girl does not fully “pass,”²⁹ she is still likely to perform a devotedly hetero-feminine (or even hyper-feminine) identity, to make it clear to her classmates she is female, and thus that they should treat her (and socialize with her) as if she were cisgender (and had always been female). Other students who considered themselves gender-fluid also used binary divisions to “play” with gender. One student commented to me *“I don't want to say, like, I'm dressing for everyone to see but like...it's pretty cool when I come to school and right away they can tell if I'm a guy that day or not.”* This student knows that their dress is a significant marker of gender, and is happy that others are able to read that marker and validate the gender they perform each day, a performance that specifically calls on hetero-binaries.

I assert that the students' continual drawing on and reinforcing of binary gender expectations suggests that although they are able to be open and accepting of non-heteronormative representations, it is not because of an understanding of the discursive forces marking bodies within exclusive and cohesive sex-gender-sexuality relationships. For these students, difference is heteronormalized³⁰ – accepted gender variations are reworked to fit heteronormative expectations. In other words, when a body presents as non-normative for its assigned sex, students make sense of that difference by matching it to a corresponding normative gender and sexuality. Gender and sexuality play off each other, as non-normative gender is accepted through a matching of corresponding sex and sexuality, and non-normative sexuality is accepted through a matching of corresponding sex and gender. For example, a transgender boy's

²⁹ In the transgender community, youth often refer to a successful public appearance as an ability to “pass.” It refers to a person's ability to be seen by others as their preferred gender.

³⁰ In *Youth and Sexualities* Rasmussen, Rofes, and Talburt (2004) make use of the term “heteronormalizing” to identify the way schools enact policies aimed at driving students into heteronormative relations. I make use of the term a bit differently, focusing on the way *interpersonal* actions between/among students work to heteronormalize students into cohesive sex/gender/sexuality performances.

acceptance is contingent on understanding him as being masculine and attracted to women. A lesbian's butchness or masculinity is rationalized as okay because she's attracted to feminine women, and so on. Students' interpersonal relations are dependent on being able to heteronormalize each other. Even students who work to present a queer ("uncategorized") essence of their embodiment are subject to this form of heteronormalizing (as seen with Arianna in Snapshot 7, and the influence her teacher had on steering her towards a more acceptable gender and sexual identity).

The effort put forth by the students to read/see/understand each other as having a cohesive sex-gender-sexuality is not surprising given the forceful influence of heteronormativity outside their school walls. Our social dependence on each other to become recognizable leaves the power of heteronormativity irreversibly present in the lives of all students. In *Giving an Account of Oneself* Butler (2005) reviews Foucault's premise that we can only become constituted through regimes of truth that dictate "the terms that make self-recognition possible" (p.22). The students, in regulating each other's gender performances, are actors within the regime of truth, signifying the norms that allow others to come into being. As students accept variations in hetero-genders, but continue to regulate gender performance overall, those who enact a variation work to comply within those terms in order to be recognized. Returning to the transgender girl who stated, "*Honey I don't care if you're gay, straight, trans, queer...whatever! But you gotta be able to pull it off, and she's too fugly to pull it off!*" her statement reveals this acceptance, while also issuing a heteronormalizing effect in the requirement that you must be able to "pull it off."

As both Foucault (1995) and Butler (1993, 1999) identify, gender subjectification works to rank individuals as having more or less social value, creating an accepted social ordering of

bodies. Within school walls, it becomes “vital to students’ survival to know how the social order works and how one’s identity can be made to make sense in terms of that social order. The students thus actively participate in establishing and maintaining that order” (Ellwood & Davies, 2010, p. 90). At Unity, the students rework the normative social order to accommodate a variety of performances of sex, gender, and sexuality, but only insofar as they can be justified within a heteronormative frame.

It became clear to me that when students do not stay within heteronormative binaries, or when their classmates are unable to reconcile an acceptable sex-gender-sexuality constellation of their embodiment, they work to remedy the behavior their classmates have deemed unacceptable. For example, Je’mal is a tall, slender, young Black man whose behavior aligns with masculine norms, and who is fond of wearing high heel shoes. Je’mal always volunteers when “strength” is needed, such as to help a teacher move a cabinet or unload a car. He speaks forcefully with people who don’t agree with him, and exudes confidence such that his peers believe his opinion is “right” 99% of the time. Although Je’mal never disclosed his sexuality to me, he dated a few girls while at Unity. Many students are puzzled that a masculine, apparently heterosexual man loves to wear high heels. As a result, Je’mal is challenged to make close male friends; instead, his strongest relationships in the school are with females. The challenge presented by Je’mal’s performance of “masculinity in heels” became evident one day when he confided in me that he would be giving them up soon. When I asked why, his response was “so I don’t have to go through what I go through on a daily basis!” . I was confused, since I had never seen him being bullied or harassed. As Je’mal continued to express real distress and angst over his need to stop wearing heels, I brought it up – “I’ve never really seen anyone bothered by you wearing heels.” He rightfully pointed out, “You not here all the time.”

Je'mal's experience, which seems to contradict Unity's overall openness to non-normative genders and sexuality, may be explained by the fact that his particular gender expression does not fit into the binary expectations of hetero-genders. Whether or not Je'mal experiences direct bullying in the form of physical, relational, or verbal abuse, he can tell that his peers do not accept or understand the way he presents himself. His feeling of needing to give up heels reveals the forceful pull of the desire for recognition. Je'mal is put in a precarious position because his classmates are unable to understand his embodiment; they have a difficult time heteronormalizing him. He fits normative hetero-masculinity in every way (male-bodied, masculine, heterosexual), but how can a "real" man want to wear heels? The pain Je'mal experiences as a result of this rejection, this lack of recognition, is so forceful he is willing to change who he is and leave his heels behind.

I argue these gender expectations similarly play out for the young women at Unity, most prominently in the regulation of pregnant and parenting students. One example is revealed in *Snapshot 8*, when Destiny is called a "fat stupid bitch." Destiny also would occasionally be accused of not smiling enough, or not being excited enough about her pregnancy. These accusations call on gender norms that require women to be pretty, polite, maternal and loving. Destiny's failure to perform these qualities presents a disjuncture between her pregnant state, a clear representation of female-bodiedness, and her (lack of) femininity.

Similarly Shay, a senior who had a daughter the summer before, returned to school and faced many challenges. Shay has a "tough" personality. Although she is very sweet and bubbly, she also makes it clear to everyone not to take advantage of her kindness. When she senses someone is cheating or disrespecting her, she'll appear more than ready to throw the first punch. Although I saw Shay's toughness displayed in talking "smack" to others, or requiring someone

to move or give her back an art supply, I never saw her get physical with anyone. I got to know Shay well in Sara's Art class. We would often sit and draw together, while chatting about the new developmental milestones her baby had achieved that week, or her plans for her and her boyfriend to get married and move away. This all stopped when one morning, upon realizing Shay had been absent all week, I was told she had been expelled. Jena, a good friend of Shay's, told me, "Some kids were saying stupid shit about her baby, callin' her a bad mom and stuff. She flipped out and started beatin' em. Who can blame her?" As I pressed Jena for more details, I learned that this taunting had gone on ever since Shay returned from having the baby. I believe Shay's position in the school as an openly proud mother subjected her to strict criticism of her performances of maternalness and femininity.

Motherhood is a significant marker of power for women and as such an institutional regulation of motherhood has developed in order to control that power (Rich, 1995). This has set in place a specific categorization of motherhood that is tightly intertwined with that of hetero-femininity. "The institution of motherhood demands that to be a 'good' mother a woman's biology must be in good working order, she must be young and healthy, married and heterosexual, financially secure, selfless and exclusively available to her offspring" (Sieger, 2012, p. 44). Both Destiny and Shay represent a resistance to this categorizing in more than one way. Neither is married or financially secure, and by being in school they are not exclusively available to their children, which can be portrayed as a type of selfishness. Additionally, as teens they both are judged as too young to have children and as having a promiscuous sexuality (Luttrell, 2003; Pillow, 2004). Given these expectations, their embodied parenthood represents transgressions of both femininity and motherhood. Although Shay's actions of beating someone up for talking negatively about her child could be seen as a protective maternal act (as Jena

implies in her approval), it also led her to perform masculinity through aggression and dominance. Since this performance was not uncommon for Shay, it likely made her more vulnerable to criticism. Not only did her acts of masculinity (coupled with a known heterosexuality) make it difficult for others to understand her placement in a normalized heterosexual matrix, but her performance of rejecting maternal norms added to students' inability to view her as someone deserving of social recognition or acceptance.

I believe each of the examples described here contributes to a culture of bullying and teasing at Unity High. In many ways this violence is inevitable, given our sociality and reliance on norms to become known to others. As discussed in Chapter 2, Butler (2004b) clearly identifies that “norms of recognition function to produce and deproduce the notion of the human” (p.31-32). If the norms available for granting recognition to others fail to produce someone, it becomes impossible to commit violence against that person – or rather, it becomes hyper-possible, because violence against them is not recognized as violence. Since the collective understanding of bodies is framed through heteronormativity, violence is used “to maintain the appearance of its collectivity” (Butler, 2005, p. 4). Therefore, bullying not only regulates heteronormativity, but it also reinforces it as the collective ethos. It is not seen as harmful, because those who are harmed are those to whom recognition has not been granted. The inclusive atmosphere of the school complicates how this rejection functions at Unity.

As described above, students *are* accepting of the embodied differences presented; however that acceptance is limited. This can lead to a false sense of security for some students who may experiment with embodying non-normative gender and sexuality. A student may misunderstand their ability to be fully recognized by others in the school and end up being bullied. This misunderstanding of how transgression has been accepted in the school can lead

students to question their status as either an insider or outsider. Furthermore, as students work to manage the dictated norms within the school, they may flow in and out of these status positions, changing their embodied performance to maximize their ability to fit in at the school (as we see with Je'mal's plans to discontinue his wearing of high heels).

Conclusion

The very "I" is called into question by its relation to the Other, a relation that does not precisely reduce me to speechlessness, but does nevertheless clutter my speech with signs of its undoing....I am gripped and undone by these very relations. (Butler, 2004a, p. 23)

In the above epigraph Butler reveals the inevitable vulnerability that comes from our dependence on sociality in order to be recognizable. We become undone by each other. We become undone through relations that fail to fully account for who we feel we are or might be. This undoing, this vulnerability, is demonstrated in the tight familial relationships within Unity High.

Many positive things occur because the students and faculty of Unity are able to form close family-like relationships. Adults offer students guidance and support during difficult times, a form of "parenting" that may be crucial if the student is in an unsupportive home. Likewise, students actively offer each other protection and support from the harmful interactions of others, forging sibling-like relationships. The closeness within the walls of Unity cultivates an enduring trust that is held dearly by everyone. The trust is central in the school's ability to uphold their pedagogical goals of openness, acceptance, and critical thinking. Therefore, I argue the comfort resulting from this trust allows students to "play" with the social norms dictating their embodiment, questioning the discursive powers of gender, sexuality, race, ability, and other

hegemonic structures influencing people's lives. However, in this play we begin to see a downside to these close relationships, as teasing reveals the extent to which closeness manifests further vulnerability for the students, and even a sense of false security.

Teasing and bullying create distinct marks of insider/outsider status. Even as students work to question the dominant norms dictating their lives, they continue to reconstitute those norms with strict gender and sexuality expectations of each other. Students view the regulation that takes place within Unity as a normal part of adolescence and growing up; therefore it isn't unreasonable that in Snapshot 7 we hear Arianna respond, "there's a lot to think about," when confronted with her teacher's inconclusive and limiting support of her gender and sexuality exploration. In Snapshot 8 we see Jacob able to continue in his sexist hurtful comments, and in Snapshot 9 Jenny simply notes that Zak's insensitive name-calling is because he's "a lil' bitch." Each of these responses marks someone as either inside or outside normative discourse and highlights the routine ways those within the school work to label each other.

As this chapter demonstrates, even as students come to understand and explore gender and sexuality as systems of oppression they continue to frame it within heteronormative standards. Students accept differences among classmates by identifying how those differences can be heteronormalized to assert a cohesive sex-gender-sexuality embodiment. This suggests that the anti-heteronormative efforts practiced within the school are no match for the powerful heteronormativity that permeates society, including the school. Acts of heteronormalizing establish joking and teasing as foundational mechanisms for maintaining hetero-genders. This form of control is prevalent in Unity High and can be seen when students push the boundaries of innocent versus harmful teasing. When a joke goes too far, or when it is not taken seriously by administrators, trust is broken. The following chapter examines such breaks in trust. I consider

the impact of bullying on both individuals and the school, and consider the impact it has on a student's ability to materialize, or matter in the school, revealing the challenge bullying poses to the inclusive space of Unity High.

CHAPTER 6

Bullying: A Challenge to Unity

In Chapter 5, I delineate how the close personal relationships among students and teachers in Unity High both provide students a necessary sense of belonging, and as a result of that belonging, make them vulnerable to each other's judgments. In this chapter, I take a deeper look at how these close relationships present challenges to the inclusion professed by the school. By exploring the different ways bullying manifests in the school, I assess the impact it has on individual students and the school "family" collectively. Even though this bullying creates vulnerability, it is important to take note of the positive reflection and critical thinking it inspires in some students. Since the school has established an inclusive environment – through their pedagogical goals of openness, acceptance and critical thinking – these moments of vulnerability are sometimes taken up by students as opportunities to explore broader systems of oppression impacting gender and sexual minorities. Although Unity's efforts at inclusion fail to eliminate bullying generally, or reinforcement of heteronormativity in particular, the school's pedagogical goals nevertheless may serve to mitigate the long-term effects of bullying on students.

Bullying: Betraying the Family

Snapshot 10

As I walk into the Art room this morning I hear loud, intense, arguing from the back corner. I drop my things off by Sara's [the teacher] desk, where she is sitting drawing. Her face is pointed down toward the sketch, but she glances up at the arguing students out of the corner of her eye. She has a grin of amusement on her face. I ask what's going on.

“New kid’s getting a lesson on how we do things around here,” she says, without shifting her focus.

I look over to the corner. Riley is lecturing in a calm and definitive manner. “You need to shut that down! We don’t do that around here. You need to tell Amy [the principal]. Like, get that shut down!”

“It don’t matter. I shouldn’t have even said anything. It’s already over with,” says Josh, a transgender boy who just came to Unity this semester, so he’s only been around for two months.

“Look around you, man!” Riley presses. “Don’t you see where you are? We don’t put up with that kind of thing.” Riley is now more visibly insistent. Her brow is furrowed and her voice gets louder. “It’s not ok for them to like, call you that. You need to tell Amy.” She says as she shoves off from under the table and storms out of the room. I hear Josh say to the remaining kids at the table “Geeze! It’s nothing compared to my old school.”

I ask Sara if she thinks someone should go after Riley.

“I think she’ll be ok, but you can try if you want.” She then calls to Josh and motions for him to come talk with her.

I go to find Riley. She is sitting on one of the beanbags in the corner of the hall, ear buds in, listening to music from her cell phone. I approach her. She sees me and pulls out one ear bud.

“Can I join you?”

“Sure.” I can hear the music from the hanging ear bud.

“You ok?”

“Yeah, it just ticks me off.”

I lower myself awkwardly to sit cross-legged on the floor next to the beanbag. “I came in late. What happened?”

“Last night I saw Josh post on Facebook that some kids were, like, callin’ him a freak and stuff. Like, we do not accept that at this school. You don’t get to say whatever you want. Like, that’s... that counts as bullying. It counts as like, abuse. That’s harassment. You... you need to shut that down right away.”

“Kids from here?” I ask.

“Yeah! That’s why I’m pissed. I mean... everyone’s family. Like, that’s not all right. And he doesn’t even care. He won’t tell Amy.”

“What do you think Amy would do?”

“Confront ‘em [the kids who were bullying]. Like, it’s not ok!”

“Can you tell Amy about it?” I enquire, thinking she may feel better just to get it off her chest.

“Yeah, but that’s not the point. Josh needs to. Like, he needs to realize we don’t allow that here.”

I see her look over my shoulder. I turn. Josh stands behind me.

“Hey,” he says to Riley.

“Hey,” she replies without looking up.

I start to get up. “I’ll let you two talk,” I say and head back to the classroom.

There were moments in my observations at Unity High when it was very clear to students that what was taking place was bullying. This snapshot shows students reactions to one of those moments. Since everyone in the school has close relationships, bullying touches everyone, not just the bully and the victim. This snapshot highlights the impact bullying has on bystanders, and illustrates how for some, a student's complacency with bullying constitutes an act of betrayal to the whole family of Unity. Josh's refusal to tell the administrator about his experience is thoroughly unacceptable to Riley, who insists the behavior needs to be "shut down" immediately. Sara's amusement at the exchange between Riley and Josh (and her decision not to interrupt) suggests that Riley's view was the accepted view of the school. In other words, Unity High has been effectively established as a place of unity; it is a family. Josh was jeopardizing that unity, and Sara interpreted Riley's lecture as appropriate socializing of a new member into the family norms. In addition, I suggest this snapshot indicates the strong protections afforded to LGBT students in the school. Whereas calling a girl fat may not be seen as bullying (as indicated in Snapshot 9), name-calling inflicted against a transgender student is immediately interpreted as bullying.

That Josh posted on Facebook about the bullying suggests a need for consolation, or at least a need to vent any emotions it evoked. Riley, however, takes his post more seriously and understands it as evidence of an injustice. She repeats over and over again that Unity High is different, and bullying of this nature is not allowed at Unity. She is positive that if Josh could just look around and see that Unity is a safe place, and feel comfortable telling the administrator this happened, justice *would* be served. Riley's attempt to convince Josh to report the incident is unsuccessful and leads to significant frustration on her part because, "he doesn't even care."

Riley leaves the conversation and the room feeling betrayed. When she says, “everyone’s family. Like, that’s not all right,” she seems to mean both that the comments made toward Josh are not alright, and that Josh failing to report them is not alright.

I see it as significant that Riley has been so deeply impacted by Josh’s being bullied and his refusal to do something about it. She doesn’t know him well (since he is new), and the incident had nothing to do with her. Yet she reacts almost as if it had happened to her. Perhaps the name-calling Josh experiences reminds Riley of her own experiences of being signified as a “freak.” Riley identifies as gender-fluid and experienced a significant amount of bullying in her previous schools (she attended three different high schools prior to Unity). Her past experience with bullying brings a sincere empathy to what Josh is going through. Having previously been subjected to these terms of hate speech (Butler, 1997; Davies, 2006; Rasmussen, 2004), Riley takes personal offense to the normative violence they invoke. Her time at Unity has provided her with a framework in which to critically evaluate the cruelty she experienced and to reject any manifestation of similar violence here. Based on Unity’s model of inclusion, Riley believes these acts of hate speech need to be immediately “shut down.” I suggest Riley has come to this powerful understanding of hate speech through the sense of community (family) she experiences at Unity. The school has recognized her as a vital part of the family, and in her insisting that Josh stand up for himself, she is trying to offer him the same.

Riley’s declaration that “We don’t do that around here...we don’t put up with that kind of thing...we do not accept that at this school,” reveals the impact Josh’s refusal to address the bullying has on her sense of “we,” of the community of the school. I believe what Riley is trying to accomplish here is to let Josh know that his complacency influences everyone. Riley’s assertion Josh must be the one to address the bullying implies that not only has a wrong been

done against him, but he also is doing wrong in not reporting it. Riley doesn't just want the bullies to be sanctioned; she wants Josh to come to a realization that Unity is a family that accepts and recognizes Josh for who he is.

In urging Josh to report the bullying, rather than doing so for him, Riley also reveals an implicit understanding that the school's acceptance and recognition of Josh can only continue if he confronts the speech seeking to deproduce him. The success of violence can only occur when it "echo[s] prior actions" of its kind and becomes a "ritualized practice" (Butler, 1997, p. 51). If Josh confronts the violence, this process can be intercepted. If Josh calls on the school's norms of inclusion, he could reestablish inclusion, rather than violence, as the ritualized practice.

Josh's response is based on his previous experiences of bullying, which he acknowledges had been much worse at his old school. Josh accepts being bullied and sees the regulation of his "freakishness" as normal. He has been so forcefully subjectified into the position of "freak" that it is hard for him to imagine anything else. This is reflected in his insistence that "It don't matter." Still, the bullying remains unacceptable to Riley, so much so that for her, Josh's full acceptance into the family of Unity is contingent on his ability to address the bullying that has taken place. Ironically, Riley positions herself as a gatekeeper, in effect refusing to recognize Josh until he "realizes we don't do that around here" and conforms to Unity's inclusive culture, including enforcing norms of inclusion on other students. When Josh appears in the hallway, my impression was that Sara likely affirmed Riley's position as gatekeeper and urged Josh to continue discussing the issue with Riley.

In addition to illustrating the significance of family loyalty, I suggest this snapshot reveals the firm stance taken to protect transgender students. As Jenny suggests in Snapshot 9, there seems to be a type of privileging accorded to LGBT students, particularly when it comes to

bullying. My observations tend to concur with this sentiment. During my observations, transphobic and homophobic epithet were more swiftly addressed than those that were sexist, racist, or ableist. The fact inclusion is not evenly practiced in the school – and that students feel there is privileging taking place –pointing to a significant lack of intersectional analysis. As mentioned in Chapter 5, I worry this may provide a sense of false security to students who struggle with normative violence, especially those who embody multiple marginalized identities. For these students, who embody multiple axes of oppression and experience intersectional forms of regulation, Unity may too often fall short of its goal of inclusion. I address the challenge of vulnerability, and the juxtaposition it has with the school’s goal of inclusion, further in the conclusion of this chapter.

Framing the Acceptability of Bullying

Students frame the bullying that happens at Unity in various ways. For the most part, bullying is largely not tolerated. Circles are used on a regular basis to address bullying and are considered a space that offers everyone an avenue to express their concerns and receive recognition. Even still, many of my participants confided that teasing/bullying is just something they do; something everyone does. They are aware of the stance Unity takes on bullying, and how the school has worked to create a safe space, but at the same time, virtually every student admits to bullying. The behavior they described was not unlike that reviewed in Snapshot 9 (Zak calling Jenny a “muffin top”), in which students assume the teasing is harmless. Students often frame bullying as a natural part of high school and being a teenager. One student, who I interviewed the semester after he had graduated, admitted he used to be a bully:

There is a lot of bullying there, but I feel like that's because... [pause] they're so-
I'm not saying they're so young because I'm only, like, a couple years older, but...

You just, like, learn more responsibilities. Like, I used to be a bully there. I used to talk crap about people in the hall sometimes. I used to whisper about people to my friends. I mean, I do it sometimes, but really not- not to hurt people.

(Interview, 12/9/15)

For this student, bullying is just a natural part of being a high schooler. His perspective on being involved is that it was all in good fun. He was younger and perhaps immature (he was 19 at the time of the interview). And most important, there was no intent to harm anyone. His description falls in line with the prosocial teasing outlined by Mills and Carwile (2009). Yet at the same time he is able to acknowledge and label his actions as bullying, implying an awareness of the harm they may have caused. Other students also reported this sentiment. Although students insist that their teasing is meant in good fun, they also are aware that it has the potential to be (and sometimes is) harmful.

Some students I spoke with articulated understanding of the complexities of defining bullying, recognizing how the close relationships at the school make it difficult to distinguish welcomed teasing from harmful bullying. In a different interview, I asked a student about school responses to bullying and was told:

I mean like- there's a certain way like, different ways of bullying. That like people might not notice that it's hurting the other person. So maybe they [teachers] like... Nobody knows people's intentions. *Sooo* maybe the teachers might not know exactly, like if they're [students] just playing around, or like if it's serious.

(Interview, 12/15/15)

Here the student identifies that teachers do take notice, but it can be challenging to recognize an incident as teasing or bullying. As noted previously, the task of differentiating between the two can be challenging; insofar as the distinction relies on understanding students' intentions and feelings, teachers are essentially asked to read their students' minds. Did the teaser *intend* to hurt the target? Did the target *feel* hurt or belittled? Did other students *feel* hurt or offended? Later in the interview, the student clarified that there were always three different perspectives on an act of bullying: 1) the bully's view, of either "I was just teasing" or "I really hate you"; 2) the victim's view, of either "I think you're joking" or "that really hurt me"; and 3) the teacher's/adult's view, of either "I'm sure they're just teasing" or "that is not acceptable." The fact this student is able to identify these complexities of bullying suggests she has given a lot of thought to it, an important application of the critical thinking skills Unity encourages, which I explore further at the end of this chapter.

When students seek to justify a particular instance of bullying, they rely on one of two explanations. Either the bullying is insignificant ("I was only kidding") or it is necessary ("They deserved it"). Both of these perspectives recognize the transphobia, homophobia, and/or heterosexism involved, but make excuses for it, either in general or in the particular manifestation. Even the rationalizations for bullying reveal that bullying serves to reproduce heteronormative values, creating additional vulnerability for students and limiting the recognition granted within the school. Furthermore, the manner in which students rationalize bullying suggests that teasing-bullying is seen as a form of prosocial bullying with merit for building inclusion, while bullying seen as harmful serves to break down the "family" of Unity.

"I was only kidding."

Snapshot 11

Bobby is in a rowdy mood today. In John's class, he has done little more than get everyone riled up. He keeps joking around with four boys who are squished onto the couch on the classroom's stage. I'm sitting with another student on the main floor, reviewing his work. Suddenly we are interrupted by a loud outburst from Bobby.

"Ohhh! Man! Why don't you get a little closer...touching his leg like that! Maybe you're a homo." Adam, the boy he's addressing, moves his leg away from the boy he touched. "It's alright man. We like faggots around here!" Bobby says, laughing.

A third boy on the couch chimes in and asks Adam, "He pretty enough to prick?" referring to the boy whose leg Adam had touched.

"No man, he's [Adam's] the catcher!" says the last boy – implying Adam would be the submissive partner in a sexual encounter.

The three boys (but not Adam) hoot in appreciation of their own hilarity.

Adam lets out a quieter, halting laugh that suggests discomfort and trying to play along.

John yells at them, "ENOUGH!"

"Yo, man," Bobby looks at John. "We jus' playin'."

"Yeah," Says John. "We don't play like that around here."

The boys quiet down for a bit, whispering to each other. Every once in a while, they break into laughter. From time to time I see students looking towards the boys, distracted by their goofing around. As I try to get back to work with the student I've been helping, I continue to hear homophobic epithets quietly being said back and forth among the boys.

It isn't long before John puts his pen down in frustration and lets out a low, forceful groan. "Bobby! Enough."

Bobby stands up, irritated. "Jeez, man. Take a chill pill." He heads out of the room.

John shakes his head in frustration.

This snapshot illustrates a common occurrence at Unity High: friends “joking” around with each other. Sometimes someone might get uncomfortable, but they continue to tolerate the teasing. Since nothing is said or done to counter the tease, insults build and build. This is representative of the bullying that all of my participants admitted to, and had no shame in admitting. The premise that students are “only kidding” allows them to believe their actions are permissible. The sense is that everyone jokes like this, so what’s the big deal? They more or less explicitly frame the teasing as a prosocial friendship building activity. When I had the opportunity to interview Bobby we discussed the incident described in the snapshot. He admitted his actions were homophobic, but again insisted that he was just kidding and everyone knew it.

Contrary to Bobby’s insistence that his heterosexist teasing was no big deal, such actions harm the overall culture of the school (and some of the participants). Defending heterosexist bullying as “just” friendly teasing reinforces the discursive force of the citation as rightfully regulating gender and sexuality, regardless of whether or not the perpetrator is truly kidding and whether or not the target agrees. As such, the presence of this type of bullying counters the inclusion set forth by Unity High.

Bobby initiates gender and sexuality regulation when he sees the legs of two males touching on the couch. Given that there are four boys sitting on a couch meant for three, some

touching is inevitable. This is of no importance to Bobby, who identifies the physical interaction as something a “homo” would do, commencing a series of insults towards Adam. Bobby’s initiation of regulatory teasing targeting Adam’s sexuality is immediately accepted by the two other boys on the couch. They add to the insults by identifying both roles in a homoerotic relationship. They threaten the hetero-masculinity of Adam and the boy he touched by suggesting a potential attraction between the two, and suggesting the boy’s possible feminine beauty as cause to be “pricked.” This comment is then trumped by the insinuation that it doesn’t matter if he is pretty because Adam must be the “catcher.” This sexualized exchange calls on the repetition of assumed hetero-genders: the pretty, passive, sexually receptive female and the strong, active, sexually insertive male.

This repetition is exactly what makes the boys’ insults so powerful. Their derisive labeling of gay sex acts and roles serves to denigrate gay male masculinity, calling on a gender binary that requires one partner to be “female” in order to be penetrated. The implication is that any male who would be willing (or want) to be penetrated cannot be masculine. A “real” man would never allow himself to be “pricked.” This analysis also resonates with Pascoe’s (2007) findings that calling a boy a fag has little to do with his sexuality, but everything to do with his (lack of) masculinity. The force of this attack is not lost on John, who is well aware of how the boys’ acts reverberate homophobic and sexist ideals throughout the room. Although the boys may have been okay with this teasing, John proclaims its unacceptability within the school.

When I interviewed Bobby, we discussed this interaction along with other homophobic behaviors he had displayed while I was observing at the school. He remained steadfast in his assertion that his comments were not meant to hurt anyone, and that everyone knew this because he was close with them.

I mean it's...it's the whole thing of, you know, what you see in a person. I mean I've lived with one of the teachers here, that's gay, and his son that's gay. And um, you know, it's...it's comfortability, you know? I would tell [the teacher] all the time, you know, 'Oh you're just a fag.' And- but he *knows* what I mean, in that I don't mean to harm [him] in any way. And these are also words like, you know, that I...that people use just, you know, it's...it's not to *hurt anybody*. It's like '*Ah it's cold as a bitch!*' Does that mean because there's a woman around, or a female dog, that you should never say that word again? You know? (Interview, 6/12/15)

When Bobby states that he has lived with one of this gay teachers, he asserts the relevance of a close relationship in harmless teasing. His preface that it's "what you see in a person," suggests that he can tell whether someone will be okay with the teasing – probably based on their close relationship, a perspective that is further supported by his statement that when there is comfort with someone, this type of joking becomes harmless. As noted previously, this type of relationship building is directly connected to the prosocial teasing found by Mills and Carwile (2009) work. However, Bobby's next statements reveal an underlying understanding that such teasing carries meaning beyond what the speaker intends. Bobby brings up the phrase "cold as a bitch," arguing that the ubiquity of such slurs make them harmless, yet his reference to female dogs makes it clear that he is aware of the citational force behind the word. Still, he does not acknowledge that equating women with dogs might be a problem. Bobby's logic attempts to nullify both the present and historical relevance of his words and actions.

Bobby draws a parallel between the teasing that happened in the close personal relationship between him and his teacher and the teasing that happens in the classroom. He does not acknowledge the "public" nature of classroom teasing or the possible impact on bystanders.

Even if all of the boys on the couch were fine with the teasing (and I suspect that Adam wasn't), its force was felt throughout the room.

What was perhaps the most damning for the class was Bobby's utterance that "we like faggots around here." I believe the echo of this statement throughout the room counteracts any sense of inclusion that had been established in the school. The excess history and reiterative value of the words linger in the room. The juxtaposition of inclusive words ("we like") with derogatory words ("faggots") effectively disregards (and mocks) the inclusion suggested, and marks an excessive degradation of gay men. By implying that the closeness among students makes this type of teasing okay, Bobby suggests that the terms are known to be non-literal or non-offensive. I interpret this to mean he believes, or wants to believe, that his friends (and the whole school) will know not to take the words as they have been used in the past or as they are used elsewhere, but to laugh because...really, "we *do* like faggots around here." Just as he points to "bitch" as a word with empty meaning, so too does he expect people to hear "faggot" as neutral. The implication is that both of the words have been resignified in a manner eliminating their derogatory force. Such resignification or reclaiming is not so simple to accomplish. It is possible and can happen over time, but Butler (1997) reiterates it is not up to the speaker to determine if a harmful effect has occurred. "Speech is always in some ways out of our control" (Butler, 1997, p. 15). Although the gap between the originating context of speech and the effects it produces allow for opportunities of resignification, whether or not that will happen with any given utterance is always unknown. It is not for Bobby to determine whether or not (or how) his words have meaning.

Furthermore, Bobby's analysis fails to contextualize the performative acts of masculinity uttering the words with a regulatory force. The boys' exchange was all about bravado and "one-

upmanship” to see who could appear the most masculine by knowing the most about emasculating another. This demonstrates Butler’s (1993) assertion of a “constitutive outside” in order for individuals to come into being. “The normative force of performativity – its power to establish what qualifies as ‘being’ – works not only through reiteration, but through exclusion as well” (p. 188). The boys’ performance serves to mark the inside of the norm of masculinity, and while doing so marks emasculation as its necessary outside. They cannot perform a convincing masculinity without putting down the masculinity of someone else (Pascoe, 2007). This performative (including the acts and the words) further strengthens the citational value of the words and action that constitute it, and forcefully pushes people (especially Adam) back into their roles as conformers to and upholders of hetero-gender norms. The boys’ performance also reminds all of the students in the room of the normatively defined boundaries of acceptable hetero-masculinity. As such it severely encroaches on any safety established in the school. Students who strive to be open about their non-normative genders or sexualities face a new vulnerability of unexpected homophobia in their school. Unfortunately, even in an inclusive school students are jolted back into the “reality” of living in a heteronormative world.

“They deserved it.”

Snapshot 12 – Part One

Today at lunch, everyone is talking about a fight that happened yesterday between Quinn and a transgender boy. The two of them have been fighting on and off for over a year. Apparently things have gotten worse lately, and yesterday Quinn called him by his previous (female) name. Students cluster around this lunch table to hear Quinn, and others, try to defend her actions.

“He started it. He sayin’ shit he knew gonna hit me deep, so I said something I knew gonna hit him deep,” Quinn laments.

The table is split. About a third of the students think that Quinn was in the right, while two thirds think she was in the wrong.

Rachel questions her, “Yeah, but no one knew his name. You think you can say shit like that and it’s no big deal?”

Before Quinn can respond, Skylar piggybacks on Rachel’s comment, “I mean that’s pretty low, man. That kinda worse than if he jus’ callin’ you a dyke or something.” (Quinn is a lesbian.)

Quinn gets defensive, “He. Started. It. What part of that don’t you understand?”

Je’mal comes to her defense. “It true. I saw it. He eggin’ you on... Callin’ you a whinny little bitch. Mmm-hm!” he says, shaking his head no, as if implying Quinn had no choice but to fight.

“See?! Thank you!” Quinn says to Je’mal.

“But don’t you think it’s different?” Rachel asks. “I mean, no one knew his name! He doesn’t even wanna show his face around here anymore.”

“Bullshit! He wanna scrap [fight] after school. No one cares. We all know he’s trans,” Quinn argues.

Rachel shakes her head in disgust. I think about jumping in, asking if these kinds of fights happen often. This is the first fight I have heard of in which a student’s identity was central to the attack. Before I have a chance to think of the right thing to say, Skylar tries a different angle.

“What if you were trans and no one knew your name, and someone did that to you?”

Je’mal interrupts, “Oh please! He deserved it!”

“Damn straight!” Quinn exclaims and gives Je’mal a high-five. “He had it comin’.”

Occasionally, behavior that I would describe as bullying at Unity High was posed as “fair” - someone deserved to be put down. This framing corresponds with the assertion that a student had “no choice” but to fight. This snapshot highlights how such reasoning plays out. Quinn feels justified in fighting the transgender boy because he insulted her first. The severity of her assault (calling him by his previous name) is justified because in Quinn’s eyes, it is equivalent to the harm he caused when he said something “he knew gonna hit me deep.” Although the majority of students take her remark as dangerous and offensive, Quinn refuses to see her actions as harmful. Je’mal’s support of Quinn further bolsters her reasoning that the boy deserved it. The fact that students are having this discussion and considering the impact of the fight reflects the successful deployment of critical pedagogy in the school (and discussed further below). Nevertheless, Quinn’s continuing assertion that she is justified in her actions indicates a lack of respect for the impact it has had on the whole school. Most of the students speaking with her agree she went too far, in effect indicating that they are impacted by Quinn’s behavior.

From Quinn’s statement that the boy said something he knew would impact her, we can infer that the two know each other well and may have been friendly previously (which would also explain how Quinn knows his old name). Again, those we are closest with contribute to our vulnerability and have the greatest potential to contribute to our own “undoing” (Butler, 2004b). Whatever the boy said to Quinn, she is so hurt that she lashes out in defense; she feels it only fair

to call the transgender boy by his female name – an act which, in transgender communities, is widely held as a violent denial of identity.

Calling a transgender person by a previous, mis-gendering name serves to mark the person as fake or imposter, invalidating their current identity. The boy Quinn insulted in this way is obviously impacted, as we hear from Rachel that “he doesn’t even want to show his face around here anymore.” Given that no one had known this boy’s female name, Rachel and Skylar contend the damage is irreversible. Skylar’s comment that the insult is even “worse than if he jus’ callin’ you a dyke or something.” I believe this suggests that the students acknowledge a hierarchy of insults, and they push Quinn to agree with their assessment of the relative severity of her insult. As a last resort Skylar, tries to appeal to empathy, asking Quinn to put herself in the boy’s shoes. Quinn rejects all of this reasoning (as does Je’mal, who ends up being her main support). For Quinn there is no going beyond “He. Started. It.”; this alone is enough to justify the fight. Je’mal backs up Quinn’s claim and identifies the forceful words hurled at Quinn as reason for fighting the boy, insisting, “he had it comin’.”

Quinn indirectly references the close relationships in the school as justification for her actions. When she asserts, “we all know he’s trans,” she suggests that the force of mis-naming and mis-gendering is neutralized because he has been accepted at the school *as* a (transgender) boy. Revealing details about his gender history is inconsequential for Quinn, because the fact of his transgender status was never secret. However, the friends at the table reject this analysis. Rachel, Skylar, and the others who voice disagreement with Quinn assert that using the boy’s transgender status against him is violent even in the context of overall acceptance in the school. Their argument aligns with Butler’s analysis of the violence incurred when a collective ethos “imposes itself on the present” (Butler, 2005, p.4). Quinn’s interpretation of the collective as

accepting of her insults fails to consider “the social and cultural conditions it includes” (Butler, 2005, p. 6). A collective ethos must continually address the changing social conditions in which it materializes. Quinn fails to consider the inclusive environment of the school as a mitigating factor to what may otherwise be a “tolerable” insult. Whereas Rachel and Skylar acknowledge the challenges of being transgender, the social and cultural significance of a transgender person’s name, and the safety the school has attempted to secure for transgender students, Quinn implies she does not. In any case, Quinn’s argument is revealed as a transparent excuse when we remember that she acknowledges she was trying to hurt the boy as he had hurt her, confirming that Quinn understood her act as causing harm.

Jackie Regales’ (2008) research identifies the act of changing one’s name as a significant defining moment for youth who are transitioning genders. Youth in her study report feeling empowered when they are called their chosen name, and rejected when others refused to acknowledge it. Regales (2008) noted, “choosing a new name is part of [the] self-constructed identity...to evade or deny that denies who [s/he] is, or is trying to become” (p. 96). Quinn’s action of denying the boy his chosen name presents a rejection of his embodiment and therefore marks him as unrecognizable. Butler (1997) emphasizes this process of subjectification, highlighting, “being called a name is...one of the conditions by which a subject is constituted in language” (p. 2), and therefore grants a “social existence of the body” (p. 5). By calling the transgender boy his female name, Quinn imposes on him a social existence as *not* a “real” boy. The norms of gender and sexuality creep into Quinn’s repertoire of insults in order to provide extra force in demeaning him. The symbolic gesture of denying the boy his name works to position Quinn as the controller of gender. Quinn becomes a mechanism within the regime of truth (Foucault, 1995) dictating the borders of acceptable gender.

In addition to highlighting the constituting effects of bullying, I believe the group discussion in this snapshot reveals a ranking of injurious speech. When Skylar suggests “That’s kinda worse than if he jus’ callin’ you a dyke,” she reveals a sense of hierarchy of which insults do more harm. Visible embodiment seems to be an indicator within this ranking. Quinn is a lesbian and performs a butch femininity. The transgender boy is masculine and has “passed” as a boy ever since he set foot in the school. Skylar’s comment seems to reinforce the idea that because someone might be able to look at Quinn and correctly assume she is a “dyke,” but someone could not look at the boy and know his past history of being raised as a girl, the latter insult is more injurious. The latter reveals a “secret.” As such, revealing it significantly impacts the family relationship and trust within the school. Rachel emphasizes this by saying, “You think you can say shit like that and it’s no big deal?” The majority of the students at the table seem to reason that even if the boy “deserved it,” as Quinn insists, the harm to him could not have been equivalent to the harm done to her. Paradoxically, this suggests an acceptance of bullying as long as it doesn’t cross this some ill-defined line. Quinn appears to have crossed the line. This crossing leaves the whole family – the school – feeling betrayed.

I argue the complex aspects of the argument described in this snapshot highlight the varying ways students come to understand how bullying works to constitute them as gendered and sexed beings. It also reinforces what most of my participants shared regarding the prevalence of bullying at the school, and suggests the collective understanding of ranking bullying marks most of it as tolerable, if not acceptable. Rankings allow for depictions of bullying as either teasing (“I was only kidding”), or fair game (“they deserved it”), with only a few incidents understood as crossing a line to truly problematic bullying. However, this snapshot also reveals the complexity of such a determination. Where is the line? To what extent do the students agree

on it, and it's criteria? I continue below with the second half of this snapshot to reveal this complexity and highlight the school's role in influencing students' judgments of bullying.

Thinking Critically About Bullying

Snapshot 12 – Part Two

The discussion of Quinn's fight goes on for 20 minutes. The students keep trying to persuade each other to see it their way. At one point Jena gets really upset that, as she sees it, Je'mal and Quinn are being so nonchalant about the whole ordeal.

"Quinn! You're being an ass. You need to stop and think about how your actions go beyond just the two of you," Jena says angrily.

"Exactly!" Rachel adds.

Brooke has been listening quietly for most of the conversation. She is a senior and has been a circle keeper [leader] for two years now. Throughout the conversation she has been shaking her head no or nodding yes as her classmates make their points. Every once in a while I see her give a suggestive look to either Jena or Rachel, who are also circle keepers, but newer to the process. Each time I think that Brooke is about to say something, she doesn't. I'm unsure why she is holding back and wonder if it might be a method she learned in circle.

My curiosity gets the best of me and I can no longer stay out of the conversation. I ask the group, "So how often does this type of thing happen?"

"It doesn't!" Skylar exclaims in frustration.

"Bullshit!" Quinn retorts. "It happens all the time. You jus' don't see it."

Skylar guffaws, "Oh come on!"

“It does. An’ it’s all different and shit. Like kids jus’ give you looks. Or they post shit online. Like, it could be the smallest thing, but it keep happenin’ and it jus’ build up, until one day it’s like...KA-BOOM!” she yells, pushing her arms out over the table. A few students are caught off guard and jump back in surprise.

“Like yesterday?” I ask.

“Yeah. I guess. I mean, me an’ him been going at it awhile and they still do nothin’ about it, so...yeah. I guess.”

I see Rachel roll her eyes as Quinn says this. Brooke is still calmly and quietly listening. I continue with Quinn.

“You mean the school doesn’t do anything?”

“Yeah,” Quinn continues, “Like they knew I ‘bout’ta go up on him, but they didn’t do nothin’.”

“What did you think they would do?” I ask.

“Well, like, a lot this shit happen on the bus. They need to change one of our busses so we’re not always on the same one.”

Rachel breaks in, “In real life can you just change busses?”

“Yeah! If it mean not starin’ at his ugly mug. Yeah!” Quinn angrily exclaims.

At this point, Brooke finally speaks up.

“Quinn, don’t you see how this goes beyond you? Beyond him?” Quinn looks down. She doesn’t say anything. It is clear Brooke’s perspective is taken with authority. “You start throwin’ stuff like that round and it impacts all of us.”

Quinn looks up at Brooke. “Come on!”

“It does. You know it does. You’ve affected every trans or queer kid at this school. It changes the whole environment. You’re breaking down everything we’ve worked so hard to build.”

Quinn shakes her head. “Don’t start pullin’ that circle bullshit on me. I know you think if we just have a little circle and talk and hold hands, it’ll all work out.” Now Brooke is the one rolling her eyes. “Well it won’t. I’ll do it. I don’t care. But I’m telling you it ain’t gonna make a difference.” Quinn gets up to walk away.

Brooke makes an effort to stop her. “Quinn, don’t leave.”

“Nah, whatever. I had enough,” she says and continues walking out the door.

Brooke looks to Rachel. “They’re not gonna stop,” she says.

“I know,” Rachel replies in a defeated voice.

“You all makin’ too much ‘a this,” says Je’mal. “They work it out.”

Both Rachel and Brooke give him a dirty look, as if to imply he is being naive.

This snapshot reveals the extent to which the pedagogical goal of critical thinking is infiltrated throughout the school. The students were willing and able to have a discussion about

their different perspectives on the incident, with an impressive degree of nuance. This type of respectful challenging of each other is common in the school, and it appears most students appreciate it. One student even commented to me, “It’s kinda cool. We can, like, argue and fight and stuff, but still be friends.” Even though this conversation ends with Quinn leaving, it nevertheless shows a fairly high tolerance among the students for sticking with uncomfortable conversations and listening to different points of view. As discussed in the first half of this snapshot, the students are primarily occupied with helping Quinn see how her actions go beyond just her and the boy she fought. These friends believe the individual motivations for the fight do not measure up against the risk to the supportive environment of the school. Quinn does not change her position, but does reveal some important aspects of microaggressions happening in the school, as well as her concern the school could have done more to prevent the fight. The two views expressed in this exchange suggest two very different ethical frameworks students are using to assess the fight. On one side is Quinn’s position that only one person has been hurt and it was deserved, and on the other side is the majority of students’ position insisting everyone is injured by Quinn’s acts, acknowledging the discursive impact. They see Quinn’s actions as leaving all students at Unity High vulnerable, counteracting the inclusion they strive to maintain in the school.

Jena’s point that Quinn’s “actions go beyond just the two” students reflects a standard principle of school-based restorative justice practices (Vaandering, 2010) and is taught in the circles held at the school. Therefore it is noteworthy that Jena, Rachel, and Brooke (all circle keepers) step forward to pose question that help keep the debate going. Their training in handling difficult conversations helps keep Quinn engaged for longer than most teenagers might. I interpret the circle keepers as leaders in helping to reveal and critique networks of control

working to constrain the subjectivity of both Quinn and the boy. When Rachel pushes, “In real life can you just change buses?” she is asking Quinn to acknowledge that the school could not simply fix the problem because the problem goes beyond the school, beyond the bus. Brooke goes even further to assert that Quinn has “affected every trans or queer kid at this school,” and in doing so “changes the whole environment.” I believe what Rachel and Brooke are trying to help Quinn see the citational force of her words and the symbolic power they hold in breaking down the inclusive space they have worked so hard to secure. This may be part of what defines the line that cannot be crossed. Betraying the family by marking one of their own an outcast is fundamentally unacceptable to these students.

Quinn’s inability to see her friends’ point of view, at least during this 20-minute encounter, may have something to do with the bullying she feels is present throughout the school, which she believes they are not acknowledging. She insists, “It happens all the time. You just don’t see it.” In other words, Quinn feels bullied on a regular basis, but the instances of bullying are either coded (to appear unthreatening) or not addressed. Her assertion that “kids just give you looks. Or they post shit online. Like, it could be the smallest thing, but it keep happenin’ and it just build up,” suggests Quinn may have been experiencing cruel teasing and/or microaggressions. Cruel teasing is a form of bullying, but it remains difficult for others to recognize the damage being done. Additionally, as Snapshot 9 reveals (when Jenny identified being called a “muffin top” as an insult carrying both race and gender implications), there are often times when the teasing is addressed, but not in a manner that classifies it as bullying or that fully recognizes the intersectional force of the regulation.

Microaggressions can be even subtler than cruel teasing. As noted in Chapter 2, microaggressions consist of small everyday acts that serve to degrade minorities. The research of

Nadal et al. (2011) documents the significance of microaggressions for LGB individuals and their adolescent development. Repeated exposure to microaggressions lead youth to develop a lower self-esteem and an overall lower performance in school. When Quinn suggests that “small things” add up over time, she is referencing the real impact of microaggressions. Nadal et al. notes, “sexual orientation microaggressions can take many forms in schools—between students, between students and staff members, between administrators and students, etc.” (2011, p. 254). In this sense they become a part of the culture of the school, active and available at all times. Since it becomes thoroughly ingrained within the culture of a school, it becomes more difficult to see, as Quinn suggests to her friends that no one is taking notice. When Quinn suggests the school “knew” she was about to get in a fight, but still did nothing, she identifies the school’s inability to take action in a way she feels is effective. Therefore she is left feeling unheard and unsupported. At this point it is no wonder Quinn feels there is nothing else she can do and...*KA-BOOM*.

I find it significant that Quinn has offered this perspective to everyone at the table, but her friends do not probe for details. Again, Quinn has not been heard. In fact, her concerns are rejected. The friends at the table are not willing to entertain the possibility that Quinn is being bullied just as the transgender boy is. Rachel rolls her eyes upon hearing Quinn’s assertion that no one at the school has tried to help stop the bullying Quinn has experienced. When I inquire further, Quinn gives the example of her bus not being changed, which is when Rachel tries to convince her she can’t change buses in real life. Rather than acknowledging the vulnerability Quinn is subtly referencing, I believe Rachel tries to steer Quinn away from an individualistic analysis of the situation to a macro perspective that may highlight systemic inequalities of gender and sexuality. At this point, Quinn becomes angered and seems to be feeling that she is being

targeted. It is clear by the end of the conversation that Quinn senses she is being pushed into having a circle. She isn't interested, but says she will participate, even though "it ain't gonna make a difference." In making this gesture, Quinn acknowledges the power of the collectivity in the school to define the morality of this fight.

The students may interpret a circle as the best option for helping Quinn see the impact her actions have on everyone around her – that her actions ultimately limit the gender expression of everyone, including her. A circle would also ensure that Quinn's concerns of being bullied would be addressed and validated, which is not the case in this informal conversation. Most importantly, the circle serves as a place to address the emotional residue believed to have touched everyone, as well as the emotional residue adding to Quinn's belief her actions were justified. In *Frames of War* Butler (2010) investigates how emotions and affect come to frame our view of situations. Affect serves as a way to critique how different situations are framed and "call into question the taken-for-granted character of those frames" (p. 34). This allows individuals to assess their responsibility in "sustaining the social conditions of life" (p. 35), or in allowing someone to be recognized. I believe when Quinn frames her actions as justified, she is doing so because of the hurt and anger she is experiencing. Butler suggests that if Quinn were able to call on those emotions and use them to critically consider why the boy hurt her in the first place, and why she wanted to hurt him in return, she might be able to see broader networks of control and regulation impacting both the boy and her. The challenge with using emotion to guide moral responsibility is that affect is "highly regulated by regimes of power and sometimes subject to explicit censorship" (Butler, 2010, p. 39). Therefore it is not surprising to see the influences of heteronormativity in Quinn's emotional response of hurt and anger. In an effort to ease her emotions, she calls on the norms of hetero-masculinity to incite injurious speech on the

boy. Although she knows on some level that her acts were wrong, her emotions get the best of her. The process of a restorative justice circle could allow the implications of these emotions, and their connections to heteronormativity, to be revealed (Vaandering, 2010), and likely offer everyone in the school resolution.

I argue this snapshot reveals that the process of critical thinking has already begun for the students. Their going back and forth, bringing up new perspectives, and listening to each other suggests at minimum the early stages of this critical process. Questioning presents an effective form of critique advocated by Butler and practitioners of critical pedagogy (Butler, 2004a, 2004b, 2010; Freire, 2011; Giroux, 1983, 2010; McLaren, 2007). As noted above, Butler (2004b, 2005) asserts there is a necessary connection between ethics and critique. If we want to be able to understand right from wrong, we must be able to acquire “a critical understanding of [our] social genesis and meaning” (Butler, 2005, p. 7). An individual cannot know, or judge, their actions without first critiquing the norms that have constructed those actions, and in doing so acknowledge their connection to the other who has allowed them to come into being. Critique in this sense is “an interrogation of the terms by which life is constrained in order to open up the possibility of different modes of living” (Butler, 2004b, p. 4), or what Butler refers to as “the sustaining social conditions of life” (2010, p. 35). We have a moral obligation to consider how our use of norms is implicated in the erasure of some bodies, nullifying particular individuals. This is precisely what Quinn’s friends are trying to get her to see. Quinn’s actions have, in effect, erased the transgender boy. Quinn’s unwillingness to consider how her own relation to gender (through its norms and regulations) impacts her ability to exist – that in marking the boy “not-boy” further marks her as a girl – suggests a disregard for a dependent sociality. Quinn is unable to see that the boy’s vulnerability is also her own vulnerability.

I believe it is because of Quinn's disregard for her connection to the boy, and the school community as a whole, may be what leads her friends to push so hard for her to rethink what she has done. She is seen as going against the school and rejecting the reverence of a family connection. We see the concerns this continues to hold for the students when Brooke realizes "they're not gonna stop." Je'mal's contrasting assertion that "they work it out," may imply he has hope that Quinn and the boy will find a way to resolve their differences on their own, or may be a reference to faith in the "family's" ability to resolve conflict. Still, I perceive Rachel and Brooke's reaction to Je'mal's suggestion signifies that an individual resolution between Quinn and the boy would not be enough, because it would not address the social norms contributing to an environment that allowed the fight to happen in the first place. In this regard the school remains susceptible to the gender regulation displayed, and therefore students are vulnerable.

Conclusion

This chapter reviews the common experiences of bullying that take place at Unity High. Although teasing among friends is a regular occurrence, many students are able to identify the hurtful nature of some teasing, and even label it bullying. The students' candid confessions make it clear that bullying remains prevalent at the school even though the school has a clear goal of preventing bullying and practicing anti-heteronormative values. This presents Unity High with a significant challenge: how are they to eliminate bullying when despite all efforts it continues to creep into their safe space?

I argue the students themselves seem to acknowledging the inevitability of some bullying. Emotions run deep when joking and teasing go too far and tend to influence students' interpretations of the offenses they have committed. The students' go-to defenses that they were "only kidding" or the other person "deserved it" – simultaneously acknowledge and discount the

citational forces within the students' performative acts. Rationalization of bullying in this regard has led to a ranking system. The "family" feel of Unity serves to both minimize bullying's impact, and frame it as a positive prosocial teasing that actually supports inclusion, even if it is sometimes harmful to those involved. Teasing-bullying, therefore, is ranked higher and as the most acceptable form. Ranked lower, and therefore more recognizably harmful, is bullying that is deemed necessary. This form of bullying does not serve to strengthen the familial relationships in the school, but it is seen as an acceptable and inevitable part of adolescent socialization.

Students' marking both of these forms of bullying acceptable indicates the central role bullying has in appropriately socializing students into the family of Unity High. Acts of bullying become the students' way of disciplining each other into appropriate (normative) roles. In this regard, "the power of normalization imposes homogeneity" (Foucault, 1995, p. 184), highlighting how the students of Unity strive to make everyone an insider, upholding the sense of family in the school. These forms of bullying contrast with those forms students consider unacceptable. The challenge is in distinguishing acceptable from unacceptable. The only clear examples students provide of unacceptable forms of bullying are those that present eminent harm to the family of Unity. This is to say, if the students sense a break in trust has occurred (as seen in Snapshot 10 with Josh's refusal to confront his bullying, and Snapshot12 with Quinn's refusal to contemplate responsibility in rejecting another student), the bullying cannot be accepted and will be confronted.

I would like to suggest that all of the forms of bullying within the school will always create additional vulnerability for the students. Even if students all agree that something is harmless "teasing," teases still have the power to negatively impact the school community and threaten the inclusive feel. However, the school's goal of critical thinking does seem to combat

some of these negative effects. As indicated in Snapshot 12, Unity students do work to understand the broader implications of their actions. They push each other to consider the impact of violence both on the individual and the collective. Although their discussion does not always lead to agreement, students are willing to listen to each other and consider differences, skills they likely learned through the schools circles and restorative justice program. The school's use of critical thinking helps students to influence their classmates' unreflective justifications for bullying. The restorative justice classes and school-wide circles support these efforts and provide students with an avenue for effectively deconstructing the systems of oppression influencing their and others' actions, and impacting the inclusive environment of the school. Their sincere efforts to work through conflicts such as that in Snapshot 12 indicate a learning environment that has found a positive byproduct of the unfortunate inevitability of school bullying.

Given that Unity High continues to see regular instances of bullying, some of which draws on and reinforces heteronormativity, is it fair to call this school inclusive? I believe it is. As Ellsworth (1989) notes, the diversity that inevitable comes with building inclusive spaces makes it challenging to adequately validate the voices of all individuals. Power hierarchies remain even when everyone is committed to inclusion. The best option for mitigating differences is to acknowledge them and consider the individual contributions each person makes to identify hegemony. It is for this reason I include aspects of *struggling through the challenges of inclusion* as a main component to building inclusion (as referenced in Chapter 2). Identifying differences and the contributions they make towards the group is often presented as a struggle. However, this is exactly what Unity High is working through. The variations of bullying they face within the school seem to be inevitable challenges to inclusion given the pervasive nature of heteronormativity, but the very fact the school actively struggles with bullying – by helping

students heal through circles, restorative justice, and encouraging critical thinking (which allows students to constructively confront each other) – indicates a full commitment to inclusion.

Therefore I suggest that even though momentary lapses of safety occur within the school, it ultimately remains an inclusive environment. In other words, success for Unity’s goal of inclusion should not be measured by their effectiveness in isolating the school community from heteronormative violence, but rather by their effectiveness in addressing and recovering from inevitable manifestations of normative violence, including bullying.

Therefore, although heteronormativity remains a forceful presence in the school, by maintaining pedagogical goals of openness, acceptance, and critical thinking Unity is able to bring a measure of safety to the space and help students confront the domineering impact of heteronormativity. The students of Unity High will not be able to remain within its protective walls forever and must learn how to cope with the constraining forces of oppression throughout our society. Allowing students to contemplate the oppressive factors of the world within a safe environment helps prepare them to cope with, address, and ultimately work to dismantle the oppressive discourses they will encounter in the world.

There is a process of negotiation that takes place for the gender and sexual minority students of Unity. They must learn to balance the inclusion present in their school with the reality of heteronormativity throughout society (including at the school). Therefore the school works to support students as they assess the meaning of their marginality and the impact it may have on their future. I turn now to consider this process and reveal how Unity High both formally and informally brings students opportunities to critically reflect on the individual they are becoming.

CHAPTER 7

Negotiating Values and Finding Self

Advocating Critical Thinking

Schools often neglect to engage minority students in the type of critical thinking necessary for overcoming discriminatory barriers (Fine, 1989; Freire, 2011; Giroux, 1983, 2010; McLaren, 2007; Morrell, 2008). Many critical theorists have identified the failings of schools to help students understand (or identify) their position within social hierarchies and the implication it has on expectations of them and on their overall lives (Ferguson, 2000; Fields, 2008; Fine, 1989; Freire, 2011; Giroux, 1983, 2010; Kumashiro, 2003; Luttrell, 2003; Mayo, 2004; McLaren, 2007; Morrell, 2008). It is more common for schools to remove controversial topics from curriculum and silence students who ask questions that may provoke disorder or rebellion than to engage their students. Unity High departs from this pattern and embraces students who ask questions and challenge the status quo.

As reviewed in Chapter 4, a key element of Unity High's philosophy is the pedagogical goal of critical thinking. Teachers and students are encouraged to question each other and explore where questioning leads. For example, one semester when the school board proposed privatizing several schools in the district, Unity teachers decided to introduce the topic to students. At first several students were skeptical of their teachers' motives – were they just worried about losing their jobs? Through critical dialogue, students explored various implications of the privatization plan, including the defunding of special projects in the school (such as trips, advocacy work, arts, music, and sports), homogenization of the student body (such as students with disabilities being segregated into other schools), and yes, the possibility of

teachers losing their jobs and/or benefits. The students came to agree that privatizing the school would not be a good thing for teachers or students. The teachers, cautious of potential retaliation from the district, backed off from the issue but allowed students to continue their own investigation and activism. Students teamed up with a local grassroots organization and campaigned across the city to reject the school board's proposal. Throughout this process the students learned to think critically about how the policies structuring their education were determined. They began to have a clearer understanding of the politics involved and the impact corporatization had had on other schools. The knowledge and skills developed in this process was only possible because the school values teaching their students how to question the power structures impacting their lives.

The effects of Unity's focus on critical thinking – particularly, the flexible curriculum and use of dialogue – are briefly illustrated in Snapshot 1 (in which Jaime proposes writing a manual on “How to be a Pretty Boy”). In this chapter, I elaborate on those themes and identify how the goal of critical thinking helps students develop a more complex understanding of their place in the world. I show how the school's effort to help students towards an understanding of self in the world. The school's ability to teach students to think critically, both through their formal assignments and in the various informal spaces in the school, allows students develop self-awareness. At Unity, students learn to consider their past and their future, while also considering the structural constraints impacting their opportunities. For many students, this reflection reveals inequalities that need to be addressed, and highlights the significant difference between the support they experience within the school and the realities outside its doors. I argue that as students recognize social inequalities and consider the impact systems of oppression will have on

their lives, they use the spaces within the school to negotiate how hegemonic values will influence who they are allowed to be or become.

How Thought Provoking Projects Provide Students an Avenue for Understanding Self

Adolescence is normally a time of self-discovery, a process that on average is challenging (Best, 2011; Cote, 2009; Johnson, 2015). Minority students can have a difficult time reconciling this process if not surrounded by supportive resources (Balsam et al., 2011; Best, 2011; Bregman, 2013; Hammack, Thompson, & Pilecki, 2009; Johnson, 2015; Nadal et al., 2011). Many of Unity High's teachers respect this process of self-discovery and work to bring the important concerns of students into lessons and assignments. For example, in Snapshot 4, the students begin to analyze why their dads were not present for the school's Dad's Day. John (the English teacher) pushes them to think more broadly about the issues of race, class, gender, and sexuality impacting students at the school and their relationships with family members. He turns the conversation into a writing assignment that allows the topic to be continued, encouraging a prolonged dialogue.

Assignments and class discussions focusing on students' real life concerns also offer students an opportunity to have their voices heard. Teachers do not shy away from having students consider the various forces impacting their life chances. Art and creative writing are used as tools for exploring self. The assignments from the Art/English class were fashioned so those students interested in going deeper into their personal lives could do so, but it was not a requirement. For example, in one assignment, John and Sara began by asking students to generate lists. Over the course of a week the students received assignments like: list 10 things you're really good at; draw 5 things you ate today; list 10 movies you like; draw 5 places you want to go before you die; list 5 obstacles you face, and so on. The following week, students

were asked to write a story incorporating a minimum of five items from their lists. Some students kept their stories general topics, while others wrote very personal things – struggling with parents separating, grieving a recent breakup, worrying about having no place to live, or feeling stressed about being at a new school. For the rest of the semester, as the students read and critiqued each other’s drafts, opportunities emerged to engage in critical conversations about the power structures impacting their lives. Dialogues about poverty and classism, race and racism, homophobia and sexism, family and religion all entered the classroom because of this one assignment. Thoughtful projects such as this were not uncommon and reveal the extent to which teachers at Unity went to introduce critical assignments to their students.

In the following two snapshots, I show how class assignments at Unity help students think through challenges they were facing (or had faced) in their lives. Students can be seen negotiating the meaning they want different social structures to have in their lives. These snapshots also reveal how assignments allow students to represent themselves as they want to be seen. The freedom students have to explore these dimensions of their life empower them to reach a reflective and thoughtful self-understanding.

Working through life’s challenges.

Snapshot 13

For the past few weeks I have been watching Alejandro make a ceramic bear for the Art/English class. It isn’t just any bear; it is a two-faced “febear.” This semester students have to write a fictional story and create three art pieces that illustrate the story. Alejandro has written a story about a febear: a strong, fierce, and resilient animal. A synopsis of his story is as follows:

Franki is a febear - part grizzly bear, part mountain lion, and part female or male. Febears often get bullied because of the way they look, but little do people know that if you come across a febear the wrong way, you better watch out! Franki is from the wild. She's been through being bullied a lot in her life. ... When Franki went to middle school that's where it all started to get bad. People were mean for no reason. Everyday she'd go home and pray that people would just accept her looks. Transferring schools, again and again, from middle school to middle school, was the worst for Franki. The last middle school had to be the worst ever.

“Hey two-faced freak, you want some money to get plastic surgery? You ugly prick.” The kids yelled at Franki.

Franki gave them no response, and that made them think she was a pushover and they could bully her all school year long. One of the kids yelled at Franki again, and this time she responded.

“Leave me alone.” Franki replied back to the mean kids.

“Ha, ha, ha, Franki's scared of you Rob,” one kid yelled. They all laughed.

Franki was getting so upset. She couldn't help but let her mean side show.

“Aaaaaaah!” The kids yelled. “She's turning around, run!”

Franki began to go towards the kids. They pissed her off, and what needs to be done, has to be done! As the kids ran away Franki ran faster.

“GET BACK HERE, NOW! YOU WANT TO PLAY WITH ME? THEN LETS GO. LETS GET DOWN TO THE NITTY GRITTY YOU SCARED LITTLE KITTY!”

Wham! Crash! Boom! Went the kids flying into the play-ground.

“Now laugh at that!” Franki yelled.

The kids began to cry.

.... Years go by and Franki’s middle school days are now gone. She transfers again to a different school and things get better. She made new friends, and they really liked her for who she was.In 2012 Franki’s Uncle passed away from cancer. Her uncle was like a father and Franki was really sad. Franki was so sad she didn’t even want to go to school anymore. Everyone at school noticed Franki was sad, but Franki refused to talk to anyone about it.

Many people have a dream and Franki’s is to be a successful dancer. The talent that Franki has is so unreal to the human race! ...One day Franki’s agent called, “Franki, we got you a spot on ‘So You Think You Can Dance’.”

“YOU DID?!” Franki replied.

“Do you want it?” the agent asked.

“Wow! Cool! Yes! Yes I would.”

...Franki won 1st place on the show and went on to do many, many more shows. She was a star! More years go by, and Franki is now 30 years old. Franki won several awards, and that gave her even more fame. Of course she had haters and whatnot, but that was NOT going to stop Franki from doing what she loved doing. THE END!

In the art room, Alejandro is struggling with making the two heads on his febear. I offer to help.

“Ok, what are we doing here?” I ask.

“It needs to have one face looking this way, and mean” he makes the face – furrowed brows, clenched jaw, teeth showing – “And the other face looking this way, and sweet,” he turns his head to the other direction and makes another face – soft smile, batting eyelashes – the picture of innocence.

He has the basic shape of the heads, but they are bigger than the body. We discuss the proportions of the animal and work to make the heads more symmetrical. As we work I ask Alejandro about his story.

“So, where did you come up with the idea for Franki?”

“Well, I kinda wanted to share about my experience of bein’ bullied. Ya know, to help other kids who might be going through it. So that’s where I started. But it had to be fiction, so I jus’ had this idea about a mutant bear-thing and came up with a Febear.”

“So Franki is really representing you, and your story?”

“Yeah.”

“And the two heads?”

He laughs, “The good and the bad.” I wait for him to elaborate. “Ya know... so most the time I’m really nice, like everyday I’m pretty calm. But if someone pushes my buttons, my mean side come out. So I guess that’s the same for Franki.”

“Yeah, she definitely has a mean side,” I say jokingly. Alejandro smiles at me. “So,” I ask him, “you had to deal with a lot of bullying?”

He nods his head yes.

“Things didn’t change until you got here?” I ask.

“Yeah. This school really saved me. It’s like my family now. People here really care about you.”

“Well I’m glad you found it, then!”

He nods yes. Our hands are encrusted with drying clay. Alejandro reaches towards me and pretends he’s going to get me dirty. I mirror the gestures back to him and he pouts in disapproval. I roll my eyes at him. We both laugh and continue working on his febear.

“So...” I cautiously ask, “is the part about your Uncle dying true, too?”

“Yeah. It was really hard. And when it happened, I didn’t really wanna talk to anyone, so no one knew what was goin’ on. Well they knew, but I didn’t talk to anyone. By writing this story, I had a way to let them know what I was goin’ through. Why I was so shut down those couple months.”

“Because you wanted to let your teachers know?”

“Yeah, ‘cuz I think they were really concerned ‘bout me. And I wanted let them know I was ok.”

“Wow, you must really trust them to share all this.”

He smiles and nods his head. “And I guess this was my way of predictin’ the future. Ya know, that things really would be ok.”

“And that you’ll be a famous dancer one day?”

“Of course!” he exclaims, his smile growing even larger.

The clay febear is starting to look better. We admire our work and I encourage Alejandro to continue adding texture to the body. As we are wrapping things up, I ask one last question.

“I’m curious why you used a female animal to represent you. Any significance?”

“Not really. It jus’ popped in my head. And Frank is actually my uncle’s name, so I jus’ added an ‘i’ at the end.”

The above snapshot reveals the various ways students can use creative writing to work through some of the challenges they face in life. Alejandro takes the opportunity to write a fictional story that validates and authenticates his past experiences, and predicts success and happiness for his future. I believe Alejandro’s ability to use the assignment in this way brings him healing from the bullying he has faced, as well as the loss of his uncle. Alejandro uses his character (Franki) to help him negotiate the meaning of femininity in young men. Additionally, his story brings him the opportunity to reflect on the relationships he has with others in the school and allows him to reestablish trusting connections. Healing has been a long process for Alejandro; the bullying he experienced didn’t stop until he came to Unity. Once at Unity he feels accepted and becomes comfortable being himself; he also finds he is liked for who he is. Therefore, his story becomes a manifesto of support for those being bullied. He wants to help others and wants his story to show survival is possible.

I first met Alejandro when I was in John’s classroom and offered to help students with assignments they were working on. He was one of the first kids to take me up on my offer. Working with him on his story allowed me to get to know Alejandro. He was at first shy; when I started working with him he spoke quietly, and covered his mouth when he smiled or laughed.

Once we became better acquainted, his shyness evaporated. After a few weeks, I became another friend, like the many he had in school, and he often greeted me with a hug. I knew him as a warm and kind young man.

As mentioned in Snapshot 4, Alejandro is Puerto Rican and gay. He has long silky black hair that goes past the middle of his back, which he wears in a ponytail or braid. He is small for his age; at 17 he stands only 5'5" and is very thin. Alejandro clearly identifies his "look" as a factor contributing to the bullying he experienced prior to attending Unity, suggesting he was aware of the ways in which his physicality and style violate the hegemonic norms dictating hetero-masculinity. Our heteronormative society leads strangers to interpret his hair and body size, and perhaps some of his mannerisms, as effeminate.

From my discussions with Alejandro it became clear he was only able to let the insecurity about his looks go once he got to Unity. The Alejandro I came to know didn't mind people knowing that he cared how he looked, especially having clean slick hair and neat nails. He also didn't hide the fact he was gay, and was flirty and overtly friendly with several boys in school. I believe the safety Alejandro felt at Unity allowed him to perform in this way. He no longer felt threatened that his embodiment would solicit bullying. This sense of safety allowed him to write the story described in the snapshot, which helped him think through the trauma of being bullied and the possibilities for his future.

I saw several drafts of Alejandro's story and became very familiar with it. Once I learned that "Franki" was really Alejandro, there were some parts of the story that surprised me. For instance, I couldn't see the Alejandro I knew beating kids up and throwing them across the playground (or even wanting to). However, over the several weeks I worked with him, it became clear that Alejandro's bullying resulted in him becoming a recluse and holding in the rage he felt

towards his perpetrators, a rage that he would release with devastating consequences from time to time. In his prior schools, he had been involved in several fights resulting from his standing up to his aggressors, believing that fighting would present an aura of confidence that would deter further violence. Alejandro's periodic fighting back and releasing his rage can be seen as an attempt to reposition himself from bullied to bully. This movement reveals the instability of normative categories. As Foucault (1995) has emphasized, power is not always stationary or without influence. As Alejandro came to understand how the other children regulated him, he learned he could also subject them to regulation. Bullying became so ingrained in Alejandro's embodiment that he knew both sides of the interaction inside and out. Bansel et al. (2010) argue "there is an embodied reverberation of experience over time and place, [and] an embodied memory that calls up and makes present prior acts and incidents and feelings" (p. 66). Having experienced so many instances of bullying, these embodied experiences may have caused Alejandro to shift and seek to become the dominant actor. Franki's fictional fighting, as well as Alejandro's real fighting, show that although "acts of bullying are unacceptable, they are nonetheless reiterations of the dominant order" (Bansel et al. 2010, p. 66).

The contrast between Alejandro's performance in prior schools and his performance at Unity was profound. The fact that Alejandro's character went home daily to "pray that people would just accept her looks" and developed a "two-faced" personality, suggests the significant psychological impact that bullying had on Alejandro. Butler (1997b) argues the various forces impacting our ability to materialize in the world not only constitute our subjectivity, but also our psyche. This is to say that even if we are to think or reflect on norms differently from what has been socially dictated, that very thinking requires an original norm, which *has* been socially dictated. Considering this psychic dimension to norms adds to an understanding of how

vulnerable we are to each other. “Being psychic, the norm does not merely reinstate social power, it becomes formative and vulnerable in highly specific ways” (Butler, 1997b, p. 21). The instability of norms (both socially and psychically) leads to melancholy and our continued vulnerability to others. Alejandro’s character, and her desire for people to “just accept her looks,” represents an aspect of his own melancholy.

I perceive Alejandro’s use of his character Franki as a means to “act out” a gender performance he cannot perform in reality, but desires to, signifying a loss of public femininity he cannot grieve (Butler, 1993, p. 234-235). I wonder if the reference to Franki’s two faces may reveal the split he experiences in order “to furnish an internal perspective by which to judge [himself]” (Butler, 1997b, p. 181). Sometimes he can be “really nice” and “pretty calm,” while other times he allows himself to act mean like an animal. This dual performance serves as a coping mechanism for understanding his embodiment as socially unacceptable. The psychic toll of Alejandro’s bullying may also be more broadly reflected in his choice of character. I believe the act of choosing a character that is “part grizzly bear, part mountain lion, and part female or male” indicates a reflection on the complexity of his identity in a heteronormative frame. As a Puerto Rican “effeminate” gay young man, he certainly has a complex intersectional identity that invites constriction and regulation from various institutions. The fact that Alejandro turns Franki’s life around and pronounces her “liked” for who she really is suggests he ultimately comes to judge himself (including the self that was bullied for how he looked) as acceptable. I suggest the self-acceptance Alejandro expresses through his story indicates that Unity High is a place where Alejandro is empowered to be himself and be accepted.

Additionally, I believe the safety felt within the school allowed Alejandro to heal from the loss of his uncle. His story reveals the pain he experienced with this loss and how it led to a

desire to not attend school and not share his grief with anyone. In his story, it is clear he was not open with people at school about the tragedy (“Franki refused to talk to anyone about it”), but this shifts upon reflection after the fact. When discussing his story with me, Alejandro acknowledged that one of his goals was to let his teachers “know what [he] was going through.” After experiencing so much hurt at his previous schools, along with an inability to have trusting relationships, Alejandro submits to the support and family atmosphere offered at Unity. Although it is clear that he initially was hesitant to reveal his emotional vulnerability, I believe his story confirms the psychological dependence he had on the school. His reflection during our conversation suggests he was able to recognize the different environment at Unity and allow his school “family” into his life. Letting them know he was okay, and would remain okay, served as a way to recognize the critical connection he built with the school and offered them appreciation.

The fact Alejandro named his character after his Uncle who passed away reveals a grief he continues to carry. I wonder if naming his character for his uncle but also making the character female may suggest a longing for an effeminate male role model. Although Alejandro told me that the choice of a female febear had “just popped into [his] head,” one can’t help but consider that his choice to represent himself as a female character holds significance. Because Alejandro interpreted his feminine appearance to be the basis of his bullying, his choice of a strong and resilient female character may have been an effort to stand up to his perpetrators. The female character is fierce and able to stand up for herself and becomes very successful. Each of these attributes rejects the dominant notion that females are subordinate to males and suggests feminine characteristics can be beneficial, regardless of what body performs them. I came to interpret Alejandro’s character as an empowered representation of self. The character allowed him to envision a liberated feminine performance.

I believe that by creating this character Alejandro is empowered to envision something different for his future. Not only is he able to come to terms with his embodiment, but he is also able to work through some of the loss he has experienced in his life. He successfully negotiates the vulnerability he has felt and allows his school to support him in his grief and a celebration of his future. Opening himself up to that support also means he is able to successfully negotiate the meaning of his feminine embodiment. He uses his creative writing to help him think through a positive representation of male femininity.

Representing self.

Snapshot 14

Candi has decided to make a cartoon strip to accompany the fictional story she wrote for the Art/English class. She is using a website Sara recommended that helps to design and format the cartoon, providing various options for each frame. Candi is in the middle of designing an avatar to represent herself in her cartoon. The process is becoming increasingly frustrating as Candi realizes the website will not allow her to customize the avatar as she desires.

“This stupid. I can’t even put highlights in her hair. And she ain’t got no booty. Look at this!”

I look at the avatar on her screen. She has done a lot to personalize it. The avatar has purple hair, big lips, and big eyes. It is tall and very skinny, with large breasts. Candi puts her finger on the screen and traces the avatar’s backside.

“Nooooo bootaaaay,” she says slowly and with great enunciation. I grin at her exaggerated comment and think about the relevance “booty” has for Black young women such as Candi. Zak is sitting next to us and leans over.

“Here, try this.” He takes over the mouse pad and tries to select the area with a different edit button, but it still doesn’t allow him to select the buttocks. “I don’t know. Maybe you can only do that with the paid version,” he says.

“Uggghhh!” Candi groans.

“Are you going to be showing her backside that much? Does it really matter?” I ask, thinking I am being helpful.

Candi glares at me. “Ttss. That beside the point, Kat. My girl not gonna have no flat ass. An’ I can’t even make her lips bigger, or change that ugly shirt. This ain’t gonna work,” she says shaking her head no. Zak continues to try to encourage Candi not to give up on the program.

“She doesn’t have to look exactly like you.” he says, reassuringly.

“No, but she still gotta be sexy,” Candi shoots back.

“I think she looks pretty sexy,” I say.

Candi looks to Zak (who is gay) for his opinion.

He shrugs his shoulders to indicate that sexy women are not his area of expertise. “Not my thing,” he says.

Candi continues to shake her head no. “An’ she ain’t got no hips. This thing ain’t no real woman.”

“Well, it is an avatar,” I reason with her. “It’s not going to be perfect.”

Zak agrees, “Really, she’s fine. Just keep going.”

“Ugh, I guess,” Candi finally says and hits the submit button, finalizing the avatar. As she continues to layout the frames I ask a little about her story.

“So, this character is you?”

“Mm-hm,” she confirms and then glances at me with flirty eyes, “One of me.”

I give a little laugh. “Really?”

“Yeah. My story ‘bout my four alter personalities. So this jus’ one of ‘em.”

“Wow. I think that’s pretty cool you get to write about that.”

“I know, right? Like I could do this at any other school.”

Candi’s effort to create a representation of herself reveals the liberating potential of some of the projects done at Unity High, as well as some limitations. Just as Alejandro (in the previous snapshot) was able to create a “febear” to represent himself, so too is Candi creating an avatar to represent herself. I argue these creations allow students to perform a desired embodiment that they may not be able to otherwise achieve. Whereas Alejandro’s fictionalized embodiment provided reconciliation of his past and affirmation of his future, Candi’s fictionalized embodiment seeks to validate the present, and in particular to validate and solidify her femininity. I suggest that by creating this avatar Candi has an outlet to explore her femininity and its meaning. In this snapshot we see that Candi has to negotiate between the available terms of femininity dictated by the website’s preprogrammed options (which are reflective of social norms more broadly) and her own perceptions of femininity, which is highly influenced by a hyper-sexualized hetero-femininity. I also believe this snapshot reveals the extent to which

gender transgression, or any form of gender-bending, is unequivocally accepted within Unity High.

Candi is a student who I would describe as transgender. She never explicitly identified herself to me in this way, however I know from her consent forms and school records that her assigned name is male. However, I never heard anyone in the school refer to her as anything other than Candi, nor did anyone ever refer to her with male pronouns. Candi dresses in very feminine, slim-fitting clothing, and usually wears heels and carries a handbag. She also wears wigs and does her hair, make-up and nails on a regular basis. The stability of her gender performance suggests transgender identification (Valentine, 2007). As discussed in Snapshot 3, Candi makes use of the school's goodwill store to find feminine clothing, and her exploration of femininity began at Unity. The school actively supports her efforts to express her gender and it is often a topic of discussion in school. In school, Candi and her other male friends who wear feminine clothing and make-up put forth significant effort – giving each other beauty advice, sharing make-up, giving fashion advice, and exchanging clothes – to “perfect” Candi's femininity.

Within this supportive environment, Candi finds the courage to explore her identity through her story and her artwork. She feels comfortable and confident in writing about her “four alter personalities.” As we see in this snapshot, at least one of them is feminine. The frustration Candi feels while creating her avatar reflects the length she goes to in order to adequately present herself as a “real woman.” We hear Candi identify the following as qualities that would make the avatar an acceptable woman: pretty hair, large lips, big/nice “booty,” big hips, nice clothes, and sexy. This list can also include what the avatar successfully depicts (figure 2): tall, skinny, big eyes, and large breasts. Taken together, Candi's list expresses markers of traditional femininity

and Black female sexuality, focusing on sexual appeal. Each of the characteristics Candi diligently hones for her avatar reveals the importance young women give to the male gaze (Holland et al., 1998). That is, “young women are living feminine identities, but in relation to a male audience – measuring themselves through the gaze of the male-in-the-head.” (Holland et al., 1998, p. 10).

Therefore the feminine performance Candi

wishes to enact may be one of hetero-femininity that will appeal to men. Candi and I never discussed her sexual orientation, so I cannot know her full intentions with projecting a feminized sexuality. However, Candi’s reliance on what could be considered hyper-sexualized characteristics reveals a dependence on the norms of hetero-femininity in order for her ideal avatar to materialize.

The hyper-sexuality of her avatar likely also reveals culturally specific aspects of Black female sexuality, especially as it relates to her concern of the avatar having “noooo bootaaaay.” Sexuality has long been raced, where Whiteness is the mark of “normal” heterosexuality and Blackness the mark of a “pathologized” hyper-heterosexuality (Collins, 2000, p. 129). The racial designation of sexuality has served to identify Black women as sexual objects. Beginning with the treatment of slave women, the commodification of Black women’s bodies was emphasized. “Black women’s sexuality could be reduced to gaining control over an objectified vagina that could be commodified and sold.... Current portrayals of Black women in popular culture –

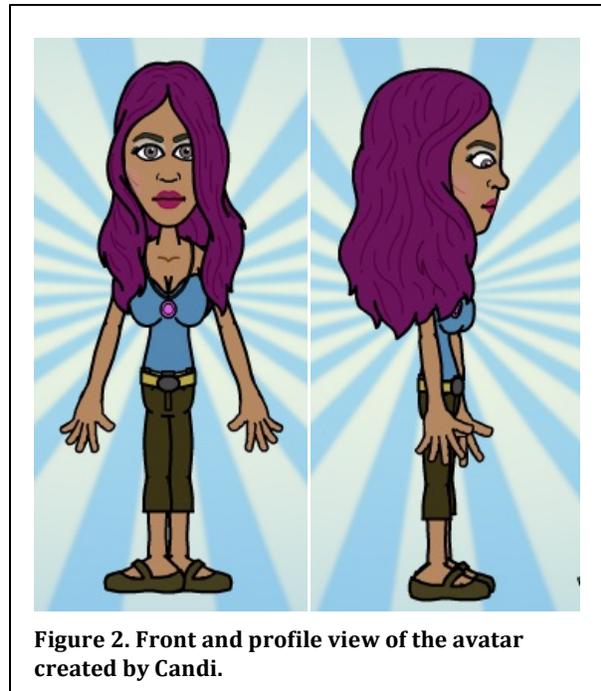


Figure 2. Front and profile view of the avatar created by Candi.

reducing Black women to butts – works to reinscribe these commodified body parts” (Collins, 2000, p. 133). The Black woman’s butt – her “booty” – has therefore become a significant mark of Black female sexuality and beauty. Dominant discourse has designated the Black female body as representative of Black sexuality overall, and a Black woman’s “protruding butt is seen as an indication of a heightened sexuality” (hooks, 1998, p. 113). As a young Black woman Candi may not be aware of the racial or historical implications within this sexualized symbol of Black female sexuality, however she is privy to the standards of Black sexuality, especially as it is iconized within popular culture. Therefore, her inability to provide her avatar with an appropriate “booty” becomes thoroughly unacceptable and makes Candi question whether or not the avatar is even sexy.

Many of the requirements Candi expresses for her avatar are similar to those she holds for herself. It is not uncommon to find her sitting, holding a mirror in front of her face, checking her hair and make-up. She also spends a great deal of time with her friends perfecting her look, trading clothes, purses, jewelry, and altering outfits, a process that included acts of stuffing bras and backsides. Candi, to be one of the girls, performs these ritualized behaviors in order to perfect her own femininity. Accentuating these feminine aspects in her avatar suggests a continued awareness of the significance specific behaviors and appearances hold for representing femininity. For instance, in response to my implication the avatar’s butt didn’t matter too much, Candi immediately takes offense and said, “My girl not gonna have no flat ass.” I perceive Candi’s reaction suggesting that an image meant to represent her *must* have this marker of femininity. Any representation of *her* must relay the sexy Black young woman she is. Candi even suggests that whether or not the butt is seen is “beside the point.” Candi combines this need for a booty with the need for bigger lips, a shirt that isn’t ugly, and bigger hips. These items

become indicators of “sexy.” Seemingly exasperated by an inability to provide her avatar with these items, Candi declares, “This thing ain’t no real woman.” Again, Candi seems to be chasing the perfect embodiment of hetero-femininity, and Black female sexuality. I interpret Candi’s determination suggests that for her, her appearance is a critical marker of “real” womanhood, and she feels that without being able to materialize effectively within the male gaze, she cannot materialize at all.

Zak is supportive, and influential, in building Candi’s confidence in being a “real” woman. When he affirmatively states, “She doesn’t have to look *exactly* like you,” he in essence confirms Candi does look feminine, perhaps even more so than the avatar. I perceive Zak’s comment to indicate the items Candi desires to change on the avatar are things she already has, and Zak insists it is okay if the avatar does not replicate that femininity identically. Candi appreciates his evaluation and looks to him to confirm whether or not the character succeeds in being sexy, to which Zak insists he can’t judge because he’s gay. Even so, it is Zak’s reassuring words (“really, she’s fine”) that allow Candi to finally move on and complete the avatar. The negotiations Candi has to make because of the website’s limited options suggest that even in her disappointment, having a feminine representation in general is more important than having a perfect one. In this regard, Candi is aware that “gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being” (Butler, 1999, p. 43-44). If she is able to maintain even a limited performance of femininity, over time she will come to *be* substantively feminine. Therefore, Candi accepts the comforting words from Zak and allows herself to accept the feminine avatar dictated by the computer program.

When Candi declares that her avatar is “one of me,” I learn that she is exploring a sense of having “four alter personalities.” Candi makes it clear the avatar she creates is her, and her story is about her life. I assert this represents the type of creative writing advocates of critical pedagogy referred to as liberating (Freire, 2011; Giroux, 1983, 2010; McLaren, 2007; Morrell, 2008). Candi’s writing serves as a form of self-reflection that can illuminate the discursive forces structuring the possibilities of her life, which include her four distinct personalities. Research on transgender and gender-non-conforming youth (Center, 2008; Gangamma et al., 2008; GLSEN, 2014; Russell et al., 2011) shows that transgender youth are susceptible to homelessness, poverty, and difficulty staying in school. During my observations I learned Candi struggled with all of these hardships. These personal struggles may have been related to Candi’s four alter personalities, which could have developed as a necessary coping strategy. Openly writing about her four personalities allows Candi an avenue to explore different ways of managing the constraining forces in her life.

I argue Candi’s ability to explore her personalities and assert an identity she felt appropriately characterized her (as her avatar mostly does), allows her a form of self-reflection that may offer her greater self-understanding. Morrell (2008) reflects on the potential of such a writing process: “Writing as care for the self offers the opportunity for students to use writing to question and clarify perceptions, values, attitudes towards the world in a space that is safe, yet inherently pedagogical” (p. 182). Candi’s ability to openly discuss this aspect of her life reveals the trust she has in her teachers and her classmates. I believe the use of writing as an outlet brings her the opportunity to share the challenges she experiences, as well as dialogue with others about it. Although I was not able to spend a significant amount of time with Candi, I was aware that both her teachers, Sara and John, were very proud she was able to write this story for

the class. Both teachers indicated the story showed personal growth, and showed more academic effort than Candi had put forth in a long time.

Lastly, I believe it is important to acknowledge how this snapshot demonstrates the normalization of transgender and gender-non-conforming identities within Unity High. Candi is in an environment that does not question, but respects her gender. She has never once struggled to find a bathroom or locker room to use. She has never faced protesting students, parents, or administrators as she tried to enter the school. To my knowledge she has never dropped a class because she felt unwelcomed or separated from the other students. At Unity, Candi is simply a student. Her embodiment would traditionally be seen as contested, but at Unity, it just *is*. The school truly accepts and respects her embodiment.

Overall, Candi's efforts to personify her avatar with hyper-femininity show a desire to explore femininity and all its possibilities. That she is able to do this in a school that fully accepts who she is is empowering: it's no big deal that she is transgender; it's no big deal that she writes about her four alter personalities, and it's no big deal that one of them is feminine. The normalizing factor itself is empowering. Candi has the freedom to be who she wants to be, and in practicing this freedom she is also seen as a successful student.

How Informal Spaces Get Students Thinking About Identity

It is one thing to infuse curriculum with topics that require students to think critically, but requiring critical thinking within the informal spaces of a school is typically more challenging. However, because Unity High actively encourages students to question their textbooks, teachers, and each other, this questioning seems to naturally flow into the informal spaces of the school as well. The school and students, see the importance in "naming" the injustices they observe (Fine,

1989) as a first step to discussing and ultimately fixing them. Therefore it is not uncommon to walk through the halls and hear students calling each other out: “You know that was racist, right?” “You think jus’ ‘cuz he poor he gonna stink?” “You wouldn’t say that if I was a guy.” Often, such statements start a substantive conversation about race, class, and gender. Students *want* to dialogue. There is a sincere interest in learning the perspectives of others. This interest creates a cyclical effect, something that Paolo Freire (2011) notes as inevitable within critical pedagogy: “Only dialogue which requires critical thinking, is also capable of generating critical thinking” (p. 92). I believe it is the normalizing of critical dialogue in informal school spaces is the reason students tend to feel comfortable confronting each other at Unity. They know their advances will lead to dialogue rather than aggression, and they are likely to learn something new and/or help others learn something new.

Certainly, there are times when discussion doesn’t come easily, but even when this is the case, students still pursue a critical perspective. For example, in Snapshot 9 when Jenny gets angry with Zak for calling her a “muffin top,” she storms off. She is not prepared to dialogue with him about the sexist and racist implications of his name-calling. Instead, she speaks with me about it, articulating her concerns and considering the forces involved in negative stereotypes of Black women. Beyond that snapshot, I also observed Jenny addressing this topic with other friends on more than one occasion (including at the prom, where an interesting racial critique of formalwear took place). Even though Jenny did not address Zak through dialogue at the very moment she felt hurt,³¹ she did continue to think critically about the power structures influencing her identity as a Black young woman and shared her perspectives with others. I suggest this

³¹ I later learned Zak and Jenny did discuss the “muffin top” incident. A few months after it happened, the school held a school-wide circle regarding name-calling, using various epithets as prompts to get students discussing. When I asked Sara how such a circle came about I was told, “Zak and Jenny needed some help working things out.”

ongoing reflection and dialogue reflects the success the school has had in infusing the value of critical thinking for each of the students as well as throughout the school.

Unity High seeks to provide its students with an emancipatory knowledge that can help them “understand how social relationships are distorted and manipulated by relations of power and privilege” (McLaren, 2007, p. 198). The critical dialogue happening throughout the school exposes students to analyses of the injustices within our society, and as students explore complex topics of gender, sexuality, race, and class, they come to understand how they are differentially privileged and disadvantaged. This knowledge emboldens many of the students to take action for positive change, demonstrating the success the school has had in providing a truly critical pedagogy. The following two snapshots reveal this success and demonstrate the ways in which students challenge each other, identify power structures constraining their acts, and find an interest in creating social change.

“I can’t believe you jus’ said that!”: The value of classroom chatter.

Snapshot 15

It’s two days before summer break. Few students are working. They finished their exams yesterday, and these last two days are more a formality than anything else. I’m hanging out in one of the corner studios with Brooke, Rachel, and Tori, who are killing time by drawing graffiti on the table. We chat about summer plans and are interrupted by Tori’s phone dinging several times. She grabs it and reads a text message.

“Ohhh, shit,” she says, laughing.

“What?” both Rachel and Brooke lean in, anticipating gossip.

“This girl I know from South [another high school in the area] jus’ texted me an’ said this other girl we went to school with jus’ claimed she got gang raped by a bunch of guys. Hold on.”

Tori clicks on a link that was sent in another text and is taken to a YouTube video. As the video starts, she holds her phone out for everyone to see. Rachel and Brooke come in closer, one on each side of Tori. I stand up to watch over her head. The video recording is poor, very fuzzy and choppy. The people are barely visible, but the movements seem clear. It shows a boy with a bottle of liquor in one hand and pushing a stumbling girl towards a room with the other. In the room we see a mattress on the floor. The girl says something inaudible. Her voice is slurred, and it is clear to me she is incapacitated. The boy says, “It’s alright baby, let’s go.” In the background, we hear several other boys rooting him on, saying, “crack that bitch,” “yo man, leave some for us,” and “enjoy the ride.” The video then shows the girl limply falling over the edge of the mattress, and the boy pulling his pants down. Hollering from the background continues, and the video cuts out.

I am shocked at what we just saw. So are the girls, but each has a different view.

“Ohhh!, I can’t believe she did that!” Tori says through a small grin on her face.

Rachel seems appalled. Her eyebrows furrow and she grimaces as she says, “That shit is fucked up. Why they send you that video?”

“I don’t know, I guess it’s all over the news or somethin’. Yo, Google it,” Tori tells Rachel, who has already started Googling on her own phone. The two of them seem eager for details.

Brooke is enraged, "Those boys never should've done that. If you're drunk you can't consent. There is no way that wasn't rape."

"Ok, ok. I found the story," Rachel says and begins reading. "Four boys have been charged with sexual assault of a 16-year-old girl from South High School. The student left class Thursday afternoon to join the boys, who range in age from 17-21." She skips a little of the text and then continues. "...They allegedly arranged to have a garage party and sent the girl an invitation through Facebook. The student claims the boys got her drunk on 'Lean,' a drink made from mixing prescription cough syrup with Sprite – blah, blah, blah," Rachel continues to skim for parts she is interested in. "...The student also claims she and the boys were smoking marijuana. ...The boys claim the girl stated she was 19 and the sex was consensual."

"Oh please!" Brooke grumbles.

"Blah, blah, blah," Rachel keeps scrolling. "...The police indicated they have video evidence, which they reviewed in order to substantiate the sexual assault charges."

"That's bull!" Tori says. "I know her. They didn't force her to do anything. You saw her in the video. She was askin' for it."

"I can't believe you jus' said that!" Brooke exclaims, staring at Tori in disgust. "You think if someone is drunk it's ok to jus' have sex with 'em?"

Tori defends herself. "I mean, why was she there in the first place? She knew somethin' stupid was gonna happen. She didn't have to drink."

"That's beside the point. Those boys should know. She was NOT in a position to consent to anything!" Brooke insists.

“I don’t know. It looked to me like she laid on that bed all on her own,” Tori says with a tone of judgment.

“Yeah,” Rachel adds, *“it’s hard to tell, but it does kinda look like she was interested.”*

“OH MY GOD!” Brooke shouts, *grabbing Tori’s phone from her hands and throwing it on the table.*

“Hey!” Tori yells.

“Both of you are being ridiculous! She was not in a position to give consent! What if that was you?!” Brooke forcefully asks Tori.

Tori ignores the question and instead says, “Yeah, but what you think she thought was gonna happen?”

Rachel looks perplexed and asks the group, “Well...even if she went there for sex, is it still ok if by the time they got to it she was blasted?”

“No!” Brooke says definitively.

“Why, if she was going there for it in the first place?” Tori squawks.

“Tori! Think about what you’re sayin’,” Brooke urges. *“You should always be able to give real consent. If that was you, would you still think it was ok?”*

“Well I wouldn’t put myself in that position,” Tori snaps.

“You don’t know that. What if you were at a party with people you knew, but somehow someone was able to slip you somethin’, and you ended up gettin’ raped?” Brooke reasons.

Rachel shakes her head yes. “It does happen.”

Tori remains quiet. It is clear she is thinking about the complexity of this issue.

“Why do you think they were givin’ her Lean?” Brook suggests. “If they just wanted to have a good time, they wouldn’t need to get her knocked out.”

Rachel adds, “And if all the guys had sex with her...I mean, I can’t imagine she was planning on that. Or, I guess...even if she was, like why did they have to get her drunk. Brooke’s right. Why Lean?”

“Exactly!” Brooke exclaims. “Clearly they had other plans. That girl was out of it. She was nothin’ but a hole to them. Those boys were on a power trip, and they should all be put in jail!”

“I don’t know.” Tori replies. “I still think she had somethin’ to do with it. I mean you can’t be an idiot! She never should’a gone there in the first place.” Tori looks to me, “Kat, what do you think?”

Up to this point I was content just listening to the girls think this through. I was surprised that Tori was so convinced of the girl’s consensual participation, and I appreciated Brooke’s ability to assert her strong opinions.

“I think it’s incredibly complicated, but Brooke brings up some good points. Women are more vulnerable than men in these situations,” I offer.

“So we can’t go to parties?” Tori asks sarcastically.

“No,” Brooke breaks in, “that’s not what she’s sayin’. There’s just a double standard. If a girl goes to a party and gets wasted, it’s taken as her giving permission for anything to happen, and she’s a slut. But when guys go to a party and get drunk, they’re studs.”

“Something like that,” I nod to Brooke.

“Well...” Tori begins cautiously, “I still say she should’a known better. I know I would never go to a party like that.”

“Amen!” Rachel agrees.

“Still, they had no right to rape her,” Brooke pushes.

All of the girls are shaking their heads in astonishment of the situation. Tori looks at her phone, which keeps buzzing every few seconds.

“I can’t believe it was all on video,” she says. “And if I know...everyone knows. I haven’t even seen her in a year.”

“Dang, you don’t even see her anymore and they sent it to you?” Rachel asks.

“Yeah. It was part of a huge chain.”

Brooke scoffs, “Ugh! Of course! Everyone needs to know she’s a slut. Uggghhh... disgusting! ...That poor girl.”

The above snapshot reveals one dimension of critical conversations taking place at Unity High. During class, lunch, or before or after school, students take it upon themselves to challenge each other and look at the “bigger picture.” In this instance, we see three young women wrestling with the ideas of consent and affirmative sexuality for teen girls and the implications of being a teen girl growing up in a sexist society. As mentioned in Chapter 2, young women are denied options for claiming agency over their sexuality, making it difficult for teenage girls to imagine opportunities to be sex positive. The young women in this snapshot respond by questioning

femininity and masculinity and critically interrogating their relation to sexual agency. Upon watching the video, each of the girls forms opinions about what they have seen. Debate is initiated the second Tori, with a grin on her face, declares, “Ohhh!, I can’t believe she did that!” Tori’s comment places sole blame on the young woman in the video, in essence labeling her a slut, clearly making her lack of appropriate hetero-femininity. The slut evaluation is further substantiated when Tori asserts, “She was asking for it.” Brooke immediately takes offense (“I can’t believe you jus’ said that!”), and places sole blame on the men. Rachel is disgusted, but remains open to both Tori’s and Brooke’s positions and seeks further details. I argue the scenario reveals how Brooke, Rachel, and Tori pursue a debate that could potentially impact their perspective on women, sexuality, and consent. In addition to how this debate informs their perspectives, this snapshot highlights the roll gossip plays in regulating young women’s sexuality, and how students mark each other in order to bring meaning to their own identity.

I was distraught, but not surprised, when I heard this incident happened to a 16-year-old, however, I was surprised that Tori heard about it so quickly, and at the extent to which she had access to details apart from what was shared on the news.

In this snapshot, the fact Rachel and Tori immediately “Google” for details about the incident reveals important aspects of the technological world teens inhabit. Tori learns of the event through a text message and is directed to a video on YouTube. The continued dinging from her phone announces further text messages and Facebook alerts regarding the event. With a quick web search, the girls are able to find several news stories recounting the incident. The influence of media access, and how media seeks to shape youth perspectives, greatly influences how teens come to know each other and themselves. Even as Brooke, Rachel, and Tori are critical of this girl being exposed online, each of them also have online profiles that actively seek

to portray them as fun, sexy, young women. Ringrose's (2011) research on teen girls' use of social media to construct gendered identities indicates that there are both positive and negative aspects to youth constructing online identities. Teen girls actively negotiate the type of sexualized representation they portray online. However, as Ringrose's work points out, the tools available for girls to construct these identities are highly dictated by discourses of heterosexuality already circulating. The actions of the girl in the video – going to a garage party and drinking with older men – are automatically considered violations of femininity. The video's circulation functions to highlight the girl's "sluttiness" as a significant marker of gender transgression (as Brooke rightly points out) and to blame her for the subsequent assault.

Through gossip and viral web content, teens from various schools work to mark this girl as sexually promiscuous. Payne (2010) describes the discursive category of "slut" as a girl who "is reduced to a defamed sexual orifice, demeaned for her sexual agency, for her pursuit of sexual partners" (p. 318-319). The good girl, or the respectable girl, on the other hand is the girl who can wait, who does not show an unrestrained desire. The regulation of female sexuality would not work without the spectacle of the slut, and new technologies serve to solidify her status even more rapidly. Gossip and rumor are required for a slut narrative to function everyone *must* know (White, 2002). These rumors are deployed as a mechanism of social control, allowing the slut to be "supervised by society as a whole" (Foucault, 1995, p. 207), or more precisely, by the norms of appropriate hetero-femininity. The threat of being labeled a slut becomes social regulation, the measure every girl is up against. Research shows the pressure to remain a "good girl" and not succumb to the slut label results in young women internalizing any notion of sexual desire (Fine, 1988; Fine & McClelland, 2006; Holland et al., 1998; Tolman, 2002). In this

regard, teen girl's assertiveness about sexuality, even when it comes to safety, "runs counter to being feminine" (Holland et al., 1998, p. 33), placing girls in vulnerable situations.

I believe the slut narrative, and related heteronormative demands for proper femininity, challenges Brooke, Rachel, and Tori to consider the boundaries of femininity and sexuality. Can a woman want to have sex with several guys in one night and *not* be a slut? This question points to the possibility of an assertive female sexuality. However, in order for a woman to assert her sexuality, she first must be able to acknowledge sexual desire. Herein lies the problem for young women. Desire is counter to (White) hetero-femininity. Tolman (2002) outlines this paradox in *Dilemmas of Desire: Teenage Girls Talking about Sexuality*. Desire is something very active and at times uncontrollable. By "nature" desire is masculine and for boys. Girls, conversely, are "naturally" passive and calm, and therefore cannot feel desire. Although we can trace these norms to a hegemonic patriarchy and the benefits it poses for keeping women's sexuality under control, they nonetheless severely impact how young women come to think about their sexual agency. Concepts of "'femininity' and 'slut' function to keep [girls] from acting on, feeling entitled to, or even knowing about their own sexual feelings" (Tolman, 2002, p. 119). The result is young women have very few options for acknowledging or experiencing desire.

Although not addressed in this snapshot, it is relevant to acknowledge the racialized components of desire and femininity. Desire and hyper-sexuality have been constructed as implicit within Black femininity. As remarked in Snapshot 14 (with Candi's desire to achieve a hyper-sexuality with her avatar), the dominant group has historically used the objectification of Black women to espouse their "natural" sexuality (Collins, 2000; hooks, 1998), while White women were expected to ignore sexuality. Tolman notes that this difference impacts minority girls in that there is no presumption of being "good," as there is for White girls. On the contrary,

Black young women in her study wish “to be thought of, and think of themselves, as ‘good’ and not ‘aggressive’ sexually” (Tolman, 2002, p. 175), in opposition to the prevailing assumptions of Black femininity.

Of particular relevance to the circumstance the Unity students debate in the snapshot, Tolman identifies drunkenness as one of the means young women use to protect themselves from being labeled as desiring. Getting drunk in order to have sex is seen

as a form of protection from getting what [a girl] would judge to be a deserved reputation for acting on her sexual desires.... [Drinking was] both a public performance and a private salve that screens [a girl’s] sexual desire in unprotected, unsanctioned circumstances. (Tolman, 2002, p. 140)

This suggests that although the girl in the video may have been taken advantage of, she also may have been using intoxication as a means to thwart any judgments of impurity. Certainly Tori believes this is the case: Her statement that “They didn’t force her to do anything,” implies that the girl was trying to “fool” everyone by claiming she was assaulted or too drunk to consent to sex.

Brooke (a trained circle leader) tries to steer the conversation towards the issue of consent. She directs all blame for this incident on the boys, stating the girl was not capable of giving consent, and consent is always a necessity. Brooke definitively believes that regardless of what is going on with the girl – regardless if she’s a slut, regardless if she put herself in a dangerous position, regardless if she drinks – a girl should always be able to “give *real* consent,” which she identifies as requiring relative sobriety. This suggests that Brooke may be open to the possibility of a sexually assertive girl, able to consent at sometimes and say no at other times.

What Brooke is unable to acknowledge is that even a girl's ability to give real consent is breaking with the demands of hetero-femininity. The act of freely consenting to sex (with multiple men or not) suggests desire and a connection to one's body and sexuality, which is not acceptable within heteronormative gender expectations. Holland et al. (1998) emphasize the impact of such expectations: "within the confines of hegemonic heterosexual discourses female agency and desire are silenced and subordinated to those of the male, and it is the male body and its needs that shape the normalised heterosexual encounter" (p. 98). Therefore, regardless of a woman's "interest," all sexual acts remain (or must be disguised as) for the pleasure of the man. Even assertive women ("sluts") do not have full agency over their acts within the confines of heterosexuality. Any consent that is given is given under the guise of male pleasure, not out of a female's sense of self-awareness or desire.

I interpret Rachel's question of, "even if she went there for sex, is it still ok if by the time they got to it she was blasted?" to reveal a continued contemplation of the possibility of an active and assertive sexuality for young women. With this Rachel seems to be questioning the possibility of drawing a line with consent. Is explicit consent at the moment of the act required, if consent was communicated or implied earlier? Brooke clearly believes the implied consent is not sufficient and that there must always be active consent at the time of the act – a position which also supports young women's right to want sex, and to have sexual agency. The exploration of this question reveals the girls' ability to think critically about the issue, and an understanding of the constraining forces of heterosexuality and hetero-femininity. I believe Brooke, Rachel, and Tori acknowledge how young women's sexuality is disproportionately judged compared to males, and how it becomes difficult to find a way for a young woman to be sexually assertive. Their discussion reveals the extent to which women are held as sexual gatekeepers, required to

hold moral authority over sex and guard their (and young men's) purity as long as possible (Fine, 1988; Holland et al., 1998; Tolman, 2002; White, 2002).

When Brooke turns Tori's arguments back on her, asking whether Tori would still consider the situation consensual if it had been her, Tori's response, "Well I wouldn't put myself in that position," marks the girl in the video as an Other. Tori's statement reveals the constituting effect of naming. "Claims of 'I am not like *that*' emphasize that another is like that, and statements naming another into an undesirable position ('She's such a slut') infer that the speaker, by contrast, is not (a slut)" (Payne, 2010, p. 323). Not only is Tori clearly marking the girl as a slut, but she is also marking herself as not-slut in order to position herself within the realm of the good girl. When Brooke continues to push Tori, highlighting the vulnerability of young women in our society ("someone [might] slip you something"), Tori begins to think more deeply about the situation. Rachel also continues to problematize the issue and considers the possibility of having an assertive sexuality: "even if she was [planning to have sex with all the guys], like why did they have to get her drunk?" Here the students are grappling with the power imbalances that result from heteronormativity. Men and women in our society are held to different sexual standards, causing a sexual vulnerability that occurs for women, and female-identified bodies, that is not present for masculine men.

The dictates of hetero-masculinity objectify women for the benefit and pleasure of men, asserting that a "real" man can get any woman he wants (Kehily, 2001; Kimmel, 2008; Pasco, 2007). Likewise the dictates of hetero-femininity teach women to perform for the "male-in-the-head" (Holland et al., 1998), advocating an existence for him rather than for herself. What follows from these expectations is the double standard Brooke identifies: "If a girl goes to a party and gets wasted, it's taken as her giving permission for anything to happen, and she's a slut. But

when guys go to a party and get drunk, they're studs." The heteronormative standard is that men should be rewarded in this situation and women chastised. "Although the double standard distinguishes between what is appropriately masculine versus feminine behavior, in practice it is the behavior of women that is judged" (Holland et al., 1998, p. 158). The confines of heterofemininity reject any possibility for women to be sexually assertive and desiring. Any woman displaying such desire will automatically be judged. Although each of the three students in the snapshot seem to acknowledge the implications of this double standard (and that the boys should not have done what they did), there remains disagreement over how much blame falls on the girl who "should have known better." Tori's continued judgment of the girl emphasizes the control that hegemonic discourses have over bodies. This is to say, even if the girl had been trying to practice an assertive sexuality and was using alcohol to mask this assertiveness, heteronormative values reinscribe her performance as unfeminine ("she should have known better"), removing any possibility of an assertive female sexuality.

I argue that by undertaking the debate described in this snapshot, Brooke, Rachel, and Tori succeed in highlighting for each other the various constraints young women in our society face. They struggle with pinpointing the possibilities of an assertive female sexuality, and rightfully identify the impact of a sexual double standard. As these students consider the meaning of femininity in their own lives, they begin to negotiate the boundaries of female sexuality. However, they remain troubled, noting that the girl in the video ultimately should have known better. Their conversation eventually circles back around to the unfortunate downfall of the girl who has become the vilified Other. As Brooke, Rachel, and Tori recognize the constraining forces impacting the sexuality of all young women, they end with a note of despair, offering pity for the girl in the video. I believe the back and forth questioning of each other (and

disagreement) provided them a glimpse of the various forces constructing them as young women needing to maintain hetero-femininity. It's noteworthy the process of awareness the girls develop is without adult input (mine was minimal). Thus the students are able to make use of the critical thinking skills cultivated by the school in order to have a productive conversation about sexism and their own vulnerability in our society.

The critical educator: The value of teacher's butting-in.

Snapshot 16

It's early morning in Sara's classroom. Students slowly trail in and sit down with their little boxes of breakfast – cereal, fruit, and milk. Sara is working on her computer, looking through news stories and drinking her morning tea. Sierra, Jaime, Arianna, and Je'mal, sit around Sara's desk. While eating their breakfasts, the students begin to talk about a murder that happened two days ago, which has been prominently covered in the local news.

"I know, it was right round corner from my house," Sierra tells the group.

"Shit! You hear anything?" Je'mal asks anxiously.

"Nah. Jus' the fire trucks and stuff after it happen. They say his body in there awhile, and they come back later to start the fire."

Sara looks up from her computer and interjects. "Are you guys talking about that murder?"

"Guy got burned in the dumpster?" Sierra clarifies.

"Yeah!" Sara says dramatically, revealing a combination of shock and disgust. "You live over there?" Sierra nods. Sara looks shocked. "Aren't you scared?"

Sierra gives Sara a look like she's crazy. "Of what? That stuff happen all the time round there." All of the students slowly nod their heads in agreement with Sierra. They are all Black and familiar with the common crimes of her neighborhood.

"That's just sad. I'm sorry that's part of your daily life," Sara says sincerely. Sierra rolls her eyes at Sara's comment and continues eating. I get the impression she has heard this type of comment from Sara before, and perhaps thinks of her teacher as an out of touch White lady.

"You know," Sara addresses the group, again dramatically, "that guy was transgender. They say he was in a gang and no one ever knew. They found out and that's why they killed him."

"No it 'aint!" Sierra retorts defensively. "They known forever."

Shocked, Sara asks, "You knew him?"

"Knew of him. They knew he trans. It was some drug deal gone bad. He owed 'em money or somethin'."

Jaime jumps in, "I heard they didn't know and after they killed 'em they were going through his clothes, you know, looking for money an' stuff, an' realized he had a binder on. That's when they decided to burn his body."

"Nah," Sierra says. "I didn't hear that."

"What the hell they gotta burn him for anyway? Didn't they shoot him four times and throw him in a dumpster? Seriously!" Arianna exclaims.

Sara urges the group, "Don't you guys think this could have been a hate crime?"

“Yes!” Je’mal bellows. “That shit don’t jus’ happen!” He shakes his head in disgust as he munches on grapes. “I mean...[chomp, chomp, chomp]...that’s some sick shit!”

“I don’t know,” says Sierra. “I really thought everyone knew. He been like that for, like, 6 years.”

“Well I wouldn’t be surprised,” says Arianna.

“I just can’t believe the news only mentions it in passing, like him being trans had nothing to do with it. This is a hate crime. It needs to be prosecuted as a hate crime,” Sara passionately tells the group. “Think about everything we are trying to do at this school. Could you imagine if this happened to one of our students and no one would acknowledge it was a hate crime?”

“But maybe it ‘aint.” Sierra says. “Maybe it was jus’ the drugs.”

“Yeah, but why burn the body?” Arianna asks.

Sierra shrugs her shoulders. She has no answer.

“Sara right,” Je’mal insists. “The media jus’ want you ignore it. But if that happen someone here, we all be up in arms and tellin’ the world like it is. The only reason no one’s talking about a hate crime is ‘cuz this guy ain’t got no family who gonna stand up and say it.”

“What do you think will happen if this isn’t seen as a hate crime?” Sara asks the students.

“Nothin’!” Jaime says. “They just keep killin’ all the trannies.”

“Mmm-hm!” Je’mal agrees.

“And what will happen if people do recognize it as a hate crime?”

“Nothin’!” Je’mal says laughing. The other students laugh too.

“Come on,” Sara coaxes the group, knowing they know better.

“What Sara? It’s just one kid,” Jaime says.

Arianna stops him, “Yeah, but this has been happening a lot. If we don’t push people to see this as a social justice issue nothin’ will ever change for trans people. I mean it’s still happening to gay people! It really could be any one of us.”

“Yes!” Sara says emphatically. “Thank you, Arianna.” Sara turns to her keyboard. “I’m going to write an editorial about it and see if they’ll print it.”

“Ok Sara. You do that.” Jaime says sarcastically, rolling his eyes.

“Can you say it’s from all of us Sara?” Arianna asks. “I’ll sign it.”

“I sign it too,” says Je’mal.

Sierra is slowly shaking her head no. “I still say it might’a jus’ been drugs.”

This snapshot reveals the significant impact teachers at Unity High have on students’ thinking about critical issues facing gender and sexual minorities. Although some of the assumptions revealed in Sara’s prodding may be racially charged and out of touch with the realities her students face (and therefore offensive), she does work to encourage the students to think beyond the immediate implications of a simple news story and consider the long-term impact of biased reporting. Each of the students has heard about this murder and that the victim

was transgender, however none of them address his gender until Sara suggests the murder may have been a hate crime. I believe Sara's insistence leads the students to think about the issue differently, and to consider the impact it has on them, the school, and society. They consider the role media plays in framing social justice issues, and not only regarding transgender bodies. Students begin to grapple with how this instance of a transgender man's murder connects with multiple aspects of oppression and the role media may play in maintaining that oppression. For two of the students, this conversation leads to a desire to take action for change.

The conversation between Sara and the four students begins a bit roughly, as Sara makes stereotypical judgments about Sierra's neighborhood and shows pity that Sierra has to live in such a "scary" place. The area under discussion is commonly referred to by White middle and upper class urbanites (of which Sara is one) as the "ghetto" of the city. Each of the four Black students is well aware of this perception of Sierra's neighborhood. The neighborhood is inhabited primarily by lower-income and poor Blacks, and has high crime rates, although it is not by far the most dangerous neighborhood in the city. The fact that Sierra simply rolls her eyes at Sara's comment about the neighborhood suggests to me she may be used to hearing this from her teacher(s). Sara's comment is a prime example of the microaggressions many marginalized students face each day. Although Sara can be regarded as a teacher who practices "culturally relevant" pedagogy (e.g., Ladson-Billings, 2009), there continues to be aspects of her White privilege that slip into her everyday encounters with students. Sue (2010) notes that it is the "invisibility of unintentional biases" (p. 48) that causes incredible harm because these microaggressions are the least expected. However, it's important to note that on several occasions I witnessed back and forth discussions between Sara and Sierra regarding the challenges present in Sierra's neighborhood. It seemed to be a topic Sierra would sometimes feel

the need to take up, and other times feel the need to let go or avoid. The ambiguity she may face negotiating responses to Sara is not unusual with these forms of racism. In this instance Sierra's initial reaction (rolling her eyes) may represent an acknowledgment that her speaking up or confronting Sara would "have minimal positive impact on the situation" (Sue, 2010, p. 56), whereas at other time she may feel it is beneficial.

Once Sara introduces the topic of hate crimes, all of the students engage with differing opinions. Sierra remains skeptical throughout the conversation, believing the crime was likely only because of a drug deal gone bad. This too may be a defensive reaction in response to the hurtful comments Sara had made about her neighborhood. In effect, Sierra may be "externalizing [her communities'] failings and avoiding responsibility for [their] actions" (Sue, 2010, p. 104). By taking this stance Sierra is suggesting her "people" were accepting and even knew "for, like, 6 years" that the murder victim was transgender, which could mark her community as more civilized than what Sara's comment suggests.

Jaime, Je'mal, and Arianna, however, are much more inclined to believe there is something more suspect regarding the murder. Jaime has heard the man's transgender identity was found out because the perpetrators discovered his binder (to flatten his breasts), inspiring the killers to burn his body. This interpretation resonates with Butler's understanding of the normative expectations of bodies and the violence incurred by those bodies that fail to materialize those normative expectations. Since everyone must embody norms in order to be known to others, there is a risk in embodying them incorrectly or ineffectively. Therefore, if one is unable to "pass" in the performance they enact, or "when what appears and how it is 'read' diverge, the artifice of the performance can be read as artifice" (Butler, 1993, p. 129). The need to always pass, and fear of being found out, is often present for those who embody non-

normative gender and sexuality. For this transgender man, such fear would have been warranted; being found out may have led to his murder. Those who murdered him may have found his “false” embodiment of masculinity so grievous an act, not only did they kill him, but they also burnt his body in order to *erase* any knowledge of his existence. This act reinscribes the hegemony of normative hetero-masculinity. Je’mal and Arianna seem to agree with Jamie’s assessment that the grievous act of burning the body does imply it was a hate crime. As Je’mal suggests, “that shit don’t jus’ happen!” And as shocked as Arianna is by the act, she “*wouldn’t* be surprised” if the man’s transgender identity was the cause, suggesting she is well aware of the dangers present for non-conforming bodies in our society. Although Sierra continues to be skeptical, she has nothing to offer that would justify burning the body. I believe her continued engagement and active listening suggests she is receptive to the viewpoints of her fellow classmates.

Now that the students are thinking more critically about this man’s death, Sara focuses in on the hate crime perspective. She reminds students of the schools mission – calling on their anti-heteronormative values – persuading them that not recognizing the crime as a hate crime could potentially impact everyone at Unity. Je’mal supports Sara’s assertion and easily relates this to students from Unity, noting, “if that happen someone here, we all be up in arms and tellin’ the world like it is.” Je’mal’s statement implies that the family relationships, care, and respect espoused by those within the school commands an automatic defense of human rights for all within Unity High. I believe the connection he draws between the lack of response to the murder, and how Unity would respond if it was one of their own, suggests the murdered man lacked this type of connection and recognition. Again, Butler (1993) reminds us of the fundamental need for social recognition and the precarity it bestows given our reliance on discourse. “The discursive

condition of social recognition *precedes and conditions* the formation of the subject: recognition is not conferred on a subject, but forms that subject” (Butler, 1993, p. 225-226). Je’mal is confirming that the family of Unity will always grant each other recognition, and establish everyone within its walls as bodies that matter. Je’mal is also suggesting this recognition should extend beyond their walls, to defend the humanity of all gender and sexual minorities.

The students get a little sarcastic once Sara pushes them to consider the political implications of the media’s failure to adequately investigate this crime. I believe their sarcasm reveals the extent to which violent aspects of heteronormativity have become mundane for them. Jaime definitively asserts that “nothin’!” would come of it besides the continued killing of “all the trannies.” He says this so nonchalantly, and the agreement from Je’mal comes so quickly, it is clear both these boys understand the dehumanizing effect society has on transgender individuals. Transgender bodies go against the norm and so no one (with power) cares if they disappear. When Sara continues, looking to suggest things *could* change for the better if this crime were recorded as a hate crime, Je’mal jokingly repeats that “nothin’!” will happen, and everyone laughs. I interpret the students’ laughter to reveal the extent to which the students have become desensitized to the acceptability of violence committed against transgender individuals. The students are so aware of how dehumanized transgender people have become, that they have little faith that justice could ever be served, especially from simply registering a murder as a hate crime. This skepticism may be related to the fact that gay and lesbian individuals continue to experience violence of this nature as well, even though such violence has been reported as hate crimes for years, as Arianna references. Their laughter, then, seems to be born out of cynicism – a coping method for the reality of their unvalued lives.

Still, Sara pushes the students to continue thinking about the cost of this murder being unrecognized as a hate crime. Jaime remains cynical that anything needs to be done, stating, “it’s just one kid,” but Arianna stops him. Arianna makes the connection to broader systems of violence, recognizing that if this man’s life isn’t recognized as mattering, neither will theirs. She urges Jaime to acknowledge that this type of violence happens a lot and that “it really could be any one of us.” I suggest Arianna’s comments reflect a clear understanding of our social interdependence. She sees her own potential for a meaningful life as contingent on her granting this murder victim a meaningful life. Butler (2005) reiterates this recognition reciprocity: if I can only come to be through norms that you recognize (norms which neither of us have chosen and are rife with historical meaning), “then the ‘I’ that I am is nothing without this ‘you,’ and cannot even begin to refer to itself outside the relation to the other by which its capacity for self-reference emerges” (p. 82). Arianna acknowledges the need for reciprocal recognition, and in doing so affirms the students’ responsibility to stand up for each other. This leads to Arianna’s desire to speak out against the hate crime committed against this man. I believe that a desire to take action was exactly what Sara hoped to inspire through this conversation. Energized by Arianna’s revelation, Sara decides to write an editorial opining her disapproval of the media’s coverage of the crime. Both Arianna and Je’mal are moved to participate, wanting to sign her letter as well. Jaime, however, remains skeptical that such a letter could make a difference; while Sierra has not moved in her resolute belief the murder was only about drugs.

The dialogue among these four students and Sara reveals an important dimension of critical thinking that takes place throughout the school. Although some joking is involved, and at times it may appear students are not taking things seriously, they do continue to listen. By the end of the conversation it is clear that the topic has resonated with the student in a new way. This

dialogue had the potential to go further if Sara or any of the students had been able to make connections regarding the racial and socioeconomic implications of the murder. It is relevant that the crime took place where it did and signifies a clash of several systems of oppression leading to this man's killing. It was not only heteronormativity and the regulation of masculinity that led to the man's death, but Sara's guidance of the conversation (and initial insult to the neighborhood) led it in that direction. Even still, the students are able to see their own place within the power structures confining the lives of others, and some even come to recognize their own responsibility in disrupting those power structures. Therefore, through this dialogue we hear students negotiating the meaning of gender discrimination both for themselves and others.

Conclusion

The students of Unity High have countless opportunities to think critically about the power structures influencing their lives. I argue the school's ability to thoroughly infuse the value of critical thinking in all of its spaces allows students to explore the impact systems of oppression have on non-heteronormative bodies. It is critical for young people to have these opportunities. During what is normally a tumultuous time, all adolescents need space to consider the implications of dominant power structures. However, for gender and sexual minorities, learning to voice the reality of structural inequalities can be immensely helpful in reducing the emotional and psychological stressors they experience. Thus these students are at a significant advantage attending a school that allows such important issues to be addressed and investigated.

In formal assignments, students are encouraged to reflect on their lives and interrogate broader systems of oppression that may be influencing challenges they may experience. Students are never discouraged from making their schoolwork personal. Rather they are respected and encouraged to interrogate issues further. Additionally, teachers at Unity are able to validate

students' work and recognize the academic value in self-reflective projects. These practices are essential when working with minority youth who have experienced continuous rejection from traditional education, and often bring comfort as they work to understand their place within our society.

These values are extended to non-academic spaces in the school as well. Students have learned the extent to which critical thinking is acceptable and therefore find it warranted in everyday occurrences with friends. They take pride in being able to call each other out, discuss issues, acknowledge differences, and still be friends. Since students engage in a continuous form of critical thinking, they serve to hold each other to higher standards, pushing each other to think beyond the micro perspective (beyond their own lives) and consider the macro perspective dictating broad implication for all minority individuals.

In what is otherwise a challenging world, the students' pursuit of critical thinking reveals a clear understanding of how Unity High creates an alternate space. The snapshots shared in this chapter highlight the students' recognition of their unique school. In Snapshot 13 Alejandro clearly delineates the difference between his various previous schools and Unity. There is even some reference to the outside world being unsupportive, while the comfort and support from Unity remains steadfast. Snapshot 14 as well highlights the struggles Candi faces outside of school and the significance Unity holds as a place of consistency and support. Lastly, Snapshot 16 reveals how students understand the risks associated with the real world and the violence many LGBT people face on a regular basis. Each of the students manages their position within the contradictory spaces of the real world and Unity High in different ways.

Overall, the anti-heteronormative space of Unity High provides students with an emancipatory critical pedagogy, which provides students with an ability to negotiate the meaning

they wish to grant dominant discourses influencing their life. It also provides students with a safe place to explore exactly how to confront hegemony. Critical thinking helps students understand how systems of power and oppression influence who they are becoming, while also providing them a freedom to be who they wish to be.

CHAPTER 8

Conclusion: New Ways of Being

In this conclusive chapter I review the powerful aspects of inclusion deployed at Unity High and argue that inclusion cannot exist without critical pedagogy. Critical pedagogy as an active tool for inclusion allows for continual teachable moments within and outside of the formal classroom curriculum. When students are offered opportunities for critical thinking, they see themselves as valued intellectuals and potential agents of change. Yet this inclusive school environment still has a significant challenge: students heteronormalize each other and work to *rework* non-normative embodiments into heteronormative representations. I review how these interpersonal acts of heteronormalizing lead to various forms of bullying and suggest that even as this occurs at Unity students, think through bullying in complex ways, which shows potential for lessening the harm. Students express concern about the ethics of bullying and the limitations it imposes on gender and sexual minorities. How bullying appears and is managed at the school reveals important aspects of the successful critical pedagogy implemented at Unity High.

Finally, given these aspects of inclusion and the challenge of persistent heteronormalizing, I offer recommendations based on lessons learned from my research. Although there are various practices Unity High implements well, it is in this section I review missed opportunities for strengthening their inclusion. I also consider how these suggestions translate to any school looking to provide a more inclusive atmosphere. There is no one right answer, nor a simple step by step solution. Rather the suggestions I offer are meant to encourage further thought and reflection among those who have the opportunity to endorse change in their schools.

The Inseparability of Inclusion and Critical Pedagogy

Unity High has successfully implemented an anti-heteronormative inclusion in their school, and I posit this has only become possible because they employ a critical pedagogy. Critical educators endorse “theories which recognize the problems of society as more than simply isolated events of individuals or deficiencies in the social structure” (McLaren, 2007, p. 197). The faculty and staff of Unity explore these connections explicitly with heteronormativity, helping students to contemplate the various ways heterosexism, genderism, and sexism are reinforced and deployed to maintain the marginalization of gender and sexual minorities. By doing so they engage students in a critical pedagogy intertwined with anti-heteronormative inclusion.

The school accomplishes critical pedagogy through their stated pedagogical goals of openness, acceptance, and critical thinking, all of which lay a foundation for students to recognize the impact systems of oppression have on everyone. This broad understanding of oppression allows the school to provide students with an emancipatory education. Since Unity has an LGBT focus, issues of heteronormativity are more deeply interrogated than in traditional schools.

The school sets forth an inclusion that seeks to account for heteronormative microaggressions happening in everyday interactions, while also addressing exclusions that may occur in policies, curriculum, pedagogy, and the overall school climate. This expansive approach exposes the mundane yet influential ways heteronorms infiltrate educational spaces. Thus the school has been successful in providing a critical pedagogy that “forges an expanded notion of politics and agency through a language of skepticism and possibility, and a culture of openness, debate, and engagement” (Giroux, 2010, p. 718). Unity’s practices of an anti-heteronormative

inclusion emphasizes how forces working to constrain LGBT individuals are the same which prescribe rigid expectations of masculinity and femininity for *all* individuals – expectations contingent on performing heterosexual desire exclusively and compelling strict performances of hetero-genders. This form of inclusion means students are expected to refrain from judging others and instead examine systems of oppression working to maximize difference, divide groups of people, and delineate hierarchy.

The benefits of practicing critical pedagogy are well documented, especially for marginalized students (Fine, 1989; Giroux, 2010; McLaren, 2007; Morrell, 2008). It is not uncommon for students exposed to critical pedagogy to be inspired to advocacy; having found new perspectives on inequality, many youth seek to make changes in their community (Morrell, 2008). This is certainly the case at Unity, where students have taken what they have learned and worked to support community groups impacted by heteronormativity. For instance, Unity has a leadership committee that often initiates plans for events that help the homeless and domestic abuse shelters, protests for keeping their school open, blood drives, Pride parades, and other human rights initiatives that arise. These efforts of community activism often grow out of critical conversations in the classroom. For instance, the insights gained by Brooke, Rachel, and Tori in Snapshot 15 (in their dialogue about date rape), makes it reasonable to see why the school participates in activities to support domestic abuse organizations. The insights gained from Sara's conversation with students about a transgender man's murder (Snapshot 16) makes it reasonable to see why the school participates in blood drives and Pride events. The inclusion fostered at the school spreads throughout the community as students come to recognize the broader implications of heteronormativity. These efforts would not emerge if the school did not support and encourage students to question systems of power and regulation.

The Struggle of Heteronormalizing

It can be difficult to reconcile the admirable goals of Unity High with the fact students engage in heteronormalizing practices. I remember when I first started to be more in tune to the nuanced ways in which this happens in the school. It was primarily after Je'mal made me aware of the criticism he received and his plan to stop wearing high heels (recounted in Chapter 5). This was almost a year into my research, and up to that point I had largely interpreted the teasing that was happening at the school in the same way as most students do, as an innocent friendship building activity. I remembered engaging in this type of teasing as a teenager as well. In my memory, students would get mad every once in a while, but they would let it go and the friendship group remained or even grew stronger. To me this was easily differentiated from the hate-filled epithets being thrown, or destructive rumors being spread about each other, that also occurred in my high school. I saw the teasing Unity students engage in as obviously akin to the former. But Je'mal helped me pay closer attention to the small instances of teasing, and even the body language students used to show approval or disapproval. I began to see how non-normative behaviors get regulated and singled out by one or more other students, in order to mark the performative failures of some students and re-heteronormalize their transgressive performances.

This process of heteronormalizing highlights the elaborate and expansive presence of power. Oppression tends to hold a complex omnipresence in our society, making it challenging for any space to act as a permanent respite. Although it is disheartening that practices of heteronormalizing continue to occur in the school, it is also unsurprising given the societal pressures placed on individuals to conform to heteronormative values. The school is not the only context for students' lives. Just as what students learn inside the school infiltrates their lives outside, so too does what they learn outside the school infiltrate their lives within it. This

influence arises in complex ways. Having been engulfed in acceptance, and feeling as though they are part of a supportive family, many students at Unity are empowered to explore gender and sexuality relatively freely. The comfort provided by the family atmosphere in the school allows students to feel secure in this exploration. Regrettably it is also this closeness that allows them to feel they have the “right” to regulate each other (as documented at the end of Chapter 5). Students are accepting of difference, but only as they can mark that difference within an intelligible hetero-gender stemming from the dominant constructions of heteronormativity that they learn from the broader culture, their families, and the media, and bring in to the school. Those students who are unable or unwilling to fit within a norm designated by fellow students can become outcasts much like in any other school.

The pressure from society to perform heteronormative sex, gender, and sexuality makes it challenging for the students of Unity to simply accept the anti-heteronormativity advocated within the school. Outside of their school, students are surrounded by agents of socialization (family, peers, media, religion, etc.) who have constituted heteronormativity “through language, gestures, and all manner of symbolic social sign[s]” (Butler, 1988, p. 519) as the dominant embodiment for all individuals. As such they are expected to participate in a “shared experience of ‘collective action’” (Butler, 1988, p. 525), performing hetero-genders to reinforce heterosexuality as the acceptable norm of gender and sexuality. The school, however, does work to counteract external pressures of heteronormativity by teaching students how to question some of the expectations imposed by social institutions.

The school’s inability to eliminate all heteronormative expectations means that bullying appears in complex ways. When teasing is interpreted as a form of community building (prosocial teasing) and regarded with approval, challenges arise with adequately addressing the

bullying that may in fact arise from such “teasing.” When students find themselves negatively singled out, or when a “tease” calls on a historical reference that demeans a group of people, the “tease” fails and becomes harmful. It goes beyond the group’s understanding of its cultural relevance as fun/play and instead repeats and reinforces all prior meanings it holds. For example, when Zak calls Jenny a “muffin top” in Snapshot 9, the insult crosses a line into bullying behavior because it referenced Jenny’s embodiment in terms of race and gender, in culturally specific ways that no others in the group could recognize. The “tease” had a racist/sexist effect for Jenny, and not (at least consciously) for the others. This situation speaks to the partial narratives Ellsworth (1989) references: even within inclusive spaces, the diversity of individuals involved leads to numerous experiences that reference partial knowledge about the functions of oppression. Jenny understands the complex way race and gender coalesce in this insult because it targets her, but the others are indifferent to how such a “tease” could be read.

Regardless of whether or not Zak intends for the tease to call on racist/sexist ideals, the force of his words remain. The same happens with Jacob’s continual reference to women as “bitches” (Snapshot 8), Josh’s being labeled a “freak” (Snapshot 10), and Bobby’s loud declaration to the class that “we like faggots around here” (Snapshot 11). Each of these incidents may be classified by some students as prosocial teasing that helps to make the family of Unity tighter. However, each act falls upon targets (and/or bystanders) who experience the force of the words in nuanced ways given their particular embodiment and the histories of how systems of oppression have regulated that embodiment.

When either the school or the students fail to account for the macro perspective implicated in a tease – the historical and constitutive effects of the language – and for the nuanced ways different students may experience the tease, the full force of prior citations comes

into effect and brings additional vulnerability to those targeted. At Unity, students often call on the collective ethos of the group to validate teasing. For example, Zak insists he was calling *everyone* a muffin top (Snapshot 9), Sierra and Rachel determine that Jacob's sexist outbursts are tolerable because of his disability (Snapshot 8), and Bobby asserts that everyone knew he was kidding when he was acting homophobic (Snapshot 11). However, when the formation of a collective ethos does not account for changing cultural and social conditions, it lends itself to "exclusionary foreclosure" (Butler, 2005, p. 6). This foreclosure becomes dangerous, making it easier for violence to be committed on those who fail to adhere to social norms.

Once I recognized the various small ways heteronormalizing was taking place in the school, I found myself troubled. The goals of the school, and all the great kids I had gotten to know, had pulled me in. I truly felt the school was a worthy institution and an essential safe haven for the students who attended it. I knew realistically that the school would still have its issues, but I didn't want kids who were coming to Unity High, precisely because they couldn't be themselves at their old school, to end up feeling like the same thing was happening at Unity. But here it was: students were still bullying each other. How could I reconcile that with the school's admirable mission? Once I started the process of combing through my data, I began to recognize the difference between how bullying occurred at Unity High and it occurred at other schools. For instance, those students who couldn't even begin to express themselves safely at their old school (couldn't be "out," couldn't date who they wanted, couldn't wear what they wanted, etc.) did have the opportunity to be themselves at Unity. Even if their performance was regulated in some way, it was a regulation of a "transgression" they couldn't previously perform at all. It was also a regulation different from that which would be implemented in a heteronormative environment marking it as not only transgressive, but also a complete rejection of heteronormativity. I see this

as a positive; the student is at least able to embody new ways of being. Still, as we saw, students at Unity worked to rework transgressive performances in to what they had determined were appropriately re-heteronormalized transgressions. Although this was certainly difficult for students, I came to see it as a more positive (more freeing) experience than how they otherwise would have been able to explore their self-understanding.

I came to feel this way particularly because of the practices of critical pedagogy I saw within the school. For instance, there are some encouraging aspects about how responses to bullying unfold at Unity High. Students appear to continually question the reasoning, necessity, and impact bullying has on each other and the school, and I do not imagine this happens at the average high school. Students may also learn lessons from how bullying is addressed at Unity that may strengthen their resilience for dealing with heteronormativity in the world. The students at Unity are able to question bullying in this manner precisely because they are enfolded in an environment of critical pedagogy advocating their questioning of power. For example, in Snapshot 12 (Quinn debating her classmates about her calling a transgender boy by his former name) reveals the extent to which students engage in dialogue to understand the impact of the harmful acts they commit upon each other. Although the students do not definitively resolve anything during their talk, they take the time to listen to each other, and there is recognition of a collective ethos working to define what is and is not acceptable in the school. The students propose a circle to interrogate the issue further, and although not everyone is thrilled about the idea, they are willing to give it a try. Similarly, Snapshot 11 reveals some critical thinking on the part of Bobby (who has been reprimanded for using homophobic epithets while “goofing around”). In my discussion with Bobby, he remains steadfast that his remarks were not hurtful, but although he is unable to make connections between his words and their effects as injurious

speech, his later responses during our interview do show some thoughtful reflection. Although Bobby only shows a glimmer of critical thinking when talking with me individually, he may have been more willing to delve into the issue if prompted by other students.

The school's practice of restorative justice circles is a very powerful aspect of their critical pedagogy. It seems to be a thread that holds together all of their pedagogical goals. Within the circles, students cannot help but to consider how their actions impact others and to reflect on how those relations are mitigated by larger power structures defining individuals' possibilities for living a meaningful life. In each interview I conducted, students had something positive to say about the circles they participated in at Unity. For some, this optimism came with complaints such as the circles are "boring" or "take too long," but even with that cynicism students admitted that they find the circles helpful. Circles therefore present the opportunity to ease the tensions of bullying and heteronormalizing that inevitably occur in the school. Some students additionally found circles personally empowering, feeling they came to know themselves and others better because of circles. The students who trained as circle leaders truly became leaders in the school. As indicated with Brooke and Rachel's guidance in Snapshot 12, the point of view of circle leaders were well respected in the school.

How the Critical Pedagogy of Unity High Empowers Students

One of the main goals of critical pedagogy is to empower students to break out of oppression. Unity High succeeds in empowering their students, and they succeed in a way few other schools do. The anti-heteronormative approach of the school has led some students to find new ways of being – literally, new ways to exist – in the world. As gender and sexual minorities, the students of Unity struggle to come to terms with their marginalized identities, and I believe the school's critical pedagogy practices eases that struggle. McLaren (2007) notes,

empowerment means more than self-confirmation. It also refers to the process by which students learn to question and selectively appropriate those aspects of the dominant culture that will provide them with the basis for defining and transforming, rather than merely serving, the wider social order. (p. 214)

As students at Unity come to understand their positions in society, they come to recognize the influences of heteronormativity and the necessity of questioning the hegemonic forces perpetuating it. This knowledge shapes the students' personal development and transforms the possibilities for their future. The various pressures of the heteronormative world leave many gender and sexual minority students feeling lost, or living "in-between" worlds of acceptance and rejection. Everything in Unity High brings students opportunities to build confidence to speak up and think through injustices dictating those feelings of acceptance or rejection.

Significantly, the flexible curriculum at the school allows youth to explore aspects of their lives and identities they may not have otherwise explored. This is because critical pedagogy has a way of empowering youth to consume knowledge in new ways, helping students produce work that allows them to "acknowledge how they want to exist in the world" (Morrell, 2008, p. 208). Students acquire a voice, a presence, that would not be available otherwise. Teachers at Unity make a point of creating assignments that encourage students to investigate their own lives. Part of the motivation for this practice is practical, as a way of neutralizing the inevitable "distractions" of real life issues students bring into the classroom. However, another purpose of this approach is to give students the opportunity to explore their sense of self in new ways. Assignments are designed so that if a student wants to make it personal, or wants to experiment with a particular identity, they can.

Curricular flexibility honors different ways of knowing and coming to knowledge, marking a central theme of critical pedagogy. It also reveals the contradictory ways in which knowledge is produced and valued in our society. McLaren (2007) emphasizes this point, highlighting the role critical pedagogy plays in teaching students about power structures eminent within knowledge production. This critical perspective pushes students to see how knowledge functions to create the world around us, and to create it in a hierarchical manner. “The crucial factor here is that some forms of knowledge have more power and legitimacy than others. ...Certain types of knowledge legitimate certain gender, class, and racial interests” (McLaren, 2007, p. 197). As students come to recognize this, they gain an understanding of how systems of power and oppression are perpetuated through knowledge/power. The social construction of knowledge must be interrogated if critical pedagogy is to offer students a truly emancipatory education. Neglecting to trace methods of power results in hopeless bodies unable to move from the sanctioned discourses of the dominant group. Outlining the connection helps students begin to see the potential effects of their own power/knowledge differently.

When Unity honors the work students produce, they validate a student’s own access to (and right to) knowledge/power. Providing various ways for students to explore issues and topics widens the frame of acceptable knowledge and pushes students to consider the outcome of valuing different ways of knowing. This too marks one of Unity High’s central pedagogical goals: acceptance. Students are pushed to go beyond tolerance and fully believe in the value of different perspectives. The school strives to show students how social connections are imbued with hegemonic forces characterizing our relationality in order to maintain power and control over particular bodies. In advocating acceptance, the school helps students imagine a disruption

to those constraining regulations. This ultimately empowers the students to understand themselves through a lens other than that of the dominant group.

As was demonstrated in Snapshot 13 (when Alejandro uses his story to think through his past experiences of bullying and his prospects for a bright future) and Snapshot 14 (when Candi creates an avatar to express her femininity), students have many opportunities to use their projects to think about who they are, who they are becoming, and who they want to be. The opportunity to explore oneself in this way, and to have the exploration validated as proof of academic success, is empowering. The coursework students complete at Unity often highlights how critical projects that “emerge from the classroom have a purpose and audience much larger than the teacher or the classroom: students produce [work] that can change the world” (Morrell, p. 86). In several ways, the work produced by students at Unity expresses new perspectives on issues impacting gender and sexual minority youth – new knowledge for educators to consider as we investigate how best to support marginalized youth.

Students’ efforts to understand their sense of self are further buoyed by the relaxed atmosphere in the school. Snapshot 15 (the girls’ discussion of date rape) and Snapshot 16 (the discussion of a transgender man’s murder) reveal the important informal conversations students and teachers have during non-academic times. There is no fear of “naming” (Fine, 1989) social inequalities and social injustices students observe or experience. Students and teachers alike “tell it like it is,” and constructive dialogue ensues. Students push each other to see the “big picture,” helping each other recognize how their lives are influenced by larger systems of regulation. Teachers, too, understand when students need to be pushed, and do so, to ensure students can see how seemingly random or insignificant social issues do indeed relate to students’ lives. In these conversations, students are learning more about what it means to take responsibility for one’s

role (whether targeted or not) in reproducing oppression, and to use one's power to challenge and transform those systems.

Student Voices

High school turned out to be a lot better than I thought it would be. Like if I had gone to another high school I know that things would have been a lot different for me, and I probably would not be as happy as I am now. I wouldn't say dead or anything, but I wouldn't be the same person. (Senior, Interview, 6/11/13)

My decision to use snapshots to emphasize the culture of Unity High and collective experiences of students has an unfortunate side effect of leaving individual voices in the background. Here, with the discussion of empowerment, I feel it is critical to honor these voices with direct, anonymized quotations. In the above epigraph, it is clear Unity has had a significant impact on this student's life. The student clearly identifies that he would be a different, less happy person, had he attended any other school. Although it may seem trivial to think of happiness as a necessary component of a high school education, given what we know about the overwhelming mental health vulnerabilities of students who experience bullying based on gender and sexual identities, graduating students capable of experiencing happiness is no small feat. We know it is not uncommon for students who are harassed at school to commit suicide (Center, 2008; Cianciotto & Cahill, 2012; Russell et al., 2011), so the student's reference to death ("I wouldn't say dead or anything") is significant. Even as he is saying that he might not actually have died without Unity, he's aware that other students likely would have. School climate surveys reveal the significance of emotional security and feeling welcome at one's school (GLSEN, 2014) for LGBTQ students' mental health outcomes. For this student, it is clear that

Unity empowered him with emotional security and the opportunity to enjoy his high school experience, something he never expected was possible.

Many students also talked about the closeness of the school, the family atmosphere, as very positive and supportive of their education. One student noted, “I’m more sociable now. Because I get along with all the teachers and I never could do that [before]” (Interview, 12/11/15). Repeatedly students discussed the benefit of being able to talk to everyone in the school. Although groups of students may be identified as “cliquey,” having closely shared interests and relationships, there were no exclusionary cliques - even the cliquey students welcomed others into their conversations and activities. One student explained the significance of this openness by saying, “There’s like no different groups. There’s not like, oh the goths, or the populars, this and that. ‘Cuz half the time I see- I see the goths mixed in with the populars, mixed in with the geeks, like- [our school’s] like a salad bowl!” (Interview, 12/2/15).

The lack of exclusive cliques lends to the overall closeness within the school and allows students to feel confident in being who they want to be. A student emphasized the significance of being empowered in this way: “this school helps me get the confidence to wear what I wear, and to- to do what I do, and feel ok without feeling like I’m being alienated or that somebody won’t like it” (Interview, 6/11/13). The comfort felt in the school is critical to creating an inclusive space. It also translates into students knowing that they are valued. Each student is known and appreciated as a unique individual who has something to contribute to the school: “Here at this school they give everybody their own spotlight. Like there’s not just one spotlight” (Interview, 12/2/15). Each of these sentiments suggests the school is successful in creating a welcoming atmosphere for everyone.

At the same time, students have mixed assessments of Unity's academic success. In interview responses, students waver between thinking the school is academically challenging and believing it has done little to advance their education (addressed further below). Those who feel Unity provides a good academic base appreciated the flexibility: "That's the nice thing about this school, everybody can move at their own pace" (Interview, 6/12/15). As mentioned in Chapters 2 and 4, the school bestows a significant amount of responsibility on students and does not push academics on them. Students are not forced to come to class, to do their work, or to study hard. The school certainly encourages it and makes it clear it is necessary for students' academic success; however, the school believes students will not benefit from being forced into an education. Teachers at Unity believe it is more empowering to allow students to come to knowledge on their own accord. As the previous quote suggests, many students appreciated this approach. One student who ended up dropping out (and who I interviewed after the fact) acknowledged that she never would have considered going back to school for her GED if it weren't for Unity: "I don't know how to explain how [Unity] made an impact on me. ...But I know I wouldn't be here today [working on my GED] if it wasn't for [Unity]. ...if I went to any other school, I might have not even gone back to go finish" (Interview, 12/9/15). Even when the school's flexible and laidback approach to academics failed – resulting in a student literally failing out – the influence of the schools' critical pedagogy remains eminent in students' lives. Students continue to feel empowered to learn more and better their lives.

Reflection on Limitations

A discussion of student voices would be incomplete without further reflection on limitations of this study. In particular, I recognize that this project would have looked very different if I had interviewed the teachers and/or completed policy analysis. I did not formally

interview Sara or John (the teachers whose classrooms I was based in) or any of the teachers or staff at Unity High. This was a purposeful decision. At the onset of this project I believed that student voices needed to be central to the research and therefore were the only voices I needed to collect. I believed that interviews with teachers would reveal more about the school's practices than about the impact of the school on students. For instance, interviewing teachers may have given further perspective regarding bullying, reasons behind assignments, and further details about the close relationships they share with their students. I initially felt none of this information would bring clarity to the experiences students shared. However, in retrospect I recognize that teachers likely could have helped to further contextualize the voices of students. For instance, moments in which a teacher's perspective on bullying may not have aligned with the perspective of a student could have provided further clarity regarding the deployment of heteronormative expectations. I also could have used interviews with teachers as an opportunity to clarify what their intentions had been during conversations I observed with students, which similarly could have shown alignment or disjuncture with a student's interpretation of the communication, further clarifying how messages about heteronormativity circulate in the school.

A policy analysis could have revealed official procedures in place to maintain an inclusive space, enrollment practices, formal efforts to address struggles with inclusion, and challenges the school faced with district-wide policy. The addition of these data would certainly have been beneficial to further understand how Unity High functions in order to serve gender and sexual minority youth. If I were to embark on this project again, I likely would add in these components of data collection. Compiling these different aspects of data (teacher interviews and policy analysis) would have revealed additional perspectives on how heteronormativity is performed, valued, and challenged in Unity High. I hope that further research in the field will

take what this project demonstrates about critical pedagogy enacted through an anti-heteronormative inclusion and add to it by investigating challenges posed to inclusion and the different implications challenges hold for students from a variety of backgrounds.

Implications and Recommendations

I address my recommendations on two levels: first, I identify some specific practices that would benefit Unity High, and second, I address the broader lessons learned that could be applicable to all high schools. As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, I do not seek to offer simplistic “solutions” here. My goal is to illuminate challenges and successes and to provide perspective on how to think through them further. I take this approach because I feel it is important each community has the opportunity to find solutions that best fit the needs of their individual school. I hope my work will inspire critical educators to join together within schools and school districts to consider the application of my findings to their particular contexts and propose locally relevant solutions.

1) Increase awareness of intersectional forms of oppression. Within Unity High, the lack of intersectional analysis and practice presents a clear opportunity for improvement. Faculty and staff need to become more aware of how systems of oppression interlock and intersect in complex ways to maintain power over particular bodies, and adapt their practices to better address how intersectionality works within Unity’s walls. “Intersectionality highlights how lived identities, structural systems, sites of marginalization, forms of power, and modes of resistance ‘intersect’ in dynamic, shifting ways” (May, 2015, p. 21) to reveal privileging of knowledge that is “applied and enforced in (biased) ways that perpetuate systemic inequality” (May, 2015, p. 28). Students with multiple marginalized identities tend to have an experiential wisdom about the struggles presented by these interlocking forces, and could benefit from greater support from

teachers to further understand and articulate intersectionality. Jenny's experience in Snapshot 9 provides a good example. Upon reflection with me, Jenny she was able to describe how she felt race *and* gender were significantly implicated in her being labeled a "muffin top." Additionally, she identified what she felt was a privileging of LGBT students in the school. If teachers tune in to students' reactions in situations like this, they may be able to learn more about the complex ways oppressions intersect, and help other students recognize it as well. Doing so would benefit students who face multiple axis of marginalization and increase inclusion throughout the school.

2) *Maintain balance between the formal and informal spaces of the school.* Unity High would benefit from trying to find balance with their informal atmosphere, allowing students in need of more structure the option of having it. I take caution in suggesting this because it is clear the school's flexible curriculum provides significant value by validating non-dominant forms of knowledge and allowing student to be creative and innovative. In addition, the various informal spaces throughout the school bring important critical conversations among students and teachers. However, the number one complaint I heard from students in interviews was that there was "too much freedom" in the school. One student eloquent defined the issue as follows:

[Some kids] need somebody to be constantly on their back. Like, they need somebody to tell them what to do all the time. And I'm not one of those people, and that's why I've been so successful here, but there's kids here who do need somebody on their back 24/7 telling them what to do. ...I feel like that's, that's a lot of kids' problem here. (Interview, 11/6/15)

The school's philosophy of waiting for students to come to education on their own can be useful for some students. However, the students at Unity indicate that when it takes their classmates a long time to "figure it out" (that they need to take school seriously), those

who do take their academics seriously are at a disadvantage. I observed several teachers managing this well, for example asking students who were not working to move to the hall instead of remaining a distraction in the classroom, but even this can be off-putting to students who are trying to concentrate (especially if they'd rather be in the hall, but are fighting the urge). Unity could benefit from brainstorming ways to remedy this discrepancy.

3) *Expand the definition of bullying, and consistently address bullying.* I believe Unity High could benefit from enforcing the definition of bullying I set forth in this dissertation. I propose bullying be defined as any cruel (attempt to debase another) or aggressive interaction between individuals of unequal power which inflict (or intend to inflict) harm/distress on an individual, or are perceived to inflict harm/distress on an individual, and represent a reoccurring victimization on the part of an intended target. In essence, this understanding of bullying places greater emphasis on acknowledging and addressing microaggressions, even if the aggressor assumes and intends them to be innocuous. As reviewed in Chapter 5, broadening the definition of bullying in this manner provides broader protections for both the direct and indirect subjects of bullying. Implementing policies that acknowledge bullying in this capacity can provide further opportunity for students (and staff) to address the complex ways in which student behavior can function to uphold systems of domination and maintain inequality.

Even accounting for the aforementioned critiques, Unity provides significant value to its students. I have no doubt their practices of critical pedagogy leave them primed to find reasonable solutions to these challenges. I now turn to reflect on the

broader lessons learned from Unity High and what other schools stand to learn from the innovate inclusion set forth in the school.

Lessons Learned

An overarching lesson from my work at Unity High is that inclusion does not happen overnight. When a school is committed to providing their students with a safer, more inclusive environment, it must be in it for the long hall. There will be setbacks – bullying may continue – but if a school is able to maintain the goals of critical pedagogy, there will be benefits, even if incremental. This is certainly easier said than done, and it may not bring comfort to the individuals impacted on a daily basis by setbacks, but from what I have gathered from the students at Unity High, it is worth it. In addition to holding strong in the commitment to inclusion, below I list brief summaries of seven lessons that can be taken from the example of Unity High.

1) Students can handle freedom, and respond with creativity and innovation. The students in Unity High demonstrate that when given responsibility for their academics, students are able to rise to the occasion. Other researchers have documented similar successes (Alonso et al., 2009; Fine, 1989; Meier, 1995; Morrell, 2008; Tough, 2009). Children, especially teens, want the opportunity to excel beyond adults' expectations. School structures must leave enough room for them to do so. Permitting students to choose their own assignments, their own research topics, or their own methods is a way educators can support this desire.

2) Students are more invested when their education is relatable. Again, this is nothing new; several critical researchers have found the same to be true (Fine, 1989; Giroux, 1983, 2010; McLaren, 2007; Morrell, 2008), but my observations at Unity provide some concrete examples

of how a school can make learning relatable. Education that speaks to a student's daily experiences lets them know that their lives matter. For marginalized students, this type of critical education empowers them to fight subordination.

3) A small room full of material resources can go a long way. Many schools are able to recognize students face various challenges outside their walls. By providing access to basic necessities schools can provide students with extra security and dignity, both of which further a student's opportunity to study successfully that day. Community-school-based partnerships should be maximized to offer basic necessities to students (and their family's) in need.

4) Faculty and staff have a responsibility to communicate with each other regarding student needs. If a student trusts one adult in the school, it will make a difference, but only if that student is in a school where personnel communicate effectively. As research has indicated, it is crucial for students to have at least one adult in their school that they trust (San Martin & Calabrese, 2011; Wegmann & Bowen, 2010). Not every student will confide in every adult; therefore, it becomes essential for faculty and staff to communicate with each other about students' needs. When school personnel share necessary information with each other, they will all be able to provide support to each student, which may increase the overall trust a student has for the school.

5) Consistently addressing the different aspects of teasing/bullying that occur in the school will have a positive impact on inclusion. Again, in reference to the definition of bullying given above, it is critical for educators to acknowledge the various ways harmful bullying occurs. As my research indicates, students learn from and recover from the harms of bullying when they are infused in a culture of critical reflection empowering them to do so. Therefore teachers and staff should be aware of the cues students give, and validate student complaints, so an

understood norm is established that harm to others is taken seriously. Even when students insist everyone is “in” on the joke, a discussion of potential harm should be initiated in order to acknowledge the powerful constituting effects of language.

6) Students and staff must be supported, both in culture and in policy, in addressing bullying. It is not enough to simply identify and acknowledge that bullying has taken place. Both staff and students need to know that when a concern of bullying is identified, they will be supported in addressing it. Unity High did this most successfully through their practices of circles. Regardless of what approach a school takes to show consistency in addressing bullying, it must be seen as being taken seriously or it will remain ineffective.

7) Allow and encourage informal spaces (e.g., lounge areas) where teachers and students can freely congregate together. The value of social, non-academic spaces and time is crucial to inclusion and critical pedagogy. These spaces allow trust to build among those within a school. With trust, schools are able to critically address concerns of inclusion and safeguard its continuance.

Conclusion

At the writing of this dissertation, our country is in the middle of a legal and social debate about transgender rights, often playing out in arguments as to whether or not transgender individuals should have the right to use public restrooms matching their gender identity.³² News outlets often focus on how this issue manifests in public schools, noting the president’s call “for schools across the country to allow transgender students to access the bathrooms where they feel

³² The Obama Administration’s Department of Justice (DOJ) sued North Carolina for gender discrimination over a recent law that bans transgender individuals from using a bathroom other than that which corresponds with the gender listed on their birth certificate. The DOJ has threatened to withhold federal education funds if North Carolina does not revoke the bill (Reilly, 2016).

most comfortable,” or noting how constituents believe such policies are harmful to the community (Teague, 2016). Once again schools are at the center of a key social debate. As our country works through this latest human rights issue, we could stand to learn some valuable lessons from the anti-heteronormative inclusion deployed within Unity High. Just as Unity High has maintained successful practices of inclusion through critical pedagogy, so too can our society by endorsing similar principles of openness, acceptance and critical thinking.

Unity High demonstrates the success that comes from pursuing dialogue. As students continue to struggle with the impact of living in a heteronormative society – and its reinforcement within their school through ever-present pressures to heteronormalize – Unity provides them with a foundation to expose the discursive power structures regulating their lives. This emancipatory education has brought the gender and sexual minority students of Unity High a freedom to be who they want to be, and allowed them to consider new possibilities for existing in our society.

APPENDIX A

IRB Process

In the spring of 2011, I was enrolled in Advanced Qualitative Methods II at Syracuse University with Dr. Sari Knopp-Biklen (my advisor at the time). For the whole semester, the class read published qualitative research. We combed through each book, assessing and comparing the methods of each author, including research design, data collection, and presentation of results.

Dr. Biklen, a well-known and respected qualitative researcher, had served on the Institutional Review Board at Syracuse University and was aware of the ins and outs of getting projects approved. After learning about the IRB process, I became concerned that I would have a difficult time getting a study discussing teenage gender and sexuality approved. Dr. Biklen and I considered this challenge on several occasions and contemplated different ways to address the IRB about the importance and feasibility of this research. For my final project in the Qualitative Methods class, I wrote a draft IRB protocol in order to work through some of the concerns we had been discussing. This was well in advance of being ready to begin research, however I figured this jump-start would give me plenty of time to iron out any kinks the IRB identified.

That first protocol, submitted in late 2011, was very different from what is presented in this dissertation. I initially anticipated getting participants involved in online/electronic journaling, having them respond to prompts that identified different interactions from a day's observations. For example, if I had witnessed drag queens dancing and showing off during class I would have asked the students to write about it from their perspectives. I imagined I would prompt their writing with something like: *Student X, Y, and Z interrupted class this afternoon. How did it impact what you were working on? Why do you think they did that? Please add any*

other comments you would like to share about the incident. My protocol was not denied outright, but I was called to a full board review meeting to discuss the concerns of some board members (an invitation that is not common, but a good sign the board was willing to work with me).

The main concern was regarding transparency. I proposed using a passive consent for parents instead of an active one, and the board members viewed this as deceiving. Passive consent entails giving a full description of the project to parents to inform them the research being conducted was an added component of the student's regular school day, would not affect the student's grades in any way, and participation was voluntary. The parents can opt their children out, but are not required to sign anything to opt in. Parents are accustomed to getting such disclosures for school classes that may be controversial, such as sexuality education and evolution. I believed using passive consent in this case would allow vulnerable gender and sexual minority students an added measure of safety. Various research has shown the risk involved with youth coming out to their family; the dangers of being open and honest about non-normative sexuality or gender has been known to result in physical and verbal abuse, youth being kicked out of their home, and increased likelihood of suicide or self-harm due to hostile environments (Elze, 2009; Fisher, 2009; Gangamma et al., 2008; MacGillivray, 2000; Miller et al., 2006; Mustanski, 2011; Priebe et al., 2010; Russell et al., 2011). I believed families who may have already been suspicious of a child's transgressive gender or sexuality could have found additional cause for suspicion when given an individual consent form. Suspicion of this kind may have induced hostilities in the home and put the youth at risk (Elze, 2009; MacGillivray, 2000; Miller et al., 2006; Mustanski, 2011; Priebe et al., 2010; Russell et al., 2011). Passive consent forms would offer protection because even though they would clearly state that gender

and sexuality were included in topics of observation, they would also explicitly state that *all* youth at the school were being studied.

One member of the IRB, who disclosed that she was a mother of a teenager, told me the passive consent letter was unclear and she believed I was trying to hide the fact I wanted to know about participants' sexuality. Other members agreed with her sentiment, believing it seemed like I was trying to hide something. Although I assured the board my intent was not to investigate individual student's sexuality, I was honest that student sexual orientation would likely be organically revealed at my research site given it was known as an LGBT school. I tried to refocus the conversation on safety and reiterated data that indicated some sexual and minority youth need to be afforded special privacy in research (Elze, 2009; Miller et al., 2006; Mustanski, 2011; Priebe et al., 2010). I additionally noted that my participants were ages 16 and above, and cited research indicated children age 14 and above are as capable as adults at making skilled decisions regarding consent (Mustanski, 2011). The board respectfully acknowledged my findings but remained skeptical. They believed parents needed to be more informed and be given clear examples of what would be taking place in their child's school. In other words, they suggested if it was possible I could give a student a prompt stating, *Today you were talking with your friend about being gay, and looking for a new boyfriend. What does it mean to you that you can talk openly about this at school?* it needed to be explicitly disclosed to parents. My protocol was deferred, and I was advised to make my consent form more transparent and resubmit.

Since I planned to work with a significant number of LGBTQ students, I knew parental consent would be challenging for several reasons. Some youth would not be out to their parents. Some would not be living with their parents. Others might be out and living with parents who were unsupportive of their identities. All of these scenarios made it challenging to find

unthreatening language to present my research to parents. My initial attempt, which resulted in this full board review, used language stating I wanted to study how students understood their school impacting their sense of being embodied “gendered” and “sexed” individuals. Looking back, I now see and hear how this terminology may have been misunderstood and raised more resistance than the actual content of the research warranted.

The reactions of some board members reflect the growing concern over researching issues of gender and sexuality in youth populations. Although we live in a society that is very sex saturated – for youth and adults – researchers are rarely allowed to talk to minors about sex. Our society continues to hold adultist views on gender and sexuality and deem the topic too inappropriate for youth (Irvine, 1994, 2002; Lesko, 2001; Luker, 2006; Luttrell, 2003; Pillow, 2004; Rasmussen, 2006). Therefore, adults continue to regulate the gender and sexuality of youth very tightly in order to maintain this façade. Of course, all adults are aware of how gender and sexuality infiltrate children’s lives because we were once in these youthful bodies as well. The politics of silence surrounding the social science of children’s gender and sexuality grows from these adultist views. However, “the politics of asking questions about LGBT sexualities and genders cannot be separated from the methodological and theoretical implications of these politics” (Gray, 2009, p. 193). If research were to definitively recognize the gender and sexuality of children, this adultist view would be at risk. The discourse of control and regulation of youth gender and sexuality would diminish and adults would have to face the prospect of confronting children’s bodies as something other than “innocent.” Most IRBs are not ready to take this chance.

After my first review, Dr. Biklen and I agreed it would be helpful to step away from the IRB process for a few months. I still had some coursework to finish and plenty of time to think

about my research. The hope was that a break would bring me fresh perspective. A few months after my IRB was deferred, I was able to begin volunteering at my research site. It was the first time I had been in the school and I soon learned the environment was much different than I had anticipated. My initial protocol assumed the school was traditional with rigid schedules, regular computer time and access, and formal classrooms. I soon learned this was far from the case at Unity High. My plan for data collection in the form of electronic journaling was not going to work at all. After four months in the school and getting to know the environment and culture, I started work on a new protocol.

The new understanding I had of my research site helped me realize that the openness in the school made it possible to investigate embodiment in different ways. Without having to ask I saw students performing gender and sexuality in nuanced ways and grasping on to their performances in order to assert who they were. I began to realize that if my research asked how students came to understand a sense of self (in school), the very composition of my participant pool at this LGBT school would inevitably reveal diverse particulars about gender and sexuality. My second protocol focused on this question: how do students come to understand a sense of self in school? This time around I felt comfortable including active parental consent forms. I believed the language of investigating students' sense of self would be relatively harmless for gender and sexual minority youth. After all, gender and sexuality are a very small aspect of self-understanding. There were some students who still felt uncomfortable bringing consent forms home (discussed in Chapter 3), but this may have been for other reasons. This second protocol was approved.

I understand and respect the important role of IRBs in protecting vulnerable populations. However, my experience initiating this project reveals some contradictions in how IRBs propose

to protect particular groups. The same measures that might protect some teens – such as requiring active parental consent – can put other teens in danger. Researchers and IRBs would benefit from greater guidance on how ethical concerns manifest differently with specific vulnerable populations.

APPENDIX B

Sample Interview Questions

- Can you tell me a little about how you got to this school?
 - [If experienced pervious HS] How is Unity High different from your previous high school?
- How do you think your life has changed since coming here?
- What did you think about [identify class]?
- Tell me a little bit about what your project represents.
 - Why was this important to you to communicate?
- Do you think your life is reflected in your project? Can you share how?
- How do you think your project reflects who you are? Or who you are becoming?
- You used a method that was unlike anyone else in the class, does it have special meaning to you?
- You focused a lot on [example] in your project; why was this important to you?
- Would you have completed this project at a different school? Why?
- How do you think Unity High has impacted your sense of an identity?
 - Unity High is open about being a safe school for LGBT kids and others who have been disadvantaged. What do you think it means to be at a school like this?
- This class is pretty unique that it allows you so much freedom with your assignments.
Why do you think they do this?
 - How do you think you've handled that freedom?

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CURRICULUM VITAE

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EDUCATION

Ph.D. Cultural Foundation of Education, Syracuse University, December 2016

Dissertation Title: *Free to Be: One Charter School's Approach to Supporting Gender and Sexual Minority Students*

Research Interests: Gender/Sexuality and Education

M.A. Women's Studies, University of Cincinnati, June 2007

Certificate Northern American Women's Studies

Thesis Title: *A Birthmother's Identity: [M]other: Living on the Border of (Non)Motherhood*

B.A. Philosophy, Mount Mary University, May 2002

Minor in Art

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Milwaukee Area Technical College, Milwaukee WI

Instructor, Contemporary American Society (SOCSCI 197) Fall 2016

Instructor, Introduction to Sociology (SOCSCI 203) Fall 2014 – present

Instructor, Valuing Diversity (SOCSCI 217) Fall 2013 – present

Syracuse University, Syracuse, NY

Teaching Assistant, The American School (EDU 310) Fall 2009; Fall 2010-Spr 2012

Instructor, The American School (EDU 310) Spr 2010

University of Cincinnati, Cincinnati, OH

Instructor, Women, Gender & Culture (WMST 375) Sum 2007

Instructor, Introduction to Women's Studies (WMST 241) Spr 2007

PUBLICATIONS

Sieger, K. (2012). A birthmother's identity: [M]other: Living on the border of (non)motherhood, in F. Latchford (Ed.). *Adoption and Mothering*. Toronto: Demeter Press.

MANUSCRIPTS IN PREPARATION

Sieger, K. (in process). "She's too fugly to pull it off!": How students at an inclusive school accept the non-heteronormative embodiment of others through heteronormalizing.

Sieger, K. (in process). The absent anus: Mechanism of heteronormativity within sex education curricula.

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

Sieger, K. "Gaming sex (education)," Safe-Healthy-Strong, Planned Parenthood WI. Milwaukee, March 2016.

Sieger, K. "The storied classroom," Safe-Healthy-Strong, Planned Parenthood WI. Milwaukee, June 2015.

Sieger, K. "Teens & sexuality: Improving support to youth in out-of-home care," Safe-Healthy-Strong, Planned Parenthood WI. Milwaukee, August 2014.

Sieger, K. "The absent anus: Mechanism of heteronormativity within sex education curricula," Bodies, Gender and Technology. Virginia Tech University, April 2012.

Sieger, K. "An exploration of heteronormativity in sex education curricula," Graduate student roundtable on LGBTQ Issues in Education, Queering Education Research Institute. CUNY, November 2010.

Sieger, K. "An exploration of heteronormativity in sex education curricula," American Educational Studies Association (AESA). Denver, October 2010.

Sieger, K. "Studies abroad: Toronto," Reflections Across Borders, UC Women's Studies Presents. April 2007.

Sieger, K. "Conversations with mother's of Dharamsala India," Feminist Internships, UC Women's Studies Presents, February 2007.

Sieger, K. "Birthmother's experience," Infant Adoption Training Initiative, National Council for Adoption. Milwaukee, April 2004.

Sieger, K. "Birthmother's experience," Adoption Resource Fair. Milwaukee, November 2003.

Sieger, K. "Birthmother," Mothering, Law, Politics, and Public Policy, Association for Research on Mothering. Toronto, October 2002.

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

2013 – 2014	Children's Hospital of WI Community Services, Program Coordinator, <i>Healthy Kids, Healthy Choices</i>
2012 - 2013	Children's Hospital of WI Community Services, Pregnancy Outreach Coordinator, <i>Start Right</i>
2010 – 2012	Q Center @ Aids Community Resources, Sexuality Educator
2007 – 2009	Children's Hospital of WI Community Services, Pregnancy Outreach Coordinator
2005 – 2007	University of Cincinnati, Friends of Women's Studies Graduate Assistant

2002 – 2005 Adoption Services, Inc., Birthparent Mentor

MEMBERSHIPS

- Milwaukee Teen Pregnancy Prevention Network, Leadership Member, 2012-present
- Future Professoriate Program, Syracuse University, 2010-2012
- American Education Studies Association, 2009-present
- Milwaukee Alliance for Sexual Health, City of Milwaukee, 2008-2009
- Diversity Council, Children's Service Society of WI, 2007-2009
- Task Force on Teen Parents, City of Milwaukee, 2007-2009
- School-Age Parent Task Force, City of West Allis, 2007-2009
- Graduate Student Health Care Committee, University of Cincinnati, 2005-2006
- Association for Research on Mothering, 2002-current

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- Nurturing Parenting Certification, 2012
- Sexuality Education Certification, PPLM, 2009
- Girls Circle Facilitator Certification, 2008

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