QUEERING THE BODY'(S) POLITIC? GSAs, CITIZENSHIP AND EDUCATION

by

LORI B. MACINTOSH

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Lori B. MacIntosh

Name of Author (please print)  30/08/2004

Date (dd/mm/yyyy)

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study deals largely with exploring the role of GSAs in schools. The analysis asks why sexual minority youth and allied heterosexual youth are the primary resource for educating their peers, faculty members, administrators, school boards about issues homophobia in schools. Related to this, the thesis also takes up the issue of the school as a heteronormative space, and subsequently asks how heteronormative structures affect student understandings of citizenship curriculum, learning, and social change.

The data consists of three individual interviews, and one group interview. In total there were six participants, four female, two male, of varying sexual orientations. All participants were youths between the ages 15-18; all were students in the Lower Mainland, and all were active members of their school’s GSA.

Queer theory and poststructural theory form the theoretical infrastructure of the study. Drawing from both theatrical frameworks, this study attempts to bridge the perceived gap between theoretical representations and applied, qualitative based analysis in the hopes of opening up a more fluid avenue of inquiry.

By way of conclusion I suggest that while beneficial to individual students, GSAs have become a “band-aid” solution for the systemic problem of homophobia in schools. I also argue that GSAs ought not be the only mechanism through which GLBTQI education and pedagogies of inclusion are fostered. Further to this, I recommend that a reconceptualized understanding of citizenship discourse, inclusive of communities, belonging, and personal responsibility would offer productive avenues to engage with heteronormativism, and other normalizing mechanisms within the school environments.
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to begin by acknowledging the GLBTQI youth from whose lives I draw my inquiry. I also want to recognize students working in GSAs, and those whose participation made this project possible.

I want to thank the many friends who have offered me support through the various stages of this journey, and its complicated detours. To Amy Bingaman, thank you for helping me to find my way here. I also want to acknowledge Tom Sork, Roweena Bacchus and Shermila Salgadoe for their navigational support and assistance. HFS, thank you.

I want to thank my advisor Deirdre Kelly for allowing me the freedom to pursue my interests, and whose tireless patience and encouragement allowed me complete this project. I want to thank my committee members, Michelle Stack and Mona Gleason. I also want to thank Jean Barman for her gentle encouragement and for serving as my external examiner.

To my father John MacIntosh, my inspiration in all things, I dedicate this thesis.
PRELUDE

When I met Elizabeth, she was a grade 12 student at Gray Secondary. She was the contact person for her GSA and I met her through a listing on a GSA Conference in Vancouver. Elizabeth offered to meet me at the front of the school and escort me to the room where we were to conduct the interview. I was immediately struck by her self-confidence and her interest in engaging with me, even though she did not know me previously. As we walked the halls, we passed the faculty lounge where teacher mailboxes were located. Elizabeth told me that the GSA at Gray had been assigned a mailbox. This struck me as being a particularly supportive gesture on the part of the school’s administration. I asked her if all the clubs at the school had been assigned mailbox space, and the answer she offered would prove to be a troubling metaphor for much of what I would hear during my research.

Surprisingly, Elizabeth told me that the GSA was the only school club to be given a mailbox. However, until only a few weeks before, no member of the GSA, including the faculty sponsor, knew it even existed. Elizabeth herself had discovered it quite by accident one day when she was in the office with a faculty member. At the time, the mailbox had a few items in it, some several months old. But furthermore, because it was housed in a faculty office, students—the very constituency for whom the GSA had been created—were not permitted access to the mailbox. Elizabeth and the other GSA members were forced to depend upon their faculty sponsor to retrieve their mail. The irony of this administrative barrier was one that Elizabeth and the other students had only recently begun to grapple with...
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

It is not a matter of looking harder or more closely, but of seeing what frames our seeing—spaces of constructed visibility and incitements to see which constitute power/knowledge.¹

This chapter sets the tone and context for the thesis, identifying major goals and objectives for my work. To this end, I begin by introducing my central conceptual framework and laying the groundwork for the argument and analysis to follow. Throughout this work, I open up what I hope are spaces for complex and fluid renderings. These are the conceptual spaces in which my own understandings of GSAs, citizenship, heteronormativity, and activism intersect, overlap, and, at times, conflict with those of the student participants. In this way, I hope to both raise questions about and trouble, current discourses of citizenship and social justice. My decision to take this particular research path is tightly linked to my interest in the social and political agency of sexual minority youth.

Throughout the interview process, I attempted to open up the ways in which sexual minority youth actively engage dialogues concerning citizenship. It is my hope that this research will enable educators to better understand the influences of these dialogues in the everyday lives of sexual minority students. Rather than adopting an anti-homophobic orientation, my position is one in which I draw attention

to the heteronormative makeup of curricular structures and broader school environments, while maintaining a focus on youth activism and resistance. I make clear why utilizing citizenship to frame my research on GSAs has allowed me to develop a "new look" at this normative discourse. Further to this, I offer an explanation as to why a focus on normativism vis-à-vis school and classroom spaces provides an opportunity for both constructive and complicating interpretations of queer youth, youth activism, and heteronormativity. Next, I introduce and clarify my use of poststructural and queer theories to look at questions raised, which I take up again in detail in my methodology chapter. Lastly, I offer the reader a road map to the thesis itself.

**How Did I Get Here**

This journey began somewhere in "the middle" --with my participants. While I am fully responsible for the shape of the data, my analysis and the critical direction of my research was enhanced, in no small part, by the insights of the students with whom I spoke, and whose stories I re/present.

I began with an interest in citizenship. Through the discourse of citizenship, I identify how sexual minority youth participate in and/or resist the social and political controls within their high school environments. The idea of Shane Phelan's "Sexual Citizen," and the notion of queer citizenship initially intrigued me. But as I made my way into Phelan's work and other similar bodies of literature, I found myself increasingly dissatisfied by the arguments. What has troubled me most was the lack of attention given to the social and political position of queer youth, and the apparent disconnect between these new discourses of citizenship and conversations
regarding educational reform. Many current discussions seem to invariably end in citizen sub-categorizations, whereby the queer, or non-heterosexual body had been given its own discrete classifications, leaving entirely uncontested the heterosexual matrix. It was at this point that I began to look for alternative frameworks for my research, a context that would allow me to explore the problems facing sexual minority youth as citizens, while respecting and problematizing notions of their agency and subjectivity. Eventually, through various textual excursions, school board meetings, and conversations with students and educators, I developed a research interest in youth participating in Gay Straight Alliances.

**Context and Research Questions**

The past several years have been witness to growing public debate surrounding Queer, Gay, Lesbian, and, more recently, Transsexual and Intersex (GLBTQI) youth issues. Topics and popular discourse run the political gamut, from homophobic bullying to the banning of so-called “gay and lesbian” literature, to the silent unarticulated dogmatics regarding the gender specificity of prom dates. Simultaneously, educational institutions have seen a surge in the active resistance of queer and allied youth, and from educators themselves, in response to these issues. Organizations such as GALE BC (Gay and Lesbian Educators of British Columbia), YouthQuest, and GAB Youth Services (Vancouver Gay/Lesbian/Trans/Bi/Questioning Youth Drop-in Center) have been at the forefront
in the development of Gay Straight Alliance (GSA) initiatives and other organized resistance efforts.²

Current research indicates that increasing numbers of gay and lesbian and queer youth choosing to self-identify in high school, and explore the boundaries of sexuality and gender, despite homophobia and social alienation that surfaces as a result.³ These tensions require new, and ongoing, public and state commitment to the process of “building democratic communities of mutual support and respect” within educational settings.⁴ I am committed to research that actively interrogates the institutional practices that either support or impede this process.

A central tenant of my research has been the desire to explore the capacity of students to understand their own social positioning as it relates to their sexual minority status. Equally important is the political status of sexual minority youth within the high school environment. Contained as I am by my own biases as researcher, I have tried to maintain a relatively “uncluttered” assessment of how youth see themselves as a result of their individual and collective experiences and actions. Their means of self-organization and response to their social environment as marginalized citizens within the school bears considerable weight in my analysis—as does their persistent refusal to conform to the demands of heterogeneous

² Based on information obtained from GALE BC in October 2002.
⁴ See Carlson, Dennis. ‘Gayness, Multicultural Education, and Community.’ Educational Foundations, 8(4) [1994] 5-25
citizenship and their response to dialogues on citizenship and social justice. By investigating the ways in which citizenship is defined vis-à-vis dominant discourse, I explore the opportunity, or lack thereof, for these youth to engage with discourses of citizenship as it relates to their own rights and freedoms. Through the interview process, I attempt to identify the ways in which youths participating in GSAs engage in constructing their own socio-political identities. In doing so, I address the social and political exigencies of schools as part of a larger ideological underpinning. As public institutions, schools are often complicit in perpetuating the forms of oppression that impact the daily lives of sexual minority youth. Moreover, through curricular inclusions or omissions, educators and administrators are implicated in the subtle normativisms that silently and discretely shape students’ self-understandings, and their understanding of others and “otherness.”

With this in mind, I initially set out to answer the following research questions:

- In what ways do GLBTQI youth [youth involved with GSAs] construct socio-political identities within their high school environment?
- How do GLBTQI youth [youth involved with GSAs] relate to discourses of citizenship?
- In what ways are GLBTQI youth [youth involved with GSAs] responding to institutionalized forms of discrimination?
- What factors facilitate and or limit this response?

For the most part, this inaugural question set continued to guide my research objectives, and I was able to address each. However, as the study progressed the

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5 Note: “GLBTQI youth” denotes the phrasing of the questions that I started with. As the project shifted away from a general context to youth who worked in GSAs in particular, the guiding research questions were altered to reflect this.
GSAs that had been my access point came to play an increasingly central role in my analysis. The data also raised a number of other questions not all of which I was initially prepared to take up in my analysis. For example, as I discuss in Chapter Three, I was not prepared for the prevalence of heterosexual youth in the GSAs. Subsequently, my argument was not simply a matter of queer vs. heterosexual youth. Specifically, the politics of "who" to include in my research was far more complex than I had anticipated.

**Spheres of Influence**

Since the mid 1990's, queer theory has dealt largely with notions of identity and sexual subjectivity while consciously divorcing itself from the immobilizing formulae of mainstream identity politics. The work of poststructural theorists like Judith Butler have shaped the ways in which queer theorists have come to negotiate and interpret the interplay of identity and sexuality. For Butler, identities are fluidly defined performative iterations that their place and shape within hegemonic boundaries – boundaries that author and assign a particular set of normative assumptions or "symbolic truths" to the body in question. Depending on the performative act or iteration, the identity result can and will vary. It may be that the performed subjectivity will embody the normative, or it may set itself, intentionally or not, in opposition to the normative. Regardless of one's juxtaposition to the normative, the end result is a performance, an enactment that needs to be repeated, in order to be maintained as such. Invoking and subsequently building on the work

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6 This refers largely to "Gay and Lesbian Studies," which as a body of work fails in large part address the interstitial space of queer subjectivity.
of many poststructural feminists, queer theorists such as Michael Warner and Shane Phelan have sharpened the theoretical focus of queer theory's political lens. For them, the theoretical significance of performativity is its potential to rupture the heteronormative in multiple ways at multiple times. Thus, the intersectionalities of race, class, ethnicity, sexuality, and gender are made both visible and potentially transgressive.\(^7\)

Queer theorists such as Kevin Kumashiro, working within education and curriculum studies, have further complicated the notion of intersectionalities by troubling what it means to queer or be queer, highlighting the paradoxical relationships within marginalized communities, communities that "like the mainstream...privilege some identities and exclude others when they redefine themselves."\(^8\) Kumashiro argues that it is not enough to simply claim a queer identity, but that queer identity must also be examined within its specific, and potentially privileged, cultural context. Phelan argues similarly that the heteronormativity of what she calls "phallic citizenship" makes it impossible for other civic bodies to be acknowledged within its meta-public perimeters.\(^9\)

In a conscious move away from traditional gay and lesbian discourse,\(^10\) queer politics has, as Warner argues:

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\(^9\) Phelan's "phallic citizen" refers to the heteronormative nature of citizenship writ large.

...not just replaced older modes of lesbian and gay politics; it has come to exist alongside those older modes, opening up new possibilities of lesbian and gay politics, opening up new possibilities and problems whose relation to more familiar problems is not always clear.  

Simultaneously, queer theory continues to absorb and reformulate some of the central tenets of feminist, anti-racist, and critical race discourse. The result is a theoretical amalgam, which engages a self-reflexive reformative politics that continuously calls into question the fixity of identity norms.

Queer theory is the thorn in the side of mainstream ideology, threatening its cohesive authority by questioning the normative nature of its subjects' constitutive boundaries. As Butler argues, heteronormative subjectivity cannot easily be reabsorbed without the threat of ideological rupture. Unlike their heterosexual counterparts, queer publics/bodies/identities refuse and attempt to subvert the naming that saturates dominant discourse. The tacit "meanings" assigned to categorizations such as straight, gay, feminine, masculine, liberal, etc., within the larger public discourse are swept aside, made messy-- their mainstream designations becoming elusive and annoyingly ambiguous.

Like identity, citizenship designations also take a location within the boundaries of hegemonic discourse – boundaries that author and assign normative


11 Warner, 12.
assumptions to those bearing its political designation. The concept of “queering” citizenship discourse is relatively new and it is here that I wish to enter the fray.

In various ways, Phelan, Warner, Kumashiro and others have each addressed the problematic relations of queer identity and citizenship, while political theorists such as Nancy Fraser have noted related inequities stating that:

...we now need to construct a new equality/difference debate, one oriented to multiple intersecting differences. We need, in other words, to reconnect the problematic of cultural difference with the problematic of social inequality.

And yet, these debates have not yet come together in a way that facilitates new meanings for what it is to be citizen, nor do these discourses directly address the silences around/of non-citizenship for those actively engaged in struggles against paralytic normativisms. Within the realm of scholarship dealing specifically with an educational context, there have been a number of studies that address gay, lesbian youth. However, the majority of those studies focusing on QLGTI issues have focused predominately on older youth or teacher educators.

In the chapters that follow, I am committed to the idea that practice and theory, even that which might be termed “high theory,” are inseparable and that we do an injustice to scholars, teachers and practitioners when there is an obligatory move from the abstract to the practical. In doing so, I would argue, we proscribe the

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outcomes of the readers, and potentially lose new, multiple interpretations of the text. Regarding the areas in which I am interested, the works of Judith Butler, Lauren Berlant, Michael Warner, Elizabeth Ellsworth and others yield the kinds of multiple interpretations to which I refer. These theorists push me to consider education and its political intersections in ways I had not previously considered. It is my hope that my work can bridge the perceptual divide between poststructural insights and lived realities in a way that serves sexual minority youth and educators.

**Roadmap for the Thesis**

As noted above, this chapter has set the tone and context of this thesis and introduced the major purposes and goals of this research, opening spaces for a messy rendering of my own and the student’s understandings of GSAs, citizenship, heteronormativity and activism. Chapter Two, “Poststructural Pathways to Methodological Clarity: There’s More Than One Way Down The Yellow Brick Road,” is my opportunity to explore method, methodology and epistemological of the research and the concerns that I bring to the qualitative process. In this chapter, I explicate my research method and design within attempts to address my own notions of methodology and method. These explications include truth claims and the ramifications of questioning them, in addition to asking why qualitative research, and interviewing in particular, is a useful framework for this project. I also present a section on positionality wherein I discuss the ways in which the “who” of who I am has an impact on the work I do with youth. In this chapter, I also discuss the limitations of the study, and the implications of these limitations. Lastly, I offer the “nuts and bolts” of the research design, participants, and subsequent analysis.
Chapter Three, "Gay Straight Alliances: School Club or Contingency Plan," reviews the limited literature in the field. I begin with an explanatory discussion of GSAs. I, then, use this chapter to discuss the implications of the GSA as a student-based organization, questioning how they are utilized and positioned within the schools. I explore the tensions and disjuncture that exists between the GSA as concept, and how it actually functions in the school. In doing so, I attempt to problematize notions of educative and curricular responsibility. Through both the literature and data, I consider how students "see" the process and function of the GSA, and the ways in which they approach working against homophobia and heterosexism vis-à-vis the GSA. Lastly, while acknowledging the value of student work and involvement, I attempt to trouble the GSA model and discuss possible alternatives.

In Chapter 4, "Lost & Found": Searching for Citizenship in Education, I engage with three concepts of notable importance to the discipline of education: Social Justice, Citizenship, and Naming with significances that are, I argue, both political and pedagogical. This leads to the incorporation of my data, and a conversation of how those students involved in GSAs view notions of activism and citizenship.

The last chapter summarizes the findings of the study. In it, I discuss the implications of this work for youth, as well as for schools and educators, and to a limited extent, teacher education. Here, I discuss possible alternatives to working with LGBTQI youth and issues in schools. Finally, I discuss the possibilities of my findings for future research.
CHAPTER TWO: POSTSTRUCTURAL PATHWAYS TO METHODOLOGICAL "CLARITY": THERE'S MORE THAN ONE WAY DOWN THE YELLOW BRICK ROAD

To speak of postmodernity as specific configurations and representations of social, economic, and political life is...simply to draw, in necessarily partial and contestable ways, some of the contours of the contemporary world within which there are as many political possibilities as there are political locations, attachments, and imaginations.\textsuperscript{15}

\textbf{Ethics, Truth Claims and other Unanswerable Research Dilemmas}

Similar to the diverse theoretical frameworks I employ throughout this thesis, my qualitative investigation of citizenship and queer identity engages a range of methodological approaches. Resisting the all-too-frequent call to locate myself within a particular theoretical “camp,” I navigate the continuum(s) of feminist methodology with an eye to formulating a theoretical amalgam appropriate to my research needs. As Christina Crosby so aptly states “things change.”\textsuperscript{16} Feminist epistemology necessitates both a diachronic and synchronic flux of ideas, concepts, and theoretical approaches. There is no one single methodology, no definitive approach to knowledge or research production that can adequately address the issues facing me as a queer feminist researcher. In order to successfully navigate the complex mechanisms of dominant ideologies and the multiple layers of identity construction, I must be willing to embrace a variety of theoretical models, and the

“permanent partiality of feminist inquiry.” My research calls for an epistemology that allows for the delineation of those aspects of queer identity formation that have, to date, not been examined in sufficient political terms. Additionally, because of my own identity as a queer researcher, it has been necessary to examine the degree to which my subjectivity within the discourse of queer theory paradoxically limits my analysis.

The intersecting politics of gender, class, race, ethnicity, and sexuality are integral to my investigation, and require a methodological approach that critically engages a variety of sources informing these intersections. However, the epistemological underpinnings of my analysis are poststructural. Poststructural feminist theory characteristically employs a highly malleable theoretical framework, one in which multiple knowledge claims not only can be made and applied in a coherent theoretical synthesis, but are insisted upon. Thus, as an epistemological starting point, poststructuralism is well suited to the juncured schema of my research, allowing me to effectively utilize the multiplicity and theoretical interplay of anti-racist, feminist, and queer discourses.

As a researcher, I have had to grapple with my politics, my position, and my vision for what I want this project to be and how I foresee its contributions to the field. As I negotiate notions of self and other, I continue to bump up against my own biases and preconceived ideas of possible and desirable outcomes. These negotiations were a central factor in shaping the methodological approach and design of this project.

I utilize both queer theory and anti-racist discourses to frame my analysis. While the intentional exclusions of QLGBTI peoples can seem less tangible than more overt racially-based exclusions, and while my argument does not seek to draw explicit parallels between anti-racist discourse and queer politics, there are lines to be drawn vis-à-vis the systems of oppression targeting these similarly marginalized groups. Consequently, in keeping with a poststructural approach my research methodology draws, in part, from both theoretical repositories.

Poststructural theories have allowed me to negotiate the terrains of these intersecting concerns in ways other methodological approaches may not have. I am aware of both silences and erasures in my data, in addition to what is stated and apparent. Consequently, my position as an out, queer, academic, and the perspective and potential bias inherent to my position, play a key role in the analysis of the data itself. While I cannot, nor do I desire to, subvert my perspective, I remain attentive to its potential to shape my analysis.

Because I am working from and within a poststructural framework, I am constantly rubbing up against notions of truth and objectivity. Many ideological norms are grounded in essentialist claims of truth and origin; heterosexuality is one such example. Science, religiosity, historical analysis, and contemporary constructions of the world, writ large, all assume a silent understanding of

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18 See, for example, Kumashiro, Troubling Intersections of Race and Sexuality: Queer Students of Color and Anti-Oppressive Education.
heterosexuality as prima facie. If, as a researcher, I accept that “knowing is always mediated through the discourses available to [me] to interpret and understand [my] experiences” in the same way that my experience is always specific to my positionality, then it is incumbent upon me to interrogate these knowledges and experiences, and be reflexive in my analysis. In the same way, then, I must apply a similar critical lens to my data. Bronwyn Davies argues that ways of making sense are not transparent, nor are they innocent. Sense makings themselves do not reveal something about the subject but about “the possibilities of sensemaking available within the discourses within a particular sensemaking community.” Similarly, she argues “[d] ata do not stand as transparent evidence of that which is real. Thus, my data do not stand alone, nor can they be understood as Truth. The articulations of my participants are being shaped in multiple ways at multiple times, the synergies of which I attempt to account for in my own interpretive applications.

Many scholars argue that poststructural approaches in general, are antithetical to materialist practice, and that the logic of such an analysis is lost in a sea of reductivism. Still, others, such as Michele Barrett, have argued that

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22 Ibid
materialist claims can only benefit from such critical feminist poststructural interrogations.\textsuperscript{24} However, no single theoretical model can serve both discursive articulations and the "lived reality" of our material existence. To this end, I employ a range of feminist, queer, anti-racist and anti-oppressive frameworks to create the theoretical fluidity essential to an informed knowledge production.

\textit{Reflexivity, Validity, Objectivity}

Positionality, as I have come to understand and define it, involves the researcher's relationship to the research subject, and any subsequent production of knowledge that comes out of that relationship.\textsuperscript{25} It also speaks to the degree to which a researcher is, or can be, self-reflexive within these relationships relative to the ascribed meanings of power borne of researcher/researched connections.\textsuperscript{26} By self-reflexive, I am speaking of the degree of transparency of one's relationship to data collection, analysis, and representation. Rather than a modernist notion of an all-encompassing reflexivity that assumes one can reach an objective finite understanding, mine is a definition that recognizes both the discourse of objectivity and the impossibility of its achievement. Objectivity, in this context, refers to an enlightenment tradition and a belief in Truth "which centers around the assumption that we must step outside our community long enough to examine it in the light of

something which transcends it." While working to subvert essentialist claims, it is also necessary to recognize the degree to which dominant ideologies (such as heteronormativity) are deeply imbedded in ideas of truth and originary hierarchies of difference. Hence, I do not dismiss notions of objectivity, but am reflexive in my interpretation of them.

Particularly useful in terms of my own positioning is Haraway's concept of "situated knowledge." Recognizing that all knowledge construction can only ever be partial, and that constructions are constantly shifting, Haraway warns against the pitfalls of "relativism, and totalizing "holisms" in establishing partial perspective." As is the case in any researcher/subject relationship, my own positionality, self-awareness and reflexivity, in response to my own subject position, are central in shaping the partial perspective within which my knowledge claims are formed. While the specific knowledge I bring to my research-- because of my identity as a queer, white, feminist, located within the politically privileged space of the academy - are crucial, they are only part of the researcher equation.

Similarly, Wanda Pillow questions the researcher's ability to know another, and construct qualitative texts with this knowing, as a focal point. She argues that the purpose of reflexivity is to produce research that questions its own interpretations. Within my research, then, reflexivity is the cornerstone of my

methodology, and is that which allows me to consistently acknowledge the ideological assumptions and power relations at play in my analysis.

'I' Researcher

Vision requires a politics of positioning; positioning implies responsibility.31

I come to this project with the matter of my own positioning very much at the forefront of my thinking, the reasons for which I hope to explicate in the following pages. My investigation, involving the use and misuse of citizenship dialogues and the relevance of these dialogues for sexual minority students in an educational context, is in fact highly dependent on both my views of subjectivity and positionality. As Braidotti states above, one's position as researcher entails a politics, a visioning, and a responsibility. It is within this critical framework that I outline my position as researcher.32

Politics and Position

The politics of research involves both explicit and implicit relations of power on multiple levels from varying perspectives. Implicit relations of power resonate with the intersecting dynamics of class, race, gender, and ethnicity, while other characteristics are endemic of/to the researcher/researched relationship itself. As researchers, we are constantly engaged in the negotiations about how much of

32 Ibid.
ourselves to reveal, simultaneously reconciling our various positions as author, researcher, and subject.

From a socio-economic perspective, my positionality as researcher is complex. As a white woman, I straddle the ground between the working-class history of my childhood and the middle-class privilege of my present life as graduate student. As a queerly identified student/researcher whose informants are self-identified sexual minority and allied heterosexual youths at local high schools, my positionality is complicated. As an educated woman, I am privileged; I am that which Patricia Hill Collins and others refer to (and problematize) as an insider. Yet, as a queer woman in a largely heterocentric public institution, I am marginalized; I am an outsider. Thus, in my field of research, I am what Collins would identify as an "outsider-within". Yet, as Trinh T. Minh-ha states so succinctly:

Differences do not exist only between outsider and insider – two entities. They are also at work within the outsider herself, or the insider herself – single entity. She knows she cannot speak of them without speaking of herself, of history without involving her story . . .

Like all researchers, I am the loci of my research, but as a queer woman I am located quite specifically within, because I am part of the marginal communities I am researching. Somewhat empathetically, and perhaps nostalgically, I am guided by my memories as someone once engaged in similar struggles for identity as a sexual minority youth in an oppressive and silencing heteronormative system. Yet, as an

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outsider to my participants, I am engaged by the principles and raison d'être of my research. Lastly, while I am self-identified as queer to my participants and locate myself "inside" this common sphere of marginality, I am also an adult some twenty years older than my participants. Thus regardless of my "insider" status, the authority of my age alone is enough to maintain my presence as an "outsider-within." While I do not believe it is entirely productive to reproduce the binary relations of inside/outside, it is a paradoxical imbalance that necessitates methodological attention.

My specific positionality or "standpoint" allows me to bring my knowledge as an "outsider within" to my research design. As an "outsider-within" I must be cautious of the "interlocking systems of oppression." in which queer identities, and thus my own identity, are firmly embedded. Yet, as a researcher, I must be fully aware of, and actively engaged with these mechanisms. While this is neither an argument wholly in favour of, or opposed to, standpoint theory, using one's own subjective position as a point of departure is a useful approach. In addition to locating myself as researcher, in its current usage the term "outsider-within" accurately locates queer identity as a "social location or border space...riddled with contradictions."

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35 Collins, Black Feminist Thought.
37 Patricia Hill Collins, Fighting Words: Black Women and the Search for Justice (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1998), 5.
Queer Authority

My self-proclaimed identity as a queer researcher positions me in the role of “expert” with regard to my authorial voice vis-à-vis my participants. Perhaps most significant, however, are the implications for the way in which my authorial or “expert” identity potentially locates me in relation to the youth involved in my research. For them, my identity is that of being “authentically queer.” By this, I mean that I am an adult; I hold authority by virtue of my role as researcher. More significantly, however, I am clearly and contentedly “out” and unquestioningly queer; as such, I embody a specifically queer subjectivity. For many youth, but particularly for those who identify as sexual minority youth, barely coming into, or coming to terms with realizations of their own sexuality and self-positioning, this is significantly divergent and potentially intimidating. Thus, in addition to the vigilance paid to my own positionality, it is also incumbent upon me to consider how these youths are positioning themselves in relation to my queerness, and to consider the possibility that they may be reacting against, or alongside, my queer “authenticity.”

For example, those participants who openly identified as a sexual minority seemed to react in ways that positioned me as authority or role model. Within this, there is the danger that they attempted to mirror reflected what they thought they heard from me, in an effort to present themselves as equally “authentic.” This is likely an issue faced by many researchers from non-dominant groups. However, in the case of queer youth, who do not necessarily have alternative means to reflect or cushion their socio-political identities (i.e. a culture at home which matches this non-dominant identity), the need to find others “like them” outside the home/school to
model themselves after is perhaps more salient. Similarly, but for nearly opposite reasons, those youth identifying as “heterosexual” reacted in a way that seemed distanced and conversationally much more structured – perhaps telling me what I wanted to hear as the “expert” or more “authentic” queer. Without a follow-up interview, this is merely a speculative analysis on my part, but it is, nevertheless, important to consider.

**Vision**

I am investigating the practices of sexual minority youth and commenting on the arenas in which these various practices take place. In so doing, I have had to balance my vision of what I want this project to be. As I take the stories of other people and transform them into data, reinterpret life experiences through a qualitative lens, I worry about, and have to consider, the potential impact of my research findings in the schools, for sexual minority youth, and in the larger world of QLGBTI research. How might it be misinterpreted or turned back on sexual minority youth by those who oppose youth activism and organizations such as GSAs? These are important questions, and while there is always an inherent risk that one’s work will be picked-up and reproduced in ways that are incongruent with the researcher’s intended purposes, one must weigh potential risk against potential gain and proceed in an ethically appropriate manner.

**And So….**

As a researcher working with sexual minority youth, I have had to negotiate the boundaries and overlaps of my own politics and authority, in addition to those of
the institutions in which both my participants and I move. As my assumptions leading into the field illustrate, I have bumped up against my own biases and preconceived notions of outcome, and continue to do so as I make my way into the data. The "I" has remained central to every stage of my knowledge production. As David Halperin aptly states: "It's a matter of being able to devise and preserve a positive, undemonized connection between my gayness and my scholarly or critical authority."38

While my status as a member of the queer community allows me to bring an informed perspective to the interview process, it also becomes essential for me to acknowledge my position in relation to the nature of the interruption that I shape. Accordingly, as I attempted to initiate this disruption, my responsibility extended both to my participants, and to the field of study to which I contribute. In the case of this particular research project, I am attempting to disrupt the all-too-silent and rarely challenged heteronormativity of the school, while recognizing the saliency of the youth activism within discourses of citizenship and social justice.

**Questioning Qualitatively**

**Who and Why**

Denzin and Lincoln note that qualitative researchers are "concerned with the individual's point of view" and argue that they "can get closer to the actors perspective through detailed interviewing and observation."39 One of the draws of a

qualitative paradigm for this study is its potential to allow for the research to
"confront and come up against the constraints of the everyday social world." 40 Lastly, qualitative research and interview process provide an opportunity to construct "rich descriptions of the social world." 41 In the case of queer youth, this is a construction that is seldom witnessed.

Qualitative research is especially well suited to interviews which are open-ended. Open-ended interviews, to a limited degree, provide an opportunity for the participant to navigate the terrain in ways that s/he desires. Having approached this project with the intention of maintaining as much transparency as possible in my research objectives, qualitative research is well positioned to understand both the "Why" and the "Who" of my research questions (see Chapter 1). Interviews and other qualitative methods invite and allow a questioning of how participants make sense of their surroundings. In this case, talking to youth about their involvement in GSAs allows the participant to elucidate their own understandings of how and why schools function heteronormatively, how this works against citizenship and/or engenders activism. As with all qualitative research, the interviewer is the instrument and must remain cognizant of this, as well as her shaping of questions and responses, knowing that questions and answers must leave space for polyvocal representations.

40 Ibid.
41 Denzin and Lincoln, "Introduction: The Discipline and Practice of Qualitative Research."
But I Thought They Would All Be Queer

In order to facilitate contact with QLGTI students, I attempted a small number of contact interviews with school counselors, GSA advisors and queer youth groups for nominations. I requested that these nominations include only those students who had, in some way, made their work within voluntary QLGTI groups known to others. When I initiated this research design, I had thought that the ideal interview candidates would be self-identified queer, lesbian, gay, transgendered, or intersex members of an institutionally recognized QLGTI group within their secondary school. To this end, my original proposal specifically excluded bisexual and heterosexually identified youth. I had anticipated small enclaves of queer identified youths. I imagined these youths to be backed by equally radical queers and/or politically active gay and lesbian faculty and administrators; individuals raised in an age of ‘we’re here, we’re queer.’ This retrospectively utopian vision of GSA membership is not, however, what I found.

What I found were small highly motivated GSAs established by heterosexual youth. Clearly, I had reached a crisis point in my design. Upon further reflection, it became clear to me that both bisexual and allied heterosexual students played a key role in the GSA. Furthermore, bisexuality because of its assumed middle-ground status, being neither heterosexual or queer, may provide a transition point for students who would otherwise identify as gay, lesbian or queer. This is not to say that all students who identify as bisexual do so as a transitional “phase,” nor do I refer to bisexuality as an “umbrella term” of sexual identity whose claimants occupy
the sexual neutral zone between "hetero" and "homo" as a construct of the popular imaginary.

Limitations of the Study

Like all studies, mine was not without its limitations. To have a well-rounded view of students involved with GSAs it would have been advantageous to increase the number of sexual minority youth involved, particularly young women. It seems as if young women who identify as queer or lesbian are less likely to be "out" on campus. Conversely, it remains more socially acceptable for young women to identify as bisexual in certain social arenas. The social complexities of this proved to be particularly problematic with two participants in particular, Shawna and Elizabeth, who wanted to be viewed in certain private circles as bisexual, but identified in larger public circles of the school as heterosexual. In retrospect, while I could have comfortably identified one of the two women as questioning, I wanted to remain consistent in documenting all of the participants' identities as "chosen." For that reason both women are represented in the study as heterosexual. As a result of this dilemma, the ways in which heterosexism and homophobia impact young queer women in relation to gender expectations, and/or various other socio-political intersections (race, class, ethnicity, ability, etcetera), are unexplored in this study. Similarly, then, I was unable to fully explore young queer women's understandings of political action and citizenship.

While the study involves four heterosexually identified youth and two self-identified sexual minority youth, they are all members of a GSA. Thus, while they do not all speak from the perspective of the queer body, they all share some
common knowledge of homophobia in the school. Not surprisingly, all of the students found it difficult to speak of their personal lives. Their difficulty in speaking about their own experiences could have been attributed to any number of factors, not the least of which was my presence as a researcher whom they did not know and only spoke to on this one occasion. However, all of the students were willing to share their ideas about creating substantive social change. It is their shared knowledge of the socio-political problems facing sexual minority youth that I chose to highlight.

That having been said, I also believe that it would have been advantageous to work with a GSA founded by sexual minority youth. Their perspectives on the problems of homophobia in school would likely have been somewhat different, because the immediate issues relate to them more directly. While the two male participants, Billy and Yuki, offered important insights, the way that their particular GSA was formulated, the actions taken by the group, and the way the group was understood within the context of the school, might have be different if those who behind it were queer. Similarly, issues of class, race and ability need to be further explicated. These intersections are vital to the broader context of oppression and remain under-researched.

When working with youth, the limits of language offer a specific set of challenges. Youth are often appropriately mired in what is occurring in their lives at that particular moment, and at times have difficulty articulating their actions within broader contexts. My position as an authority figure only complicated this, as some
of the youth saw me as intimidating, or wished to please me, adding yet another layer of complexity.

As I undertook my data analysis and began interpreting the outcomes, it became increasingly difficult to complicate what it was I thought that the youth were saying. This was especially tricky with regard to issues of silence and silencing. I often heard what I interpreted to be instances of internalized homophobia and denial around issues of racism and homophobia. It was difficult to illustrate what it was I thought the participants were not saying, without succumbing to the pitfalls of over-interpretation or assigning false consciousness. Oftentimes, with marginalized groups in particular, the silences and silencing are products of systemic oppressions youth cope with as a normative part of their daily lives, both inside and outside their school environment. It was not surprising to me, then, that the two sexual minority participants I spoke with had a difficult time talking about and articulating issues that affected or related to them directly. While I could easily have pressed my participants to say more, or alternatively, could have chosen to read into the silence of what they did not say, I chose to do neither. My attempts to do so left me feeling voyeuristic and like I had crossed an ethical line that, for me, was not possible.

In sum, despite my understanding of, and ability to comprehend the impact of, societal-based oppressions, the exact mechanism of silencing within the school for individual participants was both difficult to detect and troubling to deal with. As researcher, I was often left wondering whose lens I was using to view the silence— that of my participants, or my own?
These interpretive difficulties are compounded by the limits of language. The youth often demonstrated a well-developed critical eye, but not the language to situate that criticality within the larger theoretical and political context. Thus as a researcher, it became difficult to situate issues in relation to school, or the youths own social and political identities. This is not a failing of on the part of the youth, but an inability of the educational system to provide them with the tools to situate themselves in social political terms. And, it is perhaps yet another example of the ways in which our identities exceed language.

Nuts n' Bolts

Settings, Context and Locales

The Vancouver area is a particularly fruitful location to undertake such a study because of both the support and the more positive input of Gay and Lesbian Educators of BC (GALE BC) and the Vancouver School Board's GLBT Advisory Board. In this study, I hoped to find, and intentionally sought out, schools where there was diversity in the student population in terms of race, class, and socio-economic status. I did not want geographically similar schools (e.g. two west side schools, or two east side schools) within Vancouver. Fortunately, the opportunity arose to speak with students from one inner city Vancouver school – Park High School and another -- Gray High School,\textsuperscript{42} located in a suburban area outside of Vancouver proper, but still within the Lower Mainland. These two schools were the locations from which I drew my participants.

\textsuperscript{42}School names, as well as the names of the participants, are pseudonyms.
Table 1: School Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>No. of Students Participating in GSA</th>
<th>Years GSA in Existence</th>
<th>School Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gray High School</td>
<td>5-15</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>1200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Park High School</td>
<td>4-9</td>
<td>1 year</td>
<td>1300</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These are large high schools with over 1200 students, and ethnically diverse populations including Indo Canadian, Caucasian, Chinese, Vietnamese, and a number of other ethnic and racial minorities. Each of the schools had a functioning Gay-Straight Alliance that had been initiated by students. The GSA at Park High School had been established for one year, and at Gray the GSA was two years old. The membership of the GSA at Gray fluctuated, during the school year (2003-2004) of the study, between 5 and 15 youth, while at Park, it fluctuated between 4 and 9 members, with 5 maintaining a consistent involvement. Both GSAs had male sponsor teachers one of whom, according to the students, identifies as heterosexual.  

At both schools, I asked each of the six participants if there were any "out" faculty members, all the students responded "no," or "no – not that they were aware of." While I can only speculate, the sponsor teacher whose sexual identity was not stated to the group, and who did not openly identify as queer or gay, did "code" as a gay man, the significance of which I will take up in a subsequent chapter. The issue of coding is prickly. Here again, my status as insider comes into play because I am privy to a specific set of social understandings. Essentializing though it maybe, the discourse of "coding" is central to queer sub-cultural

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43 A sponsor teacher is a faculty member at the school who agrees to work with the GSA, and takes responsibility for the group within the context of the school.
subjectivity. By coding I refer to a series of mannerisms, a way of speaking, a language base, a familiarity with the queer communities, and/or a particular style or physical appearance that would lead many queer people to assume that one could be recognized as part of a non-dominant LGBTQI social group.

Through the stories related by the students, I perceived the GSA at Gray to be more organized and to have a more actively visible presence at the school. This may have been because Gray’s GSA had an additional year to establish itself in the school. At Gray, the GSA served as a kind of social space. Student members met regularly about once a week, maintained a snack cupboard, and often used the GSA classroom space to hang out. Additionally, members were focused on an ongoing project and maintained a roster of completed activities. However, I did not get the impression that the projects were the driving force of the GSA from week to week. That is, it was not the projects around which the youth primarily coalesced, but rather the GSA as social space (again this will be addressed and analyzed more thoroughly in chapter 3).

Although both GSAs were on their own, in terms of the active and consistent input and involvement of their faculty advisors, Park participants stated that they met infrequently and had not yet executed a project on campus that might offer them some visibility. At the time of the interviews, though, they had one in the planning stages. Even so, according to the Park students, their conversations both at the GSA meetings and during the interviews centred on activism, community and homophobia, and the GSA as a political body. This was in contrast to Gray which, according to the students, was an activist group with a social/safe space component.
Participant Demographics

In all, 6 youth participated in the study. I first made contact with Shawna when I attended a conference on Gay Straight Alliances organized by GALE BC (Gay and Lesbian Educators of British Columbia). Shawna, a 17-year-old grade 12 student, was one of a number of youth participants at the conference. I was introduced to her by a colleague from UBC who had participated in a small group exercise with her. Shawna was friendly and more than willing to speak with me. One of her friends from Gray High School, Elizabeth, was also present at the conference, and Shawna introduced us on that day. Elizabeth is also a 17-year-old grade 12 student and was quite interested in being interviewed for the study. Shawna also gave my name to Yuki, a 15-year-old grade 10 male student, and through her, contact was made. I gave the students my email address and contacted them a few weeks later.

It was also suggested to me that I pursue contacts via the GALE BC website, where information on active GSAs throughout the Lower Mainland is posted. I did so, and it was through these contacts that I connected with my next three participants. The students, Betty, Billy, and Lapis, all attended Park High School. Betty, a 15-year-old student in Grade 10, is the founder and current chair of the GSA and is the first student I contacted. Through her, I also met Billy, a 17-year-old in Grade 12, and Lapis a 15-year-old female Grade 10 student.

Although it is clear from my previous discussions that I want to problematize the notion of stable identity categories, naming and categories are still ones around which schools and educational institutions organize students. Therefore, it is useful
to understand how the students identified *themselves*. One of the male participants identified as bisexual, one male identified as homosexual, and the four female participants identified as heterosexual, although, interestingly and problematically, two of the young women who identified as heterosexual during the interviews had identified as bisexual during the GSA conference when I first made contact with them. This is an issue that will be taken up and analyzed later in the chapter on GSAs. All of the youth were middle class, except one male who identified as working class. One of the young men, Billy, was of colour, and the rest of the participants identified as white, with one male specifically identifying as an "Italian Canadian," who "wishes he weren't white."

**Table 2: How Students Identified Themselves**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total Number of Participants</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender Identification</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race/Ethnicity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White (Italian)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian Canadian</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle class</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working class</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

44 I have not included the students' sexual orientations in this chart because GLBTQI identity and use of the term "queer," in reference to both in my thesis and elsewhere, is an attempt to trouble and disrupt the use of static and binary driven identity categories. While troubling all identity categorizations is a useful endeavor, for the purposes of this study other categories are included for demographic purposes only and are not meant to reify other normative classifications such as race.
Interviews

This study focused on interviewing 6 high school aged youth; interviews are particularly well suited to this study because they offer "researchers access to people's ideas, thoughts, and memories in their own words rather than in the words of the researcher." Even though these thoughts and memories are partial and always mediated through my researcher lens, the interview process seems especially useful in a study of youth, particularly sexual minority youth, whose words are rarely heard in educational research.

Upon securing informed consent from parents/guardians and the interview candidate, having discussed my method of documentation and issues of confidentiality, I proceeded with the interviews. Interviews with Elizabeth, Yuki and Shawna were individual, and three others occurred as part of a group situation (Lapis, Billy and Betty). All were conducted with open-ended questions. The individual interviews ranged from 30 to 60 minutes, and the group interview lasted 90 minutes. I had not planned on a group interview, but as is often the case with adolescents, many attempts to schedule individual interviews with two of the participants failed. In the end, the two offered to meet as a group, and a third student, who had previously cancelled, appeared for approximately 1/3 of the interview.

All the interviews were audio-taped and subsequently transcribed. The transcripts were useful to review, and aided in my refinement and critique of the

questions and interview process for subsequent interviews. Some preliminary analysis of data occurred during the data collection, as a review of each interview allowed for a honing and sharpening of questions for the next.

In addition to the GSA conference and interviews discussed above, I also attended one meeting of the Gray GSA. Because I attended only one meeting and had little context or repeated exposure to this setting, the observational is scanty. Yet, it did give me the opportunity to meet the faculty advisor and get some very brief sense of the space of the school (which I was not able to do at Park HS). During the data collection process, I took extensive notes on the process and my notes were also transcribed and analyzed. In this way, I attempted to "be in conversation" with the data and any preliminary conclusions in order to better analyze my own situated and partial knowledge.

**Data Analysis**

The point of analysis is not to expose the hidden truth in all of its simplicity, but to disrupt that which is taken as stable/unquestionable truth.\(^46\)

In my mind, data analysis is at once the most interesting and the most challenging segment of any research project. It is here where one's limitations are discovered and one's biases exposed. During the data analysis portion of the project, the researcher becomes the tool of analysis. As Joan Scott states:

When experience is taken as the origin of knowledge, the vision of the individual subject (the person who had the experience or

the historian who recounts it) becomes the bedrock of evidence upon which explanation is built.47

Once immersed in the data the nature of the researcher/researched relationship is revealed; the façade of objectivity closes and the distance that once existed is gone. This relational foreshortening is a temporary state and can be forestalled if one remains cognizant of, and critically responsive, to the multiple discourses that frame the researcher/ed relationship.

For my part, the data analysis included analyzing and coding for themes and concepts. The data was scrutinized throughout for links to the theories that guided my thinking. During data collection, coding and writing, I reviewed the existing categories and themes and looked for emerging "patterned regularities."48 From the outset of the research, I believed the findings would reveal more about the students involved in GSA work. While many of my assumptions were borne out, I also found that the silence and self-censoring exhibited in the interviews and the reported lack of meaningful involvement from school faculty and administration pointed to the larger significance of homophobia in schools. Not only were students unable to articulate many of the issues facing sexual minority youth, but the participants, especially the two self-identified gay participants, felt compelled to take on the burden of educating the faculty and students at their schools.

A number of other emerging themes were anticipated, such as their attitude towards homophobia in the school, and the way in which gender structured their

identity constructions. Yet, I also found that the participants had an awareness and complex understanding of community, as well as a commitment to notions of equality and social justice that reappeared throughout most of their conversations. These themes were not anticipated, because my working definition of citizenship going into the study was much wider in scope. However, as I progressed through the analysis, the notion of community became increasingly salient to the conclusions I was drawing from the data.

Yet, even as I coded, I was aware that the interviews process itself and the complicated and multiple ways in which the participants of the study were responding to my orchestration, were as Riessman suggests, ‘resistant to the fragmentation of their words in our effort to categories and codify.’ For example, on several occasions I attempted to engage the participants in a discussion of racism and sexism at their schools. My attempts were met with a steadfast refutation of either sexism or racism, despite what I had observed as a potentially emergent theme during the interview. This issue will be taken up again in Chapter Three, where a fuller discussion of this paradox appears.

Notwithstanding the discussion of themes and categories important to this work, I am equally aware that a tension exists between the matter-of-fact framing of “categories” and “themes” above, and my discomfort with, and theoretical positioning in opposition to, “truth claims.” It is, perhaps, too easy to claim simply that themes emerged from the data and that categories and coding flowed thusly. And it is, in

actuality, far more complicated. Kvale asserts, "there are multiple questions that can be posed to a text, with different questions leading to different meanings of a text." With this in mind, I would argue that an act of data analysis ought to be rendered more transparent than it is. Yet, to this end, we often remain at a loss to explain how the analysis was conceived, designed and executed in a way that opens-up or acknowledges the process itself. Attempts to do so are seldom straightforward or uncomplicated. As Susan Talburt notes, educational researchers have been slow to engage poststructural theories, in particular the ways in which such theories question how "empirical inquiry can know and represent the real." Talburt goes on to suggest that poststructural theories “highlight the unknowability of experiences and the impossibility of access to an authentic self that speaks with a transparent voice.” My own project was undertaken with the acknowledgement of this “crisis” of analysis and representation. Undoubtedly, how one understands truth, objectivity, and claims to knowability is central to how one approaches collecting data, and how one views and filters data in order to analyze it. St. Pierre usefully poses the following question: “how do we think of inquiry once we begin to mistrust the notion that the liberal individual employing a rational methodology can guarantee true knowledge?” While such queries can appear to be systematically paralyzing, acknowledging the limits of research can also be a starting point for producing productively complex and complicating data analysis.

52 Ibid.
Similar to Sykes, I view data analysis and representation as a necessary shifting from “accurately re-presenting the “real” experiences of sexuality in the lives of the [participants]. . ., towards multiple yet still cautious discursive analyses of their stories, my questions, transcripts, quotations, interpretation.”

Acknowledging there is no singular truth, I understand my analysis within feminist poststructuralism frameworks, choosing to “focus on how categories come into being” in addition to exploring “how the participants of research changes in these identities during the research.”

Central to such an analytical frame is a research approach that attempts to:

contradict the obvious, to think against the stream of what is taken for granted. The idea is to make the processes of constitution explicit, processes that are usually regarded as natural and taken for granted in our discourses and practices and which silently require us to create ourselves and each other . . . within the frameworks of available discursive categories and storylines.

Therefore, questioning norms and analytical normatives are integral to one’s methodology. For the purposes of this project, this normative questioning was applied to the analytical tools used for understanding how students who work within GSAs view their own positionality, and the heteronormative structure of schools. That is, the project of questioning itself has been integral to how research was conducted, designed, and subsequently analyzed.

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55 Ibid.: 15-16.
Again, Talburt notes, "[e]thnography must always ask itself "why these representations of these voices and experiences in these ways and not others?" While Talbert addresses ethnographic research, her line of inquiry is easily extended to incorporate interview-based studies and data analysis. I used these questions to frame both my analysis and representations. I asked myself "why these analytical frames of these voices and experiences in these ways and not others?" This approach was productive as it continually fore-fronted the constructed and tenuous character of research, and served as a constant reminder that as researcher I was framing the data collection, its analysis, and the chosen modes of representation.

From the point of collection, through to data analysis and the subsequent crafting of results, the researcher possesses the authority to classify, contextualize, and draw conclusions from others' experience. In this work, while I do not deny my authority as researcher, I do not attempt to write an "authoritative written account," if by authoritative it is meant that there is only one correct account or perspective possible. Rather, there is a "legitimate plurality of interpretations" which I attempt to convey. Recognizing the limitations of my investigation as stated in this chapter, the analyses I have drawn from this small sample are neither conclusive, nor open-ended. I have however, drawn together a specific set of representations and chosen one of the many methodological paths available to me as I make my way down the "yellow brick road."

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58 Wolcott, Transforming Qualitative Data: Description, Analysis and Interpretation, 10.
59 Kvale, Interviews: An Introduction to Qualitative Research Interviewing, 211.
Conclusion

Shifting away from essentializing methodologies, my knowledge production is located within a framework that fully engages my epistemic responsibility as a researcher to both account for and acknowledge my positionality and social location, and reveal the "power differentials" that exist between subject and researcher. I would argue that there is no such thing as ethical research, there is only research that attempts to be ethical and keeps as its measure the guiding principles of ethically responsible inquiry. To this end, I have attempted to engage a methodology that prioritizes researcher responsibility and accountability. At the end of the day, however, the research project is always in the service of the researcher, in my case it is the means by which I will obtain my Master's degree. That the researched may benefit, or that some benefit may come as a result of the knowledge produced or as a result of its subsequent implications as product is a secondary outcome – no matter its value outside of the researcher's project.

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CHAPTER THREE: GAY STRAIGHT ALLIANCES: SCHOOL CLUB OR CONTINGENCY PLAN?

To make a claim on one’s own behalf assumes that one speaks the language in which the claim can be made, and speaks it in such a way that the claim can be heard.\(^6^1\)

The assertion of one’s identity, making one’s self visible, and the ability to see one’s self as separate from other subjects is an essential demand of subjectivity.\(^6^2\)

To “make a claim on one’s own behalf” within the arena of the public school is a challenging process for any student; to do so as a sexual minority student is a particularly menacing endeavor.\(^6^3\)

The recent popularity of Gay Straight Alliances (GSAs) in public schools has increased the visibility of sexual minority students, and has fostered greater awareness amongst their heterosexual peers. However, despite these gains, staking one’s identity claim as a sexual minority continues to be a complicated and deeply fraught process. This difficulty stems, in no small part,

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\(^{63}\) For the purposes of this text the term “sexual minority” is used to describe those who, either publicly or privately, self-identify as other than heterosexual.
from the way in which GSAs have been positioned, and are viewed, by school administrators and educators.

Broadly defined, a Gay Straight Alliance is a youth-led organization whose main objective is to create and foster safe environments for all youth, regardless of gender identity and/or sexual orientation. The youth in these organizations work together, building coalitions with other school organizations, and awareness around issues such as homophobia, bullying, harassment, and gender discrimination. Gay Straight Alliances are, or strive to be, safe spaces. They are spaces where gay, lesbian, bisexual, queer, questioning, and to a limited degree, transgendered and intersex (GLBTQI) identified youth create places of belonging and inclusion in an otherwise unwelcoming, and often times threatening, public. Be it perceived or actualized, exclusion, ostracization, physical violence, and the trauma inflicted by the daily onslaught of homophobic hallway vernacular inform the daily lives of most sexual minority youth in public schools. GSAs provide a space within the school where youth are granted a brief reprieve from this oppressive sway. Additionally,

64 This definition is taken from GLSEN and is consistent with other definitions I have encountered in my work. See Gay Lesbian Straight Educators Network, Gay-Straight Alliance Handbook (Washington, D.C.: Gay, Lesbian, Straight Educators Network, 2000).

65 I qualify the inclusion of transgendered and Intersex youth because even within queer communities there remains a lack of knowledge and acceptance for those who overtly blur binary gender lines. It should be noted that throughout the paper, I use the term 'queer' to theoretically locate sexual minority' bodies in a larger queer theory discourse. I do not assume that all sexual minority persons identify with the term queer.

GSAs provide a space in which allied youth can openly acknowledge their support, and work together with their sexual minority peers to foster common goals of community and social justice.⁶⁷

My purpose here is to outline some of the conceptual ideas and arguments regarding the roles of GSAs in schools, and how I read the work of GSAs through a lens of citizenship. I also suggest how educators, in viewing the work of GSAs, might situate a discourse of citizenship within the growing, and often times appropriated, dialogues of teaching for social justice. I am utilizing citizenship to frame my argument as it offers a way to address sexual minority issues within notions of social justice and rights, while problematizing these very frames. The challenge is that of finding a useful avenue to address issues of heteronormativity without further marginalizing and othering sexual minority youth into citizen subcategories—such as the “sexual citizen,” “queer citizen,” etc. GSAs, and the youth who work within them, are useful exemplars for discussions on schooling and citizenship because they remain understudied, particularly when attempting to look at identity.

Through GSA involvement, sexual minority and allied youth carve out both social and political spaces. They are enacting a version, their own version, of citizenship, community, and resistance. Their actions complicate these very terms, while simultaneously making transparent the heteronormative ideology that

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⁶⁷ The term “allied or ally” is used to refer to heterosexually identified individuals who are typically interested in fostering communities of awareness and support with regard to GLBTQI issues.
constrains them. Thus, GSAs provide a productive lens through which to view sexual minority identities. These youth believe that through the active disbursement of education and knowledge, they can bring about change. Many of the youth also believe that their actions can diffuse the dominant discourses of homophobia—and there is a small amount of research to support if not its dissolution, its temporary subversion—in some schools.\(^6^8\) However, therein lies the problem inherent with (if not to) the positioning of GSAs.

At this juncture, I think it is important to outline the assumptions from which I write about youth involved with GSAs, my position is not one that wishes to speak against GSAs or the work of the youth involved in these voluntary organizations. As will be discussed below, researchers have shown GSAs are valuable spaces where youth and their allies can come together, where sexuality minority youth in particular may seek solidarity and a sense of belonging, GSAs teach youth valuable skills in leadership, outreach, and acceptance.\(^6^9\) Moreover, GSAs are in-and-of-themselves an invaluable resource for all schools and the youth of those schools.\(^7^0\) The problem lies not with the GSA, but rather, with the way in which the schools view the role of the GSA and the youth participants of these organizations. This paper attempts to


\(^{69}\) Lee, "The Impact of Belonging to a High School Gay/Straight Alliance."

outline the problems intrinsic to the institutional approach to GSAs and the underlying ideological issues that trouble the GSA-school relationship.

As a researcher, I hope to bring a counter-narrative to this conversation, a conversation that, at present, does not effectively address issues of foremost significance. What’s more, I wish to shed light on the ways that the oppressed — in this case sexual minority youths, and their allies— are being asked to educate their oppressors. As is often the ways with Liberal notions of reform, so-called “victims” are being held accountable, left to contend with the very mechanisms of their oppression.

**The Private Face of Public Schools**

Schools are social spaces and like other social spaces, they are, in many ways microcosms within the larger socio-political system. Within this space, youth are representative of certain cultural norms, and in large part, embody the normative values of society and its binary mechanisms of exclusion/inclusion. Within the context of what is understood to be public, the K-12 classroom is a public, and therefore, political space. Not unlike other public spaces, it is where the intersectionalities of race, class, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality meet, are played out, and challenged -- though these intersections are often unacknowledged. Politically, then, the classroom can be thought of as a space where public and private subjectivities meet. Here, public and private occupy significant and seemingly dichotomous interests in the classroom. As private identities emerge, and
individual bodies subsequently come to be understood and articulated, they collide with the boundaried public arena of the classroom. What's more these boundaries exceed the classroom, becoming a social filter through which even those enlightened youth seem to fall. Note the shroud of silence in what remains unspoken in the following exchange from Elizabeth as she describes a gay friend:

Like, I have this friend who is now out to me and a couple of people. And you could tell with him, right. He sings opera, and he's my ballroom dance partner, and he was sort of more flamboyant when I met him, but less so now, and he's like really, really cool, and didn't like girls, but you know, didn't mean anything, but he just said, 'I don't want to date yet,' And we all kinda went, well that's what we think, and you know most people who meet him will go, well, that's what we think, but you know, we wouldn't talk about it.

Not only does Elizabeth describe her friend in terms of popular "homosexual" stereotypes, but his sexuality is silenced in the language she uses, described only as the silenced something "you could tell" about him, the "it" she and her friends did not talk about. And yet, ironically they did talk about "it" and accept him, despite the stigma his being gay presented. Elizabeth's self-censoring dialogue is indicative of the conflict between public and private knowledge and identity. As, David Bell and Jon Binnie argue, "for sexual dissidents there is an obvious tension between the desire for privacy and the need to be public."71 Their private lives are drawn into the public only to be "thrust back into a reduced private."72 Perhaps nowhere are these

71 See also, David Bell, and Jon Binnie, The Sexual Citizen: Queer Politics and Beyond (Cambridge: Polity, 2000), 147.
72 Ibid
public-private tensions more acutely felt than in the politically paradoxical space of classroom, and in the complex and emotionally charged worlds of GLBTQI youth.

**Current Offerings in GSA Research: One Size Fits All**

There is a fairly large body of literature discussing the damaging influence of homophobia and heterosexism on GLBTQI youth. A number of studies have reported on the high rates of physical and emotional abuse suffered by those who identify as, or are perceived to be, GLBTQI. In one such study, Didi Khayatt examines the "coming out" experience for lesbian youth in Toronto High Schools. She argues that the ways in which individual lesbians understood coming out was different, but that, in similar ways, schools failed to facilitate the courses of action for sexual minority youth. For each student, the process was difficult and was dependent on the social, emotional and political contexts and awareness of both those who came out and those to whom they were coming out. Interestingly enough, the lesbian youth in Khayatt's study could easily point out sexism and blatant expressions of homophobia in their schools, but did not readily perceive the

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74 Khayatt, "Surviving School as a Lesbian."

75 Ibid.
myriad and subtle ways in which non-dominant sexualities were made invisible. This contradiction would seem to indicate that sexual minorities remain less aware of the ideological constructs concerning non-dominant sexualities, and these subtle constructs set the tone for the competing and contested ways in which sexual minority youth perceive themselves and are perceived by their heterosexual peers.

George Smith, in a companion investigation to Khayatt’s, explores the treatment gay male youth received in Toronto schools. He, too, found that students were less cognizant of the contributing factors and contexts that structured GLBTQI invisibility. As in Khayatt’s study, the youth in Smith’s study perceived the environment in school to be largely unaccepting, and realized such an environment had profoundly affected their sense of well-being and educational achievement.76 Smith outlines the ways in which “antigay activities … are a normal, everyday part of school social organization.”77 He argues that the physical and verbal abuse that students experience at school emanates from what he calls an “ideology of ‘fag’.” This ideology is “integral to the way language establishes hegemony” and subsequently constructs sexual minority identity as fixed.78 Further to this, Smith argues, this ideology saturates the school environment and sets the parameters for homophobic harassment.

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76 See, George W. Smith, "The Ideology of “Fag": The School Experience of Gay Students," Sociological Quarterly 39, no. 2 (1998). Camille Lee found similar results in her study of students in GSAs (see explication later in section).
77 Ibid.: 327.
78 Ibid.: 315.
While the Khayatt and Smith studies explore the schooling experiences of gay and lesbian Canadian youth, there have been far fewer studies on the impact of Gay Straight Alliances, and there are few, if any, empirical studies that focus on Canada.\footnote{Even though I searched quite broadly I was unable to find many empirical studies focusing on GSAs in the Canadian context, with the exception of Darren E. Lund, "A New Day for Dignity and Respect in Red Deer: Forming Alberta's First Gay/Straight Alliance," \textit{Our Schools/Our Selves} (2004).} This is not surprising given that GSAs are relatively new phenomenon and have only recently become the subject of educational research in Canada and the United States.\footnote{See for example, Lee, "The Impact of Belonging to a High School Gay/Straight Alliance."; Benjamin Dowling-Sendor, "Opening the Schoolhouse Door," \textit{American School Board Journal} (2003); Griffin et al., "Describing Roles That Gay-Straight Alliances Play in Schools: From Individual Support to School Change."} In the largest study to date, Griffin, Lee, Waugh, and Beyer studied 22 high schools and associated GSAs, concluding that GSAs "are the most visible and widely adopted strategies . . . to approaching LGBT issues in schools."\footnote{Griffin et al., "Describing Roles That Gay-Straight Alliances Play in Schools: From Individual Support to School Change," 8. While I use GLBTQI (gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer and/or questioning and intersex), when discussing the literature I adopt the acronym of the authors.} Griffin and colleagues, suggest that GSAs typically play one or more of four identifiable roles, for students and high schools: 1) counseling and support for LGBT students, 2) creating "safe space" for LGBT students and friends, 3) acting as the primary vehicle for education and awareness, and 4) increasing visibility and education regarding LGBT issues in the school as part of broader school effort for raising awareness.\footnote{Ibid.: 11.} They argue that while the largest number of schools utilized GSAs as their primary vehicle for raising awareness, providing education and increasing visibility, "positive effects of GSAs are most likely to be long lasting when
they are part of a broad, on-going, organizational level plan to affect institutional...[change].”

Griffin and colleagues also explore what they view as the advantages and disadvantages of each role. They contend that when the purpose of the GSA is to counsel and support, the overall commitment to systemic change is lacking. However, as Treadway and Yoakham also found, GSAs offer support and a sense of safety within an often unsafe school environment. While this may be true, the issue of personal safety is contingent upon both the individual’s sense of self, in addition to their sense of community. For example, Billy believed that his school was already a place where he could feel safe: “the school is pretty open to different things, but it is, also that I am just so open these days with people.” Billy proposed that he felt safe because he was out and open, adding that he attempted to “make friends with everybody anyway.” Billy’s assertion conveys a confidence and self-awareness with regard to his own positionality as a young Gay male. In the same way, his comments speak to the power of GSAs to create a supportive environment through which to affect communities of change, and in which he is free to express his subjectivity. In light of his other statements, where he noted that he had, in the past, worried about his personal safety, and the safety of others. I will elaborate more on this in chapter four.

83 Ibid.: 10.
84 Treadway and Yoakham, "Creating a Safer School Environment for Gay and Lesbian Students."
Offering a "safe-space" may offer heterosexual students a means by which to support GLBTQI friends and family members and encourage some sense of belonging for GLBTQI students, but, as Griffin and colleagues point out, there is little opportunity for counseling. Neither of the two GSAs in this study had a counseling component. In the case of Yuki, who was isolated, had low social standing and "was on his own," the opportunity for intervening conversations concerning a somewhat confused sexuality, would likely have been beneficial. I would argue that even within the counseling and support model, there remains little connection to ideas of broader systemic change, or to the socio-political context within which students function.

In 9 of the 21 schools Griffin and colleagues studied, GSAs were the primary vehicle for raising awareness, and programming on LGBTQ issues was initiated by the youth in GSAs. To varying degrees and successes, Both Park and Gray's GSAs took this role as their central and most important goal. As will be discussed in a later section, this raises questions with regard to accountability and responsibility within the school - with whom does it lie? Another issue raised by the authors was that of confidentiality. If GSAs are the only vehicle for increasing GLBTQI awareness, not all sexual minority students consider GSAs populated largely by heterosexual allies to be safe. Thus, Griffin and colleagues ask for whom are GSAs safe and supportive?

Often, GSAs attempt a "one size fits all" approach, but sexual minority students, like their heterosexual peers, are complex and diverse; no single organization or GSA can meet the needs of every individual. As Kevin Kumashiro
notes, these complexities can be paradoxical; what's more, "since every identity has meaning only because it is named against other identities, there can never be an identity that is all inclusive." For example, in his study of black queer males and GSAs, Lance McCready found that for students of colour, Otherness was intersectional. When his participants aligned themselves with certain extracurricular clubs and activities, it opened them up to harassment and public ridicule by their peers of colour. McCready maintains, "unless race and the 'troubling intersections' of issues for queer students of color are put on the agenda of GSAs they risk becoming another racial project." Kathryn Snider, who studied the Toronto School Board's Triangle alternative program, also claims that the program was often unable to meet the needs of queer students of colour because the program failed to work with, or acknowledge, the intersectionalities of race and sexuality. Bearing these concerns in mind, the lack of sexual minority youth of colour associated with the two GSAs in my study (with the exception of Billy) was not surprising. However, given the racial diversity of the general population at Park the demographics of the GSA seem problematic and, perhaps, exclusionary. Moreover,

87 Ibid.
it points to the need for multiple approaches to support and action with regard to sexual minority youth. In some ways then, GSAs are not safe spaces for all students, and any analyses of GSAs needs to formulate complicated understandings that take into consideration race, class, gender, and ability cross-dynamics. As will be discussed in more detail later, this is one area where utilizing fluid notions of identity can help to render more inclusive institutional understandings, and suggest multiple approaches to working with these issues across competing needs and groups.

In one of the only qualitative studies to investigate the impact of GSA membership on student participants, Camille Lee concludes that participation in a GSA has a positive, holistic influence on student academic performance (though not necessarily an increase in grade point average), enhances students' sense of physical safety, and contributes to a greater sense of belonging. Lee bases her definition of belonging on: changes in relationship with the school, identification with the school, desire to be known as a student of the school, and attitude about daily life in school. While these are measures of a type of belonging, it is unclear whether it renders a complicated enough view of what belonging might include or exclude for those students in GSAs who are variously marginalized.

However, LGBT youth who participated in the study agreed that having a support group made coming out easier, contributing to a sense of greater pride in

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89 Lee, "The Impact of Belonging to a High School Gay/Straight Alliance."
who they are.\textsuperscript{90} Billy agreed and said, "We want a place where anybody can go and feel comfortable and not shy way from who they are." Lee states that the "participants gained a new sense that they could make a difference or contribute positively to society through their involvement in the Alliance."\textsuperscript{91} This is similar to Griffin and colleagues, who found that participation in GSAs:

> can be an empowering experience for heterosexual and LGBT members and a valuable lesson in making social action consistent with democratic values. For LGBT youth being part of such a group can help them overcome persistent isolation and victimization in school.\textsuperscript{92}

On the other hand, creating a vision of GSA youth as change agents, and attributing notions of agency and "new found power,"\textsuperscript{93} directly to GSA involvement lacks the complexity under which student power, choice and agency function. This creates a dangerous either/or dichotomy for the students and an all or nothing system in which students are valuable contributors to change - or not.

On the whole, the researchers of studies on GSAs, and those who discuss the experiences of GLBTQI students, have a singular definition of GLB(T) that fails to address the intersecting and the overlapping identities of queer youth. Similarly, many of the authors employ binary definitions of gender, heterosexual, and homosexual that reify dominant narratives. Here again, we must return to issues of

\textsuperscript{90} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{91} Ibid.: 23.
\textsuperscript{92} Griffin et al., "Describing Roles That Gay-Straight Alliances Play in Schools: From Individual Support to School Change," 18.
\textsuperscript{93} Lee, "The Impact of Belonging to a High School Gay/Straight Alliance," 22.
intersectionality, and to the variable mechanisms surrounding a pathologized and silenced queer body.

Within the existing literature on GSAs, there are dominant narratives of resistance and social justice; ideas of what community ought to be, what knowledge productions are most beneficial, and how to produce societies of "enlightenment." There is also a considerable rhetoric within educational circles regarding safety and safe schooling, much of which falls under the rubric of anti-bullying agendas. While the particulars of these studies are less important to this project, the overall tone they set is significant. To a large extent, these discourses underscore the need for greater specificity regarding issues of homophobia and heteronormativity in schools, the burden of which currently falls on youth working within GSAs. While notions of homophobia, and to some degree heteronormativity, are addressed in some of the research on GSAs, many researchers fail to problematize or question the results of their findings. Enhanced critical analysis would allow for deeper interrogations of the identity foundations to which researchers of GLBTQI youth seem to adhere. I would argue that this type of interrogation is necessary and points

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to the need for further analyses of GSAs, including conversations in which these organizations are seen as paradoxical and possibly problematic.

In one such attempt to trouble existing discourses, researchers Quinlivan and Town stake their analyses within a framework of queer theory. The researchers attempt to use queer theories to trouble heteronormative processes of secondary schools in New Zealand. Their work draws upon two studies: one is conducted by Kathleen Quinlivan, an "out lesbian" scholar who explores heteronormativity in the science and health curriculums and interviews young lesbians about sexuality, sex education and the curriculum at eight secondary schools. The other is conducted by Shane Town, who investigates curriculum and talks to gay males at a number of secondary institutions. Both scholars seek to move beyond their established views of queer students as a "disenfranchised minority group requiring reparation within an equity framework." The authors begin by outlining the roles of gender and sexuality, and the ways in which each of these categorizations aid in the establishment and maintenance of heterosexual norms. Quinlivan and Town's findings support their assumption that schools maintain gender binaries and curriculums which are (hetero)normative. The researchers argue that this is particularly problematic for gay and lesbian youth on any number of levels, not the least of which is the paucity of space within schools for youth to come to terms with their identities. However, similar to the studies on GSAs, they do not problematize

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for whom the spaces might be safe and how the intersectionalities and fluidities of sexual minority identity influence the use of so-called safe spaces.

Correspondingly, while Quinlivan and Town thoroughly analyze the heteronormativism of the school and the way it normalizes, silences, and pathologizes youth, they rely on singular definitions of "queer theory" that also fail to address the intersections and the overlapping identities of queer youth. Perhaps most important and analogous to GSA research, they effectively use their data to buttress their research findings, but they do little to complicate the agency of the youth they explore. The understandings of GSAs offered throughout the remainder of this chapter are an attempt to complicate current understandings of GSAs. In so doing, I hope to highlight the agency and identity of the youth who participate in GSAs, and outline how the institutional structuring of GSAs, as currently formed, fails to acknowledge, and in fact may cover over, the underlying problem of institutionalized heteronormativity.

**GLBTQI Youth: Taking Chances, Raising Questions**

As discussed above, much has been written about the beneficial contributions of GSAs, celebrating the work of youth and the rise in GSA numbers. Researchers have attempted to highlight the courage of those youth forging the way for others, through a system that would rather have them remain silent and invisible. While there is little argument about the very real and palpable presence of increasing numbers of GLBTQI identified youth in our schools, the celebration of their success
by the educational system is strikingly ironic, and perhaps premature. If the students who spoke with me are any indication, and if educators, administrators, and researchers were to listen closely to more subtle rumblings, they would no doubt hear messages of sexual minority resistance embedded in the work of GSAs.

The ironies that surround the open-embrace of GSAs as the be-all answer for problems facing sexuality minority youth in schools begs a number of questions. Why has more not been written to critique the heteronormativity of the educational system? Why (as is historically the case with issues of race and civil rights) has the burden of educating for social justice, of fighting discrimination and violence, once again fallen on the very bodies, in this case queer student bodies, through which such violence is enacted? Despite the involvement of allied heterosexual youth in many GSAs the burden of risk with this “alliance” remains firmly rooted in the naming of one’s sexual orientation. Thus, for straight youth, while the GSA association may place them in a precarious social position, the public and private implications of one’s association is not and, will never be, equal to that of the queer student. Why then, are sexual minority youth educating their peers? Faculty? Staff and administration at their schools? Why are teachers, college professors, school board members, administrators and policy members, parents and guardians not explicitly championing the causes of the queer youth in their care? That is, why are more empowered and privileged adults failing to take the lead on anti-homophobia campaigns? Are GLBTQI youth in public educational institutions not part of the larger pedagogical purview? When did issues of educational reform become the
responsible for youth, and what does this say about our educational system? Our curricular responsibility? Our commitment to social justice? Ellsworth suggests:

A teacher’s “taking control” in order to manipulate students into “taking on responsibility” for the meanings they make—for the knowledge they construct—is a paradoxical gesture. Like all paradoxes, this one doesn’t “make sense.”

As Ellsworth aptly notes, many educators’ desire to teach the youth in their classes to “take responsibility.” Yet, the form of pedagogy that often materializes vis-à-vis this desire seldom includes the acknowledgement, or fostering, of students’ own knowledge production. Similarly when issues of homophobia arise, or when youth themselves bring homophobic oppression to the fore, too often students are left to deal with the situation themselves. When youth involved with GSAs raise issues of homophobia and discrimination most teachers are at a loss as to how to proceed. Rather than recognizing the problems inherent in the need for anti-homophobia work, educators and administrators are inclined to leave it in the hands of GSAs, celebrating, at arm’s length, the work of sexual minority youth and their allies. This critique is not meant to question educators’ desire to meet the needs of their students, nor should meeting the needs of students solely be a teacher’s responsibility. School boards, schools of education, and other organizations that participate in professional development can also be held accountable for the

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ongoing lack of commitment to ideals of social justice and the widespread failure to address the needs of sexual minority youth.

**Citizenship: The New Discourse of Schooling for Social Justice**

Citizenship, in the context of social justice, can be understood as one's political identity in association with nation, that is, belongingness and the inherent "rights and freedoms" that accompany such a membership. But it can also be understood as community, the rights and freedoms that one assumes and abides by as a member of a given community. This is a concept of citizenship, and of the citizen, that questions binaries of inclusion/exclusion and pushes at the boundaries of hegemonic nationalism and its dominant ideologies. Defined as such, citizenship proposes to acknowledge both a larger public, and the diverse subjectivities of its members. It is a citizenship that moves beyond incitements to normativism and conformity.

As Michael Apple argues, encouraging the growth of "engaged citizens" is necessary for the ongoing success of democracy and social justice. But what do the aims and ideals of democracy mean if students and educators are not visible in the discourses surrounding democratic education? Alternatively, what does visibility mean if one is situated in a context of Othering? Perhaps, those who occupy the

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margins are visible in ways that involuntarily sustain hegemonic framings, or as Butler remarks:

Those who should ideally be included within any operation of the universal find themselves not only outside its terms but as the very outside without which the universal could not be formulated, living as the trace, the spectral remainder, which does not have a home in the forward march of the universal.  

If students cannot participate in dialogues of citizenship, if curriculums are inherently exclusionary, then the repercussions extend far beyond the classroom. This pedagogical exclusion disrupts the very foundation on which the rights and freedoms of citizenship, writ large, are constructed. What happens in school classrooms is, I would argue, a microcosm of society, and its influences and outcomes are referred outward.

**The Politics of Meaning?**

As Dennis Sumara and Brent Davis conclude from their research on heteronormativity in curriculum: “subjectivity is not so much a matter of how one acts if one is this or that identity but, rather, how one becomes (and comes to be known as) this or that identity.” For queer students, the compartmentalization that results from the silence that surrounds heterosexual normativism in the public “this and that” of classroom life is often devastating. For sexual minority youth, the

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100 Butler, Laclau, and Zizek, *Contingency, Hegemony, and Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left*, 178.
heteronormative insistence of the classroom limits, and in some cases prohibits, the political space of the body. Simultaneously, the paradoxical demands of this public space often require that GLBTQI youth reveal their private lives - an obligation euphemistically known as "coming out." Thus, for sexual minorities the price exacted for subjectivity is both public and private. As Snider argues, "[T]he coming out discourse categorically underestimates the beneficial influence and support that the private sphere provides to many youth, which, by coming out, they risk losing. At the same time, the discourse over-privileges and protects the public sphere." 102

From an educational standpoint, institutionalized heteronormative standards hamper pedagogical aims. The establishment of a GSA alone does not alter this, though it may lessen its impact. Substantive institutional and curricular change requires that educators and administrators acknowledge the classroom as a public space. The discourse must be one that fosters a critical awareness of this competitive social arena, where one's civic authority and political viability are carefully orchestrated both institutionally and discursively. This orchestration should extend, therefore, beyond the existing "visibility and inclusion" models offered up by anti-homophobia discourses. While visibility and the politics of inclusion are important, these conceptual mechanisms do not, in-and-of-themselves, address the embeddedness of heteronormativity. As a benchmark of hegemonic normativism, heteronormativity must be addressed with institutional persistence. In order to begin this necessary

dismantling; however, educators must look beyond current catchall anti-violence frameworks and begin to acknowledge the wider significance of GSAs.

The Positive Role Model Revisited....

[The minority subject who circulates in a majoritarian public sphere occupies a specific contradiction: insofar as she is exemplary, she has distinguished herself from the collective stereotype; and at the same time, she is also read as a kind of foreign national, an exotic representative of her alien "people" who reports to the dominant culture about collective life in the crevices of national existence.]

Regardless of membership size or perceived success, once established, the GSA ruptures the heteronormative framework of the institution and makes necessary the acknowledgement of sexual minority youth. However, institutional acknowledgement does not necessitate institutional support. Visibility is a complex and centrally important element pertaining to this conversation. As Chris Mayo observes, "[t]he lack of visible and out students means that administrators often claim that schools have no gay students." Gay Straight Alliances establish the undeniable presence of sexual minority youth within the wider heterosexual school population, by allowing the queer body to legitimately occupy the "majoritarian public sphere." Similarly, in her study of lesbian identified students, Didi Khayatt argues

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that the existence of lesbian youth "... in the schools (overtly or covertly) is subversive and counter-hegemonic."\textsuperscript{105}

Conversely, Judith Roof argues that the ongoing call for public visibility, namely for GLBTQI people to come "out of the closet," is ineffectual because "visibility's implicit heteronarrative undoes its political efficacy for [sexual minorities] from the start."\textsuperscript{106} The public enactment and attainment of political agency for the queer body is impossible because the notion of visibility, against which invisibility is positioned, is itself heteronormative.\textsuperscript{107} Applying this line of reasoning to Gay Straight Alliances, one has to question the rationale used by educators and school administrators to explain the mushrooming popularity of GSAs across both Canada and the United States: that is, in many cases, it has been largely an argument about safe schooling inclusive of a marginally acceptable "gay and lesbian" visibility. The GSA provides a platform for sexual minority youth to be seen and heard, and it is a space from which they can foster communities of "tolerance" and acceptance. A popular suggested activity for start-up GSAs is a project intended to promote both visibility and peer awareness. The poster campaign is such that youth design posters and placards that bear the words "queer," "fag," "dyke," etcetera, which they post in various "high traffic" areas throughout the school, often with anonymous faces attached alongside.

\textsuperscript{106} Judith Roof, \textit{Come as You Are: Sexuality and Narrative} (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996). Roof offers an engaging discussion of narrative theory and sexual identity which lends itself well to the politics of sexual minority youth in schools
\textsuperscript{107} Ibid.
Such campaigns have a two-fold objective. The placards are meant to saturate the school environment, creating a politics of visibility, imbuing these commonplace homophobic pejoratives with greater meaning, while the act of making the word(s) public presumably circumvents its original meaning. Assigning a body/face to the word is intended to permeate language itself with the lived realities of GLBTQI people, while somehow simultaneously diffusing its injurious social meaning. It is meant to remind those who would perpetrate such verbal violence that the act of naming can be injurious, that in fact “words wound.” However, as Butler points out, locating or attributing deleterious meaning solely to a word/utterance advances the “notion that injurious speech is attributable to a singular subject and act”; in fact, what needs to be examined is the underlying ideology from which such utterances derive power.\textsuperscript{108} This style of campaign reifies both word and meaning, and correspondingly, the Otherness of those to whom the words refer. Homophobic slurs, spoken or silent, are juxtaposed against the silent normativism of heterosexuality. Thus, as Smith argues in the \textit{Ideology of ‘Fag}, these desensitizing exercises are ineffectual because they do little to deconstruct the fundamental heteronormative framework in which the language of homophobia is deeply embedded.\textsuperscript{109}

The students at Park and Gray pursued postering campaigns that attempted to move beyond simple desensitization exercises. Each of their projects had an


\textsuperscript{109} See, Smith, “The Ideology of ‘Fag’: The School Experience of Gay Students.”
action component. While the students at Park had not yet implemented their project, they felt that it was "a major goal," and had a clear idea of how they wanted to proceed and why. Betty explained the plan:

We were going to make posters cause [sponsor teacher] has Photoshop on their computer. First of all it would have our name. We decided to just be Park Pride and we were gonna use different symbols of using, like the Park Logo and so we started thinking about symbols. If maybe we wanted to make our own symbol. Then we are going to make up this poster, put them around the school. map out where we put them and after a certain amount of time we were going to just take them down And see if they've had anything written on them, like vandalism, whether it was good or bad, and maybe if they had been torn down. And maybe write up a mission statement. And we were going to use the front display case when you first walk in and either say, and write something about how about these posters we had up there for so long and say something like this is how our school views a GSA, whether it be good or bad basically by looking at how they have been reacted upon, sort of thing. So, it was kinda dependent on how students reacted. And then just putting [the results] up so everyone could see.

At Gray, both Elizabeth and Shawna had attended a workshop about organizing GSAs at a GALE BC conference the previous fall. Elizabeth noted that they had seen posters "in the libraries in the schools and stuff, and they say, you know, "this is a homophobia free zone, this is against the law and all people will be treated with respect." Inspired by the posters at the conference, Elizabeth recounted that:

We made our own little posters, and then when we get like a 100 of them, cause there's so many lockers in the school, we're going to put them in a box over by where the teachers get all their mail in the morning, and put a thing in the Bulletin saying if you want one come take one. Please hang them in your rooms, right. There's a lot of teachers who don't really want to say, "hey by the way you say these things you're gonna get in trouble now." So that would be kind of a good way for them to bring it into it, or even just having something
like that in the library, and plus, it's a comforting things for people who hear those (slurs) and are upset by them.

When discussing the poster campaign Shawna said, “well, this year we're focusing on eradicating homophobic slurs. So that is basically our number one goal... That's basically what the reality is for this year. Maybe in the future, going around to [other] schools.” The Gray GSA had just begun postering at the time of the interviews: “We put one up, and then someone took it down, and then we put another one up and they erased some of it or vandalized it in some way. So we took that one down. And we're waiting till we finished to get enough (Elizabeth).” While the students were anticipating resistance from the school community, they were determined in their commitment to the campaign, and to the process of educating their peers.

An ensuing factor to GSA activist activities, such as postering campaigns, is that the youth themselves are often made visible or “outed.” This introduces what Roof describes as a secondary issue within the politics of visibility: the role model ideal. To this she notes that, “[t]ogether visibility and invisibility refer obsessively to a knowledge of sexuality that performs a disciplinary function.”\(^{110}\) Within the context of the school, the visible GSA member is framed as a “the positive role model” -- the well-adapted sexual minority youth, or the empathetic heterosexual peer. The mythology of the positive role model creates a homogenous sexual minority from which logic would assume there to be a failed queer body. Against the positive role

\(^{110}\) Roof, *Come as You Are: Sexuality and Narrative*, 151.
model, closeted, queer, gender ambiguous, and other non-conforming and resistant bodies are measured and disciplined.

The success of the role model is based on achieving and maintaining socio-political acceptance and visibility in the public sphere. As Steven Russell states "heterosexuality has become a necessary basis for full citizenship," thus one can only ever attain political agency through visibility as a heterosexual.111 A public viewpoint in which the sexual minority role model is seen as successful, is one in which the standards for political agency have been set and legitimated by institutionally sanctioned heteronormative culture. My participants seemed to indicate that within schools, GSAs are often problematically positioned as the only space where sexual minority youth can safely establish a viable public identity. Equally troubling, is a majoritarian public school population that conceives of the GSA as the sole space where GLBTQI visibility ought be located. Visibility falls short as the solution to homophobic violence because visibility is itself an organizing mechanism of heteronormative public life.

One of the most consistent, "everyday" activities that students I spoke to engaged in was interrupting comments that they viewed as homophobic. These interventions often occurred in the classroom. When asked about homophobia at her school, Shawna responded that:

it depends what the definition is, because there are some people who use derogatory terms, aimed at people who are gay, but that doesn't necessarily mean that they are homophobic because sometimes they don't really know what the connotation is, and they don't know they are hurting people by using it.

Students reported that they addressed homophobia by confronting fellow students about use of language. These were generally individual acts, tied to the work of GSAs, but isolated within specific classroom spaces. Although it was not an official project of the GSA, most of the students felt that interrupting homophobic slurs was necessary. Shawna remarked, "I've told people I don't know to please not use the word gay as a derogatory term." Betty spoke of confronting students in class when she heard "that's so gay." Adding, "I am pretty easy going with people, [but] I said "um hey, I actually find that offensive, can you not use it anymore?"

Lapis also reported that

just someone in my class would say "that's so gay." And I would say 'hey, that's not right you shouldn't say that. Do you want to rephrase yourself, and try not to use that term next time?"

Typically, the students challenged by GSA students responded with some version of "oops, sorry," or "oh that's not what I mean." At times, however, the responses were more complicated. Betty spoke of an incident when:

This one girl who I, who had actually used that term before, and I had asked her to stop, did so, and we were working and I was talking, and um, I guess she was trying to get me to stop, or something. SO, she said, "hey I stopped using the g-a-y word, can you not talk?"
Like, you know, which if fine except, I kinda laughed, and I said the word gay isn’t homophobic; it’s when it is used in a homophobic context. And I laughed that she thought the word itself was
homophobic. And I’m like, not. It’s okay, I’ll stop talking sure, but, you can word the word gay, I don’t mind. It’s when you use it in a homophobic way.

Here, Betty is making a critical distinction between a word and how it is used. To her mind, the word “gay,” on its own is not a pejorative term, but the fact that gay is used in a way that denotes homophobia (and, I would argue heterosexism) makes it inappropriate to use. Yet, even as Betty makes these distinctions, she has mixed feelings about the student’s intent, and wants to make it clear that she does not think that the other student realizes its meaning. She notes:

I just don’t think she had really thought about it. Like, she’s not, like when she uses it I don’t think that she herself was being homophobic. Like now it is such a general term, for something that is stupid or dumb or something. So she used it, and so, um, so I think when I told her a little bit more about it she understood.

While intent seems to be a significant factor for many educators and students, it can also be used as an excuse not to address homophobia and heterosexism. Embedded in the logic of intent is a belief that if one works hard enough at educating others, they will simply “understand” and cease to use homophobic language. In some ways, we want to believe that homophobia is simply a matter of ignorance. We assume that homophobia is understandable. As such, left unchecked these seemingly innocuous phrases reinforce heteronormativism.

Interestingly, of the six participants, only two, Betty and Elizabeth, made substantive connections between sexual orientation, and race and/or racism. Three of the students did not mention race at all. Yuki believed that “citizenship or race is
not really connected to orientation. . . [it is] separate." However, Elizabeth, who tended toward a human rights approach, noted that she grouped all forms of oppression together: "they're all linked, and I think that they're all equally no good."

When Betty was asked if she had confronted someone when hearing something homophobic or racist, she recounted a time when someone had used the word “Jew” in a racist context:

He actually used the word “Jew” and I'm actually a secular Jew. I'm not really religious or anything. Just the fact that he would use religion to define anyone, . . . [he said] “what was he a Jew or something.” I just said to him, “hey that's offensive and not just for like Jewish people. If in fact that I was Christian and you used the word Christian or something, or Hindu, you know?” And then he asked me. “Are you Jewish, and I said yes.” We don't have a very large Jewish population at our school. He was like, “well, oh my god,” and ran off to his friends, like look “there's one of them,” (whispering conspiratorially). It was like, “oh look there is one of them, but guys look we have one at our school. I didn't know there were any.” It wasn't really offensive that part, it was just that he was so surprised that there are people around like me in my class.

It is significant that Betty would classify prejudice based on religion (and its complications) as being racist. It begs the question (unfortunately unasked as it was outside the scope of my interview) of how racism is defined by students, and whether it has become a catchall phrase for types of oppression that are otherwise unnamed or unfamiliar to the student. Similarly, Betty's personal investment in the issue is different, as she uses her own Judaism to inform her response. Her Judaism is also used to explain the rationale for her reaction to the student, and to account for the student's fear and discomfort. The language Betty uses to interrupt
the anti-Semitism is much more nuanced than it had been in the previous example, when she was confronting homophobia. With regard to homophobic slurs she simply told the other students that what they did was offensive. Whereas in confronting anti-Semitism, she drew parallels, suggesting to the student that he would not do the same thing to another identifiable group. This is significant because it speaks to the unique and invisible character of heterosexism, and its veiled relationship to homophobia. Also, unspoken is the sense that there is harm in the naming. These issues will be returned to in some detail in Chapter 4.

**Equality: The After-School Program**

As a youth-led organization, the GSA holds complex significance within school culture, affecting the lives of both heterosexual and sexual minority youth. Even so, GSAs serve singularly diverse purposes for these different, and often times conflicting, actors and agents. In her study of youth in alternative schools, Deirdre Kelly argues that alternative schools often function as a "safety valve" for the mainstream schools, rather than as a "safety net" for the students.\(^{112}\) Kelly further argues that the tensions between these issues are productive spaces from which to analyze the schooling experiences of marginalized youth. Thus, Kelly's "valve" versus "net" notion is useful framework for viewing the institutional positioning of GSAs and students who are involved with them. For the schools, the GSA presents

a public image that features tolerance as a priority. The function of the GSA, then, can be articulated as a safety valve for the school's requirements to meet the needs of GLBTQI students, and an ever-increasing public outcry for school safety. This does not detract from the importance of GSAs to students and the positive sense of self, school community, and belonging that their involvement provides. For students the Alliance does in fact function as a safety net, offering them a safer space and an opportunity to establish peer connections. Yet, as discussed previously, the onus for change lies problematically with those involved with GSAs, in particular with GLBTQI students. Even as we analyze the tensions of institutional views and commitments to GSAs, the students rely on it in very different ways. This is indicative of the complexity of these issues. It is likely that in most schools, GSAs function as both safety net and valve. However, one must question whether the presence of a safety valve aids in removing, or displacing, the responsibility for reforming school culture from the larger school community.

Steven Seidman argues that there has been an increasing shift towards normalizing the homosexual body, neutralizing its political potential and rendering "sexual difference" as insignificant to the body that otherwise successfully performs and reproduces an ideal citizen body. 113 Continuing to ignore the heteronormative infrastructure of our schools and classrooms and asking youth to "do the work," when we continue to ignore that very infrastructure, is problematic. This is

especially true when these youth already have the discourse and understanding of community that is in keeping with what we talk about as social justice.

Playing it Safe

The self-determination with which youth engage in sexual expression, and subsequently come to terms with, or begin questioning their sexual identity, is increasingly apparent. More sexual minority youth are choosing to explore their non-dominant sexuality and, for some, this means “coming out” at a younger age -- during their high school years.\(^{114}\) For the burgeoning adolescent, sexuality is normalized via hyper-sexualized pop-culture icons, reality TV shows, and other mediated sources which showcase heterosexual privilege and gay/lesbian stereotypes. Thus, while sexual exploration is encouraged within youth culture’s popular imaginary, somewhat paradoxically, the boundaries of this sexual expression and exploration are heavily regulated and remain largely defined within a heteronormative framework. While discourses of sexual exploration may appear to be accepted within the public imaginary, there is, I would argue, an expectation of conformity bubbling beneath this liberalized veneer. Though lip service is paid to ideas of tolerance and diversity within schools, there is in actuality, only tertiary treatment given to conversations of sexual minority issues. In the same way, little thought is given to conceptualizations of social justice that move beyond tolerance.

Thus, while society seems to condone a certain flexibility and experimentation, opening a space for the "questioning body," paradoxically, the body within this space remains highly regulated.

There is a societal expectation that adolescents will engage in some degree of sexual "exploration." Nonetheless, this anticipated behavior is one burdened with several underlying assumptions. For some, exploration implies that one will indulge the curiosities of a burgeoning sexuality and pubescent social development, perhaps even venturing beyond the socially prescribed boundaries of heterosexual behavior. When, however, this sexual sojourn becomes a journey from which one does not return, the exploration as such, is no longer tolerated. A refusal of normative sexual identity directly results in the failure to conform to entrenched social standards. Unable to perform one's heterosexualized place in the world, one becomes Other. In the context of public school spaces, the Other is the sexual minority and/or questioning youth. Thus, while schools foster and encourage a rhetoric of youthful individualism, they remain keenly invested in regulating the parameters in which this explorative individuation can occur. Despite this socio-institutional paradox, as the dialogues of tolerance and acceptance make their way into schools, public discourses, and school curriculums, school boards and administrators are quick to jump on the GSA bandwagon, funding one-off workshops, umbrella seminars, and pamphleteering enterprises.

While the support of Gay Straight Alliances seems a positive step forward, in fact, school boards and schools are, I would argue, actually leaving the work of
challenging dominant ideology to the youth in GSAs. Those who occupy the margins – sexual minority and allied youth, GLBTQI educators, and GSA adult leaders remain on the political frontlines, actually taking risks and doing the work of educating for, and about, issues of social justice and diversity. One example of this unsettling trend was offered in my conversation with Shawna. In her discussion of the types of activities the Gray GSA had been involved in, she stated that they were still going with our theme of getting rid of homophobic slurs.

So, we acknowledged that we do have a problem here, which is what a lot of teachers are ignoring because they don't know how to handle it. So, we just acknowledged, ya this is a problem. And we asked them to treat it like any other derogatory racist or what not comment.

As we can gather from Shawna's account of Park, it was the students who had been proactive in both acknowledging the problem of homophobia and actively seeking out a way to address it within the school. While educators “who didn't know how to handle it” simply ignored the problem. Again, I am not arguing in opposition to youth activism such as we have seen with the GSAs at Park and Gray. However, I am arguing that GSAs ought not to be the only mechanism through which curricular and pedagogical change, and GLBTQI inclusion is fostered. Educators ought not to be in a position where ignoring the problem of homophobia in their schools is an option.

Does Someone Have A Better Idea?

Existing literature on sexual minority youth in schools and GSAs effectively outlines the various approaches that schools could take to help sexual minority

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youth within existing institutional and curricular structures. While the idea of incorporating "gay and lesbian" issues into the curriculum, educating new teachers, improving school safety, and affirming diversity, are not bad ideas, those who author these suggestions do not critically discuss their implementation, nor do they analyze the opportunities and hazards of these approaches in widely different contexts. Similarly, educators and administrators often fail to offer complicated renderings of a diverse sexual minority population. This failure emerges within the context of parents, communities and larger systems which regulate the work of teachers and administrations, and where spaces in which to address, complicate and/or practice working outside universalized categories are nearly non-existent. Consequently, educators frequently fall short of discussing how strategies might be introduced that forefront a social justice framework to support the fluidity of student identities within schools. I cannot pretend, or purport here, to tackle the implementation issues raised by an intersectional understanding of citizenship, social justice and Gay Straight Alliances. Nevertheless, I have offered important avenues for future research and marked a clear path for problematizing our current understandings.
CHAPTER 4: "LOST & FOUND": SEARCHING FOR CITIZENSHIP IN EDUCATION

This chapter will engage three concepts of particular importance to the educational experience of sexual minority youth: Citizenship, Social Justice, and Naming. The classroom is central to this exploration. Like the social and political norms that shape and define knowledge and authority within a larger socio-political context, political meaning and the relations of power cannot be separated within this curricular space. In particular, I am interested in the ways these socio-political elements relate to issues of sexual minority identity. Throughout this chapter, I address the various ways in which the official discourses of citizenship relate to student's own conceptual understandings. I highlight the participants' understandings of social responsibility, social activism, and community, offering access to a seldom-heard perspective. Drawing connections and distinctions between school policies of social responsibility, formal curricular understandings of citizenship, and definitions of social justice; I offer opportunities to juxtapose student perspectives with current educational understanding and theory. The youth provide examples that illustrate the ways in which classrooms can be viewed as complicated, political spaces. I also suggest the classroom as one arena where complex renderings of citizenship can take place, and subsequently utilized to better meet the needs of all students, but particularly the queer student. I also examine sub-categories of citizenship in which I introduce a categorization I call Citizen-others. Lastly, I return to issues of social justice in the classroom and explicate its usefulness vis-à-vis a fluid understandings of citizenship.
The "Good Citizen"

There could be much that is politically significant in a name...\textsuperscript{115}

As the opening quotation suggests, naming is a significant act with powerful social, political, and pedagogical repercussions. In political terms, one of the most powerful designations one can claim, or be given, is that of \textit{citizen}. For some, citizenship is a seemingly innocuous term that means very little in their day-to-day lives, while for others, it is a term rife with political tensions and hidden oppressions. Regardless of its meaning or context, the desired prefatory title with regard to citizenship is that of "good citizen," that is, a public identity that poses no discernable challenges to the hegemonic confluence of citizenship, writ large. Those who do not adhere to the parameters embedded in popular meanings of good citizenry must endure the admonishments, (for example, a political othering, pejorative naming, etcetera) of their civic failure. For many, the rights of full citizenship, including a desire for belonging, are enough to endure the silencing integral to a "politics of passing."\textsuperscript{116} For the unmarked, unnamed GLBTQI body, public life has an implicit -- albeit socially and economically variable-- membership. Yet, as Carol Johnson argues these good homosexuals "still reinforce heteronormative conceptions of

\textsuperscript{115} Himani Bannerji, \textit{Thinking Through: Essays on Feminism, Marxism, and Anti-Racism} (Toronto: Women's Press, 1995), 19.

citizenship since the politics of passing is an important way of asserting heterosexuality privilege."117

Traditionally speaking, citizenship is a political position within the state that facilitates the ability of those who are named citizen to participate as such. This definition implies that citizenship authorizes and safeguards the socio-political mobility of its members, while binding individual “citizens together in sociality.”118 In so doing, it suggests that the political will of the state, and its members (a.k.a. the Public), is that of inclusion. This idea of citizenship implies that all bodies named citizen be permitted the right to openly engage in civic discourse, participate in the political processes by which the rights and freedoms of both individual and community are formed, and enjoy the protection of those rights and freedoms. In actuality, full inclusivity is seldom realized for those at the margins. For those who are not named or acknowledged as good-citizens, there are alternative categorizations, designations that often result in an obstructive otherness.119 Categorizations such as the queer-citizen and the sexual-citizen serve to highlight the exclusionary foundation from which these very identities emerge. Yet, ironically, it is often from within the margins that these designations are produced in an attempt to reclaim that which has been denied. In so doing, the homogeneity of citizenship is preserved and the disenfranchising taxonomies of those who would challenge its hegemonic politics are maintained. As Lauren Berlant similarly asserts:

118 Bell, The Sexual Citizen: Queer Politics and Beyond, 7.
119 While there is much to be said about this issue regarding First Nations politics in Canada, and other issue of aboriginal politics internationally, it is beyond the scope of this chapter. That being said, I feel it is important to acknowledge the specific nature of aboriginal peoples in relation to the discourse of citizenship as it is outlined herein.
[Citizenship is a desired effect of conservative cultural politics, whose aim is to dilute the oppositional discourses of the historically stereotyped citizens—people of colour, women, gays, and lesbians.]

Thus, because those not easily identifiable as the stereotyped "good citizen" push at the boundaries of hegemonic nationalism and its dominant ideologies, they are given an alternative framing. The result is a politics and a discourse of citizenship founded on difference.

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**Has Anyone Seen My Citizenship? Negotiating Curricular Disconnections**

When asked to define citizenship and discuss what meant to them, student participants varied in their replies. However, in every case, their initial response to citizenship was tied to their perceptions of curricular definitions. Lapis and Shawna noted, "it sounds like a boring word," or a "boring topic." When pressed, Lapis said, "I don't know the dictionary version of it. I'm sure the general population doesn't." However, having recently completed a two-day Vancouver School Board leadership forum entitled "What is an educated Canadian", she added "that citizenship is also one of those things you can't come up with a complete answer for." Lapis also noted that she thought the forum had been useful, and "was really interesting because they [school administrators] had a lot of the same views as I did. Somehow the ideas got lost in the process of education." That the "ideas" of citizenship had become "lost in the process of education" is indicative of the disconnect that can occur when curricular content does not address what students have identified as their own concerns. One can speculate that this is often the case with sexual

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121 See, Bell and Binnie, 25-34
minority students, where curriculums often fail to be inclusive of GLBTQI issues. Students like Billy and Lapis, interested in social change and active in their peer groups and school communities, appear isolated in their opinions and beliefs. By her own account, Lapis' attendance at the citizenship forum, albeit beneficial, was happenstance; a friend had asked her to fill in at the last minute for someone else. In talking to her, it was clear that the positive feedback she received from the educators and administrators, while affirming, had come as a surprise.

Other students had notably similar responses. Shawna reported that citizenship per se was "not really" talked about in her socials courses but there was a "certain extent of it in Geography... regarding the environment." Yuki, also remembered talking about citizenship in class, but could not remember the particulars:

I don't think we actually put the word citizenship on the board and copied it down into our notebooks and had a summary. But you know, I think we may have a little talk about it. Not in the specific, say, citizenship is..., but in relation to maybe a topic, or something like that.

While Billy understood the school-derived definition of citizenship to be "basically, I am Canadian, so I am a citizen here," he made the distinction that citizenship was not "just a literal term." His own views were seemingly absent from any curricular content he could recall. Billy offered the following definition:

it can be groups of people, a citizen in a gang. Or part of my friends or it can be this or that. Acceptance. Something that says you are this, or you are a part of that. That's what comes to mind.
Thus it seemed, in relation to Billy’s nuanced interpretations and according to the participants’ accounts, that the curricular approaches to the discourse of citizenship had been too narrow or unilateral, offering only a “literal term.”

Offering a comparable critique, Elizabeth recalled discussions of citizenship in school, but stated, “they [teachers] go about it the wrong way. The message they are trying to get across is not something that teenagers will identify with.” Citizenship, as defined within the realm of school curriculums, held no appeal, it was “not something that I wanted to involve myself with, [it] is not what I think citizenship is (Elizabeth).” Significantly, Elizabeth made the distinction between “the really boring scholarship, administrator, school type of thing,” and “the I’m gonna be a nice person kind of [citizenship] thing.” Other participants’ comments bore a strikingly similar tone. Betty noted schools talked about citizenship, “maybe literally but not in the context we [the youth] give it.” While, Billy agreed, “that the curriculum isn’t anything connected to what we’ve said at all.” As a researcher, I was struck by how detached all of the participants felt in relation to the school’s curricular offerings. It was not that citizenship was an unfamiliar term, or that it held no conceptual meaning for them as individuals; rather, students had their own interpretation of the issues. This would seem to point to a disparity between curricular content and student understandings. Citizenship education did not resonate with these students because static curricular definitions offered in classrooms and school forums had little pedagogical relevance to their lives. This curricular lack is noteworthy because it signifies to students that there is little acknowledgment or validation for them, as citizens, within curricular discourses of citizenship.
Without acknowledgement and affirmation, students cannot learn. Without acknowledgement, individual citizens can never fully realize the benefits and entitlements of one recognized as a “good citizen.” Not unlike the queer and allied students in my study, this type of political impasse is precisely what many GLBTQI individuals face. Steve Seidman argues “the exclusion of the homosexual from public life is reinforced by civic disenfranchisement— the denial of civil rights and political representation.” Any definition of citizenship, therefore, must acknowledge an embedded and fundamental discourse of “rights” and social justice; the nation, community, or school classroom serve as the stage on which these rights may be exercised and performed. Notably, many of the students I spoke with had already come to understand the political saliency of citizenship and civic disenfranchisement within a broader social context. This was an awareness the students attained from witnessing (and for some experiencing) homophobia and oppression both within and beyond the school environment.

Considering the citizenship question more generally, Shawna offered the following definition: “the sort of understanding that we, as human beings have responsibilities for the well being of the planet itself and other human beings around us.” While citizenship, according to Elizabeth “is being a helpful nice person,” it is

123 Seidman, "From Identity to Queer Politics: Shifts in Normative Heterosexuality and the Meaning of Citizenship,” 322. See also, Evans, "Creating a Positive Learning Environment for Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Students."
124 This is what Carl Stychin calls a “dynamic rights discourse.” For further discussion see, Carl F. Stychin, A Nation by Rights (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998).
more than just an individual act or sense of self. She went on to use an example from a book she read in her English class, *Cry, the Beloved Country*:

There is a man sleeping in the grass and there's the greatest storm of all his days gathered over top of him, and people who are passing him, but none stop to wake him up. And to me that is not citizenship. That's not helping other people, that's not contributing to a greater cause of yourself or your country or the people around you, or whatever you want to call it. You know, you should stop and wake him up, and that's good citizenship.

Lori: Do you see it as tied to country?

Elizabeth: Na. I don't know. I see it as tied to — if everyone is nice all around you, then the whole country will be nice.

Both Shawna and Elizabeth construct a definition of citizenship that is coupled with an ideal of the “good person” or the “good citizen.” Their definition of citizenship is developed in relation to their understanding of humanity. So, too, is a belief that if people recognize their place in the world in relation to others, that this will be enough to make the country “nice.” While perhaps naively stated, their observations of society and their grappling with the implications of social action speak to a deeper level of comprehension regarding human relations, social interaction, and civic responsibility.

**Belonging**

Belonging was a narrative thread that ran throughout the participants' discussions of citizenship. For example, Billy stated that, “citizenship can be groups of people, a citizen in a gang, or part of my friends. Acceptance, something that says you are this, or you are that.” Here, Billy seemed to equate *belonging to a*
group with a type of citizenship. Betty also made a connection to acceptance and belonging when she noted that citizenship:

means taking pride in who you are and what and where you are. Like Billy said, your country that you are in, your city, or even your school. Using that pride to promote it and make it a better place.

If belonging and acceptance are, as Billy argued, a part of citizenship and group identification, then issues of naming, both self-defined and imposed, become more salient and complicating to broader understandings of citizenship. This is not to say that belonging is straightforward, or that citizenship is a correlative process in which one simply names one's self, or is named into a state of belonging. Even so, for the students I spoke with, belonging quite clearly denoted a kind of citizenship. Betty, for example, pointed to the potential onerousness of “having to belong” in connection with one’s citizenship:

citizenship could be a really positive word or almost negative. It could mean . . . that you have to belong somewhere to know who you really are. Oh, I have to belong to these people because I have black hair. . . . in that context, citizenship could mean that you have to belong somewhere to someone.

In noting that membership and belonging are not always uncomplicated or purely “positive,” Betty’s analysis points to the hegemonic implications of desiring to belong, and the need to belong as a requirement of citizenship.

When asked to tie their own notions of citizenship to the work of GSAs, most of the students did not see a direct association. Betty stated that she “didn’t really see it as being a part of a GSA.” Yuki made broader connections between citizenship and sexual orientation both inside and outside of schools, but in terms of GSA work and homophobia argued, “I don’t think citizenship has anything to do with
In contrast, Elizabeth believed there was a relationship between gay and lesbian issues, homophobia and citizenship. Again, using the example from *Cry, the Beloved Country*:

It's like the guy sleeping in the grass, right. Someone is being taunted or ridiculed or made to feel upset in some way, and people think that's fine, you know, "oh, they're just joking," or "they're just having fun" or "who cares, he's a fag?" Well no, that's not true. Like, it may be true, but it's not true that you should just leave them alone.

When asked if she thought homophobia and gay and lesbian issues were tied to citizenship, Shawna responded that it could be, since we go into the well being of others. These homophobic slurs don't necessarily impact everyone, but I think everyone should have a responsibility to get rid of them because they do impact some people. So, that's the general well being of our society.

And while she did not state so explicitly, notions of the "general well-being of society" seemed to encompass what it meant to be a citizen. What's more, her suggestion that "everyone should have a responsibility" is in keeping with notions of the "good citizen," and for sexual minority students, in particular, it is characteristic of an idealized public role model.

**Social Responsibility**

The students at both schools reported that social responsibility was part of school wide goals, but Shawna noted that it was "an assembly. They were describing our school motto. Respect was the one thing they were focusing on. I can't really remember. It must have been very interesting (laughing)."
direct connection between citizenship and social responsibility, Elizabeth said that schools spoke about a particular type of citizenship:

All the time. It's like when they gather you all together at the beginning of the year and they give you the respect and the responsibility, and whatever, the other R one they use is. They have this little motto at our school. And they give us this little talk with a power point presentation and stuff, and everyone's snoozing (laughs). 'Cause the administrators give us this big talk at the beginning of the year. And they talk about the citizenship, and stuff like that.

Thus, while school administrators articulated their version of citizenship and social responsibility, the students were not engaged in the dialogue and were too uninterested to make the link. The new British Columbia Social Responsibility Performance Standards outlines expectations that students will receive instruction in "contributing to class and school community, solving problems in peaceful ways, valuing diversity and defending human rights, and exercising democratic rights and responsibilities." \(^{125}\) While the expectations are well intentioned, the guidelines provided primarily focus on individual participation and change. For example, the 'fully meets expectations' rating scale for grades 8-10" uses terms such as "usually kind and friendly," "usually manages anger appropriately," "respectful and fair," and "increasingly interested in taking action to improve the world." Note the last, "increasingly interested" clause, and an accompanying "fully meets expectations" criterion of "may show interest in taking action," means that to fully meet one's social responsibility according to the schools, a student need not take action, only show and interest in doing so. Yet, the youth in the study called for schools to

support and reward collective and direct action, not individual acts of "kindness."
They noted that this was the most direct way of altering school curriculum and
combatting homophobia.

Here, we see a significant conceptual divide between the school’s ideological
renderings of social responsibility (as well as their ideas of citizenship and social
change) and what the students themselves value and perceive as important., and
This disjuncture is indicative of what Fine and Weis identify as schooling’s role in
reproducing structural inequalities and dominant narratives all-the-while silencing
student voices. They argue that “educational policies and procedures obscure the
very social, economic, and therefore experiential conditions of students’ daily lives,
while they expel critical ‘talk’ about these conditions from written, oral, and nonverbal
expression.”

Shawna made an evocative distinction between citizen and citizenship, and
what was important to her own sense making in this regard:

a citizen is anyone who has citizenship status in their society, but in
the broader sense, citizenship also means the responsibility part. So,
being a citizen doesn’t necessarily mean you’re exhibiting citizenship.
But I think it should.

Responsibility, according to Shawna, is a self-conscious process:

the person has to make up their mind to see what they want to
change, or if they see any problem, like our GSA with the
homophobic slurs problem, or . . . regarding the environment, we
have a responsibility to support sustainable agriculture and stuff . . .
and as a society . . . we are all nourished by our community. That’s
how we exist, so there should be some giving back to the community.

126 See, Michelle Fine and Lois Weis, Silenced Voices and Extraordinary Conversations: Reimagining
Again, we see a complex and well-developed understanding of citizenship and social responsibility, neither of which can be traced to what the students described within the content of their school curriculums. What is most intriguing in Shawna’s analysis however, is her representation of community. Here, community seems to stand in for citizenship. It is community that she feels a responsibility towards, and it is community that in her estimation binds society together.

Similarly, Lapis felt it was important to expand definitions of citizenship beyond “city and location,” stating that community was a really good word to define it [citizenship] . . . somehow representing it. The first thing that popped into my head was a thing at school about social responsibility, such as kindness acts, it can be anything from helping the teacher to staying after school.

However, the “acts” of social responsibility that Lapis attributes to community and citizenship, were, in actuality, seen by the participants as individual, random, unrelated “kindness acts” set in motion by the school’s social responsibility program. Lapis, Billy and Betty described the program at Park, in which a school-wide “theme” for social responsibility was selected each month. The program included individual students being given recognition for contributing to a positive school environment. This involved activities such as “sewing hats and stuff for a battered women’s shelter” to “welcoming a grade 8” (Betty), or as Lapis noted above simply “staying after to help a teacher.” Teachers at Park submitted individual student names to the administration and, once each month or so, those students would be invited to lunch or breakfast with the school principal. During this meal, they were asked to “talk
about the school, some things they want, or some things they would change, that kind of thing" (Betty).

While Lapis was fairly positive about the program and saw it as "a good start," while still needing improvement, Billy and Betty were doubtful of the program's capacity to affect any lasting change. While all three recognized that the "idea was useful," (Billy), there was also a collective feeling that it had not been "planned and implemented very well" (Betty). Both Billy and Betty were concerned about who was missed in the reward system, and attributed this to the individualized nature of the recognition. They were troubled by a focus on what they viewed to be common courtesies or minor acts such as "helping the soccer coach fold the team jerseys"(Betty). Equally, they saw a lack of recognition for the "really great things we do at our school like social responsibility." Both Betty and Billy knew they had "done stuff and maybe the teacher just didn’t put a slip in or something. I haven’t been acknowledged or had my name in the bulletin or gone to lunch with the principal, but I know I’ve done stuff" (Betty). Billy also remarked that

It's weird how your teacher reads [from the daily bulletin], "oh this person opened the door for a teacher" and they're going to have lunch with the principal. We've done a lot of things in the last few years and I am not saying that I am jealous or anything. But it's kind of weird how they would just present it that way to the students and kind of make it a competition, which I don't really like.

There was also a desire for less focus on the individual, and more group-oriented goals and projects. To their mind, social responsibility was not defined by individual acts and official recognition for who did what. To which end Betty stated:

I think that we could do something more as group of people....a school, as a class. I mean I really like the idea of the sewing,
students sewing hats and stuff for a battered women’s shelter. Just the fact that somebody helped shelve books doesn’t really appeal to me.

Billy offered the Student Centered Learning program,\textsuperscript{127} in which all three students were enrolled, as an example. They had completed a number of projects including “beach clean-up and making hampers at Christmas time for the homeless shelter.

Billy added:

[We do] things like that and we are never acknowledged. I am not saying that I want to be acknowledged, or anything like that. But at the same time it is a good thing to bring to the school, to let people know that you can help out people who are less fortunate than most people. You can donate things, and this and that. I think that should be more of the focus than just opening a door for a teacher.

Similar to the social responsibility program at Park, Grey also had a program entitled the **** Auction.\textsuperscript{128} The program was designed to inspire “good works” in the school. Students who participated in random acts of kindness or good deeds were recognized with **** Rewards, which could be used at the student holiday auction.

Interestingly, Elizabeth brought up the program in connection with citizenship, which she described as “a really boring scholarship, administrator, school type thing, and then it has the I’m gonna be a nice person kind of thing.” She cited the **** Auction of one such example of the “nice person,” “school type thing.” In order to protest what Elizabeth saw as somewhat disingenuous acts of “good citizenry,” she stated that:

I go around on the last day and I collect all the [named reward] from the teachers. All the leftovers, and I get a big pile and I go and I hand

\textsuperscript{127} This is a pseudonym.
\textsuperscript{128} For purposes of confidentiality, the names of these programs and auctions have been removed and are signified by ****
them out to people who I see doing nice things, or people who don’t ask me for them. I’ll just throw them at people.

She made a point of noting that she would not give them to students who ask for them because “that’s selfish.”

Both the Park and Grey programs illustrate the ways in which schools are attempting to engage the students in responsibility-type programs that encourage the ideals of good citizenry. However, as the many comments from the participants attest, these attempts miss the mark, and grossly underestimate students’ ability to conceptualize ideas of community and social responsibility. The students questioned the system of rewarding individual behavior and the effectiveness of doing so. Their remarks expose the flaws of a system in which the school’s short-term goals are met, while long-term social justice reforms are sacrificed to a highly Liberalized agenda. Students like Elizabeth and Billy who have already developed an interest in the social well-being of their respective school communities are left feeling under-appreciated and resistant.

**Classroom Tensions**

There are complex power relations concerning notions of citizenship in curriculums and classrooms. As we have seen, for better or worse, citizenship is tied to individual subjectivity and is dictated, in large part, by one’s public belonging and socio-political placement. In terms of the school classroom, this socio-political placement has significance both inside and outside the school. While the students I

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129 In this context I refer to a particular branch of Liberalism that is particularly individualistic, self-serving, and exclusionary. For an additional critiques see: Brown, *States of Injury.*
spoke to did not directly address belonging per se, there was a sense that a connection was made between citizenship, social responsibility, and the acknowledgement or naming associated with the work done within the school's GSA. For example, Betty spoke of making sure a website was constructed for the Park GSA:

   I haven't had much contact with GALE other than having my name out there. But I like that I have links to get to me. Like you getting to me. I was so happy that Park went up on the site for school GSAs.

While Betty spoke of "having her name out there" with some shyness, it mattered in a significant way that Park's website be affiliated with the other GSAs on the GALE BC site. Betty's enthusiasm may have derived, in part, from her own sense of pride over the GSAs continued existence, particularly since Betty was the catalyst for its inception. However, in an undeclared way, Betty's joy seemed connected to a sense of belonging associated with the GSA. The GSA was part of a larger community, and within that community the website gave the GSA and its members a specific group identity as the "Park GSA."

Not easily understood, the complex relations of belonging are further complicated by the intersectionalities of race, class, ethnicity, ability, and gender. These politically diverse intersections necessarily and productively complicate individual subjectivities and, subsequently, one's public memberships. For sexual minority students, these complications result in the local and momentary displacement of hegemonic norms or what Judith Butler refers to as "performative ruptures":

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The term queer emerges as an interpellation that raises the question of the status of force and opposition, of stability and variability, *within* performativity...And the "act" by which a name authorizes and deauthorizes a set of social or sexual relations is, of necessity, *a repetition.*

Thus, performative processes, which are the necessary iterations of hegemonic discourse (e.g. the heteronormative curricular space of the classroom), constitute their own originary meaning. It is through these constructed meanings that the subject (e.g. the 'typical' student body) is re/produced, and out of which identities imbued with a particular normative politics, continue to emerge.

Within the classroom, pedagogies of "difference" occupy a highly constrained curricular space. As "difference" is named, dis-harmonious bodies are constructed vis-à-vis race (i.e. non-white), (homo)sexuality, class, dis/ability, etcetera. The result is a hegemonic learning environment in which disenfranchised youths struggle to develop an understanding of themselves as individuals with viable subjectivity inclusive of "difference." At the same time, frustrated educators are left mouthing the words to the worn-out echoes of culturally pluralistic, "why can't we all just get along" pedagogies. Unfortunately, for students caught in the institutional

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131 Ibid, 15.
crossfire, the result is invariably a curricular (and school-wide) environment in which complex categories of race, class, sexuality and other markers of "difference" become lost in a quagmire of cultural pluralism. Within a curricular environment, both the participants in the study and I are addressing the socio-political milieu in which curricular and pedagogical decisions and the performances are constructed and produced. The cultural pluralism that many educators embrace focuses on the ways that identity groupings are the same, resulting in loss of intersectionality and multiplicity that the students in this study desired.

Where, then, does a queer body, a body desiring both to belong and to resist the assimilationalist demands, locate itself in a public, historically heterosexual pedagogical and curricular space? As noted previously, and as Michael Warner suggests, the queer body is already, regardless of its own subjectivity and social positioning, limited by its relegation to the private sphere. In the classroom, whether or not self-identified, queer youths choose to be "out," their identity is marked. Such individuals often do not have the freedom to control how their identity is forged within the classroom environment – nor can they escape the inexorable reach of a principally heterosexual public imaginary. Acting against or interrupting heterosexism and homophobia is more difficult if one does not have support at school from friends, or lacks an identifiable peer group. Even those students involved with GSAs remain vulnerable, living alongside what Brown and Kelly call

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When asked what would happen if he tried to disrupt homophobic slurs, Yuki said:

I don’t really have much social status, and I don’t know, if I would have said something, I would be even lower. Although I guess it doesn’t make any difference now because I’m still really low on the social list, I don’t know, whatever, I mean I’m not really high up there like the whole group of friends. A lot of times I am here by myself. . . And plus, if I did say something, generally people don’t listen to what I say.

Yuki’s comments remind us that speaking out is not linear, or merely an act of an empowered person or agent. Different positionalities within any given context offer differing opportunities and risks. Not only did Yuki think that people would be unwilling to hear him, but that his already diminished social status would only sink “lower.” Since Yuki did not have a strong relationship to a friendship group and often felt “on his own,” any increased isolation would likely have had a negative impact. His is a silencing imposed by myriad social norms, norms to which the public queer body, his body, does not comply. The discourses of subjection in his case produce not only overt forms of homophobia and oppression, but also a discrete and potentially crushing silence. The choice then, for the sexual minority student is to acknowledge one’s identity publicly and face the Othering that is inherent to any marginalized identification, or consign oneself, one’s identity, to a private, albeit painfully public, silence.

For the standpoint of educational reform and student-initiated change, at the end of the day, there is little room in institutional and administrative conversations to address issues of heteronormativism. Perhaps the reticence of educators to attend

to matters of sexual diversity, and acknowledge the needs of sexual minority students, faculty and families is due, in part, to a lack of knowledge and training.\textsuperscript{136} This is not to argue that there are not individual educators, programs or schools pursuing such work. Similarly it is not the case that school board and Ministry discomfort and parental concern do not impact teachers. However, at some point these issues must be raised and political pressure brought to bear so that the roadblocks to substantive change, and the inevitable backlash generated, can begin to be diffused. Change needs to occur across teacher education programs, professional development days, school board retreats and parent teacher interactions; I am arguing that the classroom is but one starting point in this process. Certainly their silence is indicative of the endemic sway of heteronormative culture in the classroom.

\textit{Belonging, Naming, Citizenship and Queer Youth}

As noted previously in this chapter and in Chapter 3, all students need a place to create belonging, spaces both physical and emotional where they and others can be acknowledged and self-identify without fear. For sexual minority students, the need to have their rights and differences supported and acknowledged in an often hostile and unwelcoming school environment holds particular meaning. For the unnamed and misnamed, it is “a situation in which persons do not have control over

their actions, the conditions of their actions, or the consequences of their actions due
to the intervention of other agents."  

Embedded in dialogues of belonging, citizenship and naming rise to the surface as seemingly irreconcilable necessities, each a vital component in the pursuit of social justice.

Much is captured and assumed in a name. Naming takes many forms including names we choose, and those that are "given" to us. The differences between various forms of naming are crucial to both individuals and collectives, and impact is felt most particularly for both at the level of public social and political viability and visibility. Language constructs the politics of the everyday and the language of citizenship is markedly limited in its ability to deal with that which falls outside the boundaries established by normative citizenry. Individuals and their imagined communities are produced through regimes of power, and are consistently reified by mechanisms of the state. Citizenship is one of these key mechanisms, and naming its driving force. Linda Alcoff explains it thusly:

In speaking for myself, I (momentarily) create my self just as much as when I speak for others I create their selves – in the sense that I create a public, discursive self, which will in most cases have an effect on the self experienced as interiority. Even if someone never hears the discursive self I present of them they may be affected by the decisions others make after hearing it. The point is that a kind of representation occurs in all cases of speaking for, whether I am speaking for myself or for others...  

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For those who are not named (citizen) the alternative designation invariably results in a category of otherness.  

Dialogues of tolerance, situated within the rhetoric of a homogenizing ideology, effectively maintain the political righteousness of the greater public imaginary. The result is a dominant public that conceives of itself as upholding the obligations of a wider citizenry without compromising the "imagined norms" of the variously named individuals at its core.  

Within the context of teaching for social justice, this hegemonic persistence can be evidenced in some multicultural education discourses; especially those that rely upon add and stir pedagogies and curriculums. The problem inherent to the logic of the public imaginary is its inability to control completely that which it designates or names as other. It is here, in the body of the "uncontrollable," that the potential to refuse and rupture dominant normatives lies.

In an attempt to navigate the impermeable barriers of this normative positioning, much of the existing scholarship on citizenship merges discourses of marginally identified subjects and citizenship into a singularly unified discourse, or what I refer to as "citizen-Others." Such arguments are useful, insofar as they maintain the primacy of citizenship while acknowledging the specificity of

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139 While there is much to be said about this issue in relation to First Nations politics in Canada, and to aboriginal politics more broadly, the relative specificity of the argument is beyond the scope of this chapter. That being said, I feel it is important to acknowledge the express character of aboriginal peoples as it pertains to the discourse of citizenship outlined in this chapter.

140 The concept of the "imagined citizen" is borrowed from Berlant, *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City: Essays on Sex and Citizenship*.

differentiated identities and relationships within dominant discourse (e.g. race, class, sexuality, ability, etcetera). However, these categorizations of "strategic essentialism" are only strategic in their conception.\footnote{See, Ernesto LaClau, "Subject of Politics, Politics of the Subject," \textit{Differences} 7, no. 1 (1995).} Subdividing discourses of citizenship (i.e. naming them, as "other than" is a divisive mechanism that reifies the normative through what Butler refers to as "speech acts" or a discursive "politics of the performative."\footnote{See, Butler, \textit{Excitable Speech}.} The "performative utterance" of their otherness, within languages both spoken and silent, produces marginalized bodies as political liabilities, a status that in turn reifies their Otherness "as an instrument of violent rhetoricity, the body of the speaker exceeds the words that are spoken, exposing the addressed body as no longer (and not ever fully) in its own control."\footnote{Ibid.} In the construction of citizenship, a body is politically named, either as citizen or Other. Now situated within privilege, or marginalized within the public sphere of citizenship as queer, multi-cultural, sexual, and so on, individuals struggle to maintain their sense of belonging. These citizen-Others embody the potential to rupture the normativism politics of the state. Differentiated as gay, lesbian, queer, or otherwise, not citizens "proper," these transgressive bodies, "citizen-Others" shatter the illusions of normative politics and all that it seeks to maintain in its illusory fold.

\textit{Citizen-Others}

Within citizenship discourses, the who, of who is excluded, has patterns based upon difference, Othering, and the power that political and social visibility brings. Thus, it is not a matter of simply stating that all power dynamics are the
same, nor asserting that they are all different. Rather, significance lay in the multiple understandings of citizenship, in the messy gray spaces in-between what is ultimately clear or hopelessly cloudy. Part of the argument upon which this research is based is that power relations are not linear, and rarely are players ultimately powerful or powerless. This makes classroom dynamics, public citizenship, and issues of exclusion and inclusion abstract, complicated and subject to fluid understandings of socio-economic, spatial, textual, and bodily context(s).

Unfortunately, what queer, of colour, dis/abled, and other students marginalized within the dominant framework, encounter each day is a linear expression of power. For queer students, I am speaking of homophobic slurs, and of youth who must endure harassment in the hallways on a day-to-day basis, where their very being becomes a performance of an otherness they do not choose. As Gayatri Spivak asserts: “one of the most tedious acts of racism as the science of the everyday is the need to refer every contemporary act of life or mind performed by the cultural other to [their] cultural origin.”¹⁴⁵ The participants in the study spoke of hearing “fag” and “faggot” in hallways, classrooms and in the lunchroom. Not surprisingly, the most often heard statement was “that’s so gay.” Billy underplayed the impact and usage of such language:

> Usually those words are used for things. They are not really used toward homosexuals anymore. Fag, gay, queer. Even the term “it’s so gay” it has nothing to do with homosexuality anymore. You know, they just happen to use those terms for other things. “It’s so stupid; I don’t like it; it sucks.”

However, he was acutely aware of how harmful these words were, and expressed a profoundly broader fear:

just watching things on TV, the news or just hearing things, people like myself, I've gone through a stage, and the next person I tell could bash me, hurt me or even take away my life because it is supposedly wrong... I have heard of individuals being so afraid. That's why people go into denial, or suicide, or whatever. That pain or that scaredness inside of them. Because it does rip people inside to have that. And, I don't know, I just want people to know that just little things like "it's so gay," or little words that they say could affect one person a lot, and it is very emotional.

For Billy, the culture of fear seemed to play out in relation to a heightened sense of the possibility of physical violence, which he linked to acts of verbal violence. This type of violence fosters a desire for invisibility. In order to avoid the abuse and marginalization, one withdraws into silence in both hallways and classrooms to avoid notice. At the same time, invisibility and feelings of otherness are cultivated when sexual minority students see nothing of themselves in the official curriculum, and only thin, reifying content in the hidden curriculums. The "who" of who s/he is, is excluded and/or rejected and continues to be, even if on occasion a teacher throws in a comment about a prominent public figure being gay. Similarly, marginalization persists when there are one-off lessons "added" to existing curriculum to include "gay and lesbian" content, without fundamentally altering the pedagogical approach. It is important to note that these add-and-stir pedagogies or curricular silences negatively impact both heterosexual and queer students. As Brown and Kelly argue, representation and curricular "absence/presence...become a qualifying element in
the vernacular of students." Within the classroom, silence, especially silence pertaining to difference, is as effective as stereotypes and pejorative narratives in its ability to generate categories of Otherness. Accordingly, it is through the absence/presence phenomenon that homophobic slurs such as "that's so gay" make their way into the public psyche and find expression in the everyday. As Billy aptly noted, the term "fag" had become a general insult:

Short, tall, any little thing like that use the term fag to replace it instead I feel that people use those words to replace the longer words that they don't want to say. SO it's a really quick little thing they would say for fun. I don't think that it is usually meant to hurt or even say anything homophobic. But it's not always right to say that anyway.

The lack of social standing central to this curricular Othering is itself part-and-parcel of a diminishing of citizenship and, consequently, one's fundamental rights. I would argue that we can take from Billy's tangential acceptance, and earlier, from Yuki's perceived powerlessness, it is when one has no socio-political standing, or when one's perception of self is diminished, that one begins to embody an existence as "Other." As Other, a sub-categorized citizen, the queer body's socio-political erasure is solidified through the pejorative onslaught of a "that's so gay" vernacular.

Defining Social Justice

Returning, again, to social justice within the educational environment, there seems to be a commonsense relationship between the interests in teaching for diversity, and the production of "good citizens." Accompanying this is a conception

of social justice as a useful framework from which to provoke curricular change.

While acknowledging that both teaching for diversity and social justice are terms that have been appropriated by those who’s goals are cultural pluralism, in this case my reference to diversity denotes a variety of social reconstructionist goals.

Social justice is not a term easily defined. In many respects, it is a discourse that is pedagogically bandied about without ever fully being defined. Many scholars and educators assume a commonsensical understanding of the meaning or meanings of social justice, but spend little time discussing its complex and potentially conflicting definitions. Analyses of these common-sense meanings are important because similar to terms such as multicultural education, they have come to stand for so much and so little, and are often divorced from important contextual relevancies. Perhaps even more problematic, these under-explored definitions can then become an “easy out” for educators and policymakers to claim that anything and everything they do in the name of equity or equality is social justice education. The problem stems, in part, from educators utilizing pedagogies of the “can’t we all just get along” or “foods and festivals” variety, upon which many definitions of social justice education rely, failing to incorporate constructivist orientations. Given an adequate critical analysis, social justice pedagogies afford educators an opportunity for systemic change. Change, to my mind, is part of what defines social justice; therefore assimilationist moves such as a focus on similarity (e.g., foods and
festivals) undermine valuable social justice goals within education and maintain the status quo (e.g. dialogues of tolerance).\footnote{One example of this problematic tendency is Sharon L. Nichols, "Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Youth: Understanding Diversity and Promoting Tolerance in Schools," \textit{The Elementary School Journal} 99, no. 5 (1999).}

Many authors speak to the generalities of what teaching for social change or social justice entails;\footnote{See, Shariene Razack, "Storytelling for Social Change," in \textit{Returning the Gaze: Essays on Racism, Feminism, and Polics}, ed. Himani Bannerji (Toronto: Sister Vision Press, 1993).} while others such as Iris Marion Young and Nancy Fraser carefully define justice.\footnote{See, Fraser, \textit{Justice Interruptus: Critical Reflections on the "Postcolonial" Condition}, Iris Marion Young, \textit{Justice and the Politics of Difference} (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990).} But, few clearly delineate what social justice means within a combined educational social movement context. This is not to argue that there should be a set definition of social justice. And yet, if there is no clear understanding of what social justice is, how can educators make a case for "social justice issues?" What, for instance, makes any given topic a social justice issue? When is an issue of racism, homophobia, or some other distinct form of exploitation a question of social justice? An argument can be, and often is made, that these and similarly "public" issues are part-and-parcel of a larger social justice dialogue, but this, in itself, does not answer the question of why any issue would be specifically identified as such. For the most part, then, without the benefit of further explanation, social justice appears to be a political catchall used largely to address issues of inequity. It may also be the case that as a term of reference, "social justice" is much more comfortable than specifically named acts of injustice and "isms" of oppression. Terms such as \textit{racism} and \textit{sexism}, for example, imply a sense of complicity and responsibility; moreover, they invoke a discomforting sense of privilege in those for whom the term "Other" necessarily refers to someone else.
In some instances, social justice arguments take on an Enlightenment flavour; there is a singular vision, an absolute, of what social justice is and/or ought to be; a notion that social consciousness is attainable as a singular Truth or knowledge claim. Similarly, there is often a need to equate social justice with Truth, and motivation to construct social and political absolutes. Certainly, a quest for the "true" nature of social justice would explain the exactitude of citizenship language and its inherent categorizations. And, perhaps it would also account for society's collective (and individual) compulsion to name. In failing to have more contextualized and contested understandings of what is meant by "social justice," even those who utilize a social reconstructionist and critical framework are left open to the critiques of a liberal social justice agenda.

**Pedagogical Paradox**

There is an assumption in Canadian classrooms that stems, in part, from Canada's history and its institutionalized multi-cultural agenda. The assumption is one with a paradoxical twist. That is, while many educators and scholars would argue that the race/class/gender triad is pedagogically and ideologically significant, and ought to be prioritized, they also acknowledge that this is often not the case in pedagogical practice. Moreover, these same theorists note the need for curricular accountability and diversity, and, of a contradictory lack of substantive curricular

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change and development. A few explanations for the proliferation of this social justice paradox may include overburdened curriculums, understaffed faculties, and budgetary constraints. Notably, proponents of feminist and anti-racism reforms have encountered similar barriers. Indeed, feminists have long argued that gender is central to pedagogical success and educational reform but that it must be viewed within a larger framework of oppression. As Linda Nicholson notes, sex is not "subsumable under gender," and we "cannot look to the body to ground cross-cultural claims about male/female distinctions." Neither, then, can we look to the body to make ultimate, complete, or unalterable distinctions between straight/heterosexual, gay/queer and/or other.

Certainly many social justice educators and researchers work to create environments in which minority students can achieve and learn despite omnipresent dialogues of otherness. In terms of this particular research project, however, the role of social justice in education is to put forward new ways in order to highlight and work in conjunction with a diversity of students and student needs. This also includes raising current levels of critical awareness in classrooms often steeped in the normativism of dominant—in particular heteronormative—discourse. Lastly, it

152 See, Young, Justice and the Politics of Difference.
involves developing socially and politically relevant pedagogies and curriculums that work to actively engage all students in practices of thinking critically. Social justice pedagogies ask students to consider how they view the world around them, and how they view themselves in relation to that world. I am advocating that educators invite a critique of their own worldview and curricular biases, how might we be complicit in shaping and maintaining the very systems we instruct students to resist?

Within multicultural and anti-homophobic social justice reforms, there is a very specific call to inclusivity. However, the mere inclusion of curricula denoting an “alternative” visibility, popularly expressed as a “gay and lesbian component,” is not enough. Left uncomplicated and uncontextualized, these constructions become ad hoc. Instead of engendering a powerful acknowledgment of the queer body, the Othering, to which it is already subjected, is given special authority by its inclusion in official and hidden curriculums. Rather than fostering a well–transitioned curricular reform, the result is often a cursory treatment of crucial issues firmly bounded within formulaic curriculums. For the sexually marginalized body, this usually means being subjected to essentializing discourses of “tolerance.” As discussed in the previous chapter, current pedagogical attempts to address the needs of sexual minority students are often constructed under the rubric of “anti-bullying.” While important, this singular response, counters only one aspect of harassment or bullying of gay and lesbian students. Rather than interrogate the politics and space of heteronormativity in the classroom, a discomforting pedagogical undertaking, we ask only that students and teachers grapple with who they are in relation to visible

\[156\] An important distinction is to be made regarding the specificity and exclusivity surrounding the limitations of gay and lesbian as discrete categories into which all non-normative sexualities must fall.
constructions of Otherness. As a result, social justice education remains stuck in an Us/Them dichotomy. Students like Yuki come to see their own positionalities, in relation to, or as, Other. In the heterosexual classroom, the pedagogical paradox is heightened as educators' own dominant positionalities, often played out through personal narrative, go unchallenged. Assumptions of student and teacher identities as heterosexual, examples expressed through heterosexual narrative, and curriculums seeped in gender normativity, are all characteristic of the ways in which non-normative sexualities are "inadvertently" excluded from curricular agendas, and subsequent social justice reforms.

Despite the fact that issues of social justice have come to occupy a central position with some educators and researchers, none of the students in my study discussed work done by GSAs as having a specifically "social justice" orientation. As a term or idea, social justice did not resonate with the students, nor when questioned did they remember it ever being used explicitly as a term within their school or classrooms. Elizabeth spoke about having heard the term, but said, "I don't completely understand it," while Shawna had heard the term at school but still seemed confounded by its meaning, expressing "it's sort of hard to explain though." That students, schools and/or academics do not necessarily use the same discourses to describe what occurs at school, or in the educational context may not be altogether surprising or inherently problematic. However, it is possible that the mismatch of discourses leads to, or demonstrates, a mismatch of pedagogy and curricular strategies.
Political Appendages

Queer, or more pointedly, non-heterosexual, bodies call into question not only the assumed neutrality of heterosexual identity, but also the static alterity of those it renders as Other. Because it is always the Other against which dominant discourses are formed, queer bodies by virtue of their existence as such, have the potential to disrupt the stability of heteronormative political orderings. Alternatively, if one's identity as citizen can be thought of as an interstitial space, relations between persons rather than against, there is room for multiple identities to function without the same relational hierarchy.\textsuperscript{157}

To know one's self as citizen is to know one's own subjectivity as an extension of self and other. By this I mean that self, as a singularly knowable entity, is an impossibility. Identity is always partial and contingent; self is always subject to the juxtaposition and socio-political context of other. Thus, knowing oneself as citizen also implies a finite understanding and a refusal to acknowledge the impossibility of ever fully knowing.\textsuperscript{158} Knowing something (someone), or to claim to know something completely, indicates that there is little invitation for what is not known, and, can never be known. In the context of citizenship, such static understandings always place the other at a political disadvantage. Popular perceptions of the queer body serve as a case in point. Lauren Berlant states it thusly:

\[T\]he queer body .... is a visibly queer flashcard in an ongoing project of cultural pedagogy aimed at exposing the range and

\textsuperscript{\textsuperscript{157}}Interstitial space\textsuperscript{ is a concept I borrow, in part, from Butler. See, Butler, Excitable Speech.  
\textsuperscript{158}See, Shoshana Felman, "Education and Crisis, or the Vicissitudes of Teaching," in Trauma: Explorations in Memory, ed. Cathy Caruth (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1995).\]
variety of bounded spaces upon which heterosexual supremacy depends .... (it) becomes the locus where mainstream culture's discipline of gay citizens is written.\textsuperscript{159}

The queer or sexually marked body is both discursively and corporeally messy and its subversive potential threatens to upset the apple cart of heterosexual stability. Consequently, the queer body's political access is highly regulated.

Within the discourse of rights, in particular, there are various hierarchies of citizenship. As Wendy Brown states, "insofar as rights operate to distance and demarcate, they are a means of socially organizing us by separating us, using the fiction of our autonomy and independence to produce a social order reflecting it."\textsuperscript{160}

In relation to the queer body, heteronormative constructions of citizenship shape the public social and political imaginary in many taken-for-granted ways. Accordingly, there are those for whom citizenship remains an always-incomplete process and, those whom regulatory regimes favor, and for whom acknowledged political membership is of little consequence to their overall public viability. I offer sexual minority youth as one example of the former.

GLBTQI youth are excluded from citizenship on multiple levels. It is often the case that for sexual minority students, the citizen moniker is an adjunct-categorization of their minoritized status. These adjunct categorizations produce bodies that are excluded from citizenship, by their very definition, and are unable and/or unwilling to avail themselves of political and public membership. Membership, in this context of citizenship, is either unavailable, or it requires such compromise of self and subjection that it is undesirable. Take, for example, the political subtext

\textsuperscript{159} Berlant, \textit{The Queen of America Goes to Washington City: Essays on Sex and Citizenship}, 61.
\textsuperscript{160} Brown, \textit{States of Injury}, 158.
embedded in “gay and lesbian rights” in the context of public schooling. The cordonning-off of “gay and lesbian” rights as somehow exceptional, but also as ultimately assimilationist or desiring to be like the majority, is problematic. That is, focusing on issues such as the right to bring a same-sex partner to the prom as the main avenue by which to attain full rights, serves to further depoliticize the queer body while silently reinscribing discourses of heteronormativity. The desire to be “equal to” in terms of ones sexual and personal relationships has the effect of subverting the focus on institutional, national, and ideological divisions rooted in heteronormativity.

I return, now Gay Straight Alliances and the issue of naming. Although untrue of the GSAs at Gray and Park, (the latter significantly named Park Pride –clearly marking it as queer affiliated), many schools in the Lower Mainland do not call the groups Gay Straight Alliances.\textsuperscript{161} The preoccupation over naming, and the resistance to name groups in way that overtly signifies their GLBTQI affiliation, is driven by a fear that school boards and/or administrators will not approve them, or that parents may object to their child’s membership. As a result, GSAs often become “The Diversity Council”, or “The Multicultural Club.” This seemingly small compromise is an affirmation of the silencing prevalent in classrooms and curriculums, and acts to reinscribe the over-determined and discreet categorizations of heteronormative and \textit{Other}.

\textsuperscript{161} At a Gale BC GSA Conference I attended in October 2003 several student and faculty leaders from Lower mainland GSAs spoke of the difficulties naming their groups posed in terms of “outing” its members. In one workshop I attended the facilitator (a guest speaker from San Francisco) advocated choosing a name for the group that would obscure its identity as GLBTQI orientation (e.g., the chess club).
Anatomy of a Classroom: Dissecting the Body’s Politics

[t]o address a public or to think of oneself as belonging to a public is to be a certain kind of person, to inhabit a certain kind of social world, to have at one’s disposal certain media and genres, to be motivated by a certain normative horizon, and to speak within a certain language ideology.¹⁵²

Schools are public spaces, and like many public spaces, they are complex and politically fraught. Unlike other public space, there are no clear lines of delineation between public and private for those who inhabit its curricular space. Yet, there are several imaginary divisions of public and private used to regulate or police what is or is not taught in the school’s classroom. Here, the intersectionalities of race, class, ethnicity, dis/ability, gender, and sexuality intersect, are played out and challenged, as bodies are regulated into the school’s political fold. This is not a relativistic appraisal, but an acknowledgement that the intersectionalities of public life affect and construct the political makeup of classroom space.

Political, in this context, is metacultural, informing the normative and homogeneous composition of both classroom pedagogy and practice.¹⁶³ Equally, the political occupies and defines the space where “power presents itself and prescribes what we conceive of it.”¹⁶⁴ Politically and theoretically, the classroom can be thought of as a space where public and private subjectivities meet. Here, public and private occupy significant and seemingly conflictual interests. As private

¹⁵² Warner, Publics and Counterpublics, 10. For an alternative but equally relevant elucidation of public sphere discourse see: Fraser, Justice Interruptus: Critical Reflections on the "Postcolonial" Condition.

¹⁵³ Metacultural is a term I borrow from literary criticism, referring to the broader over-arching and self-defining nature of normative politics.

¹⁶⁴ Foucault, The History of Sexuality. While Foucault refers to the political “analytics” of power in relation to desire, it is an argument that resonates and is viable in this particular context.
identities emerge, and individual bodies subsequently come to be understood and articulated, they collide with the boundaried public arena of the classroom.

Within the classroom framework, how differing publics relate to various issues changes in accordance with the contextual flux of the social, political, and pedagogical moment. Accordingly, at any given time there are various and competing public interests in play, multiple bodies within one ideologic skin. For the marginalized student, schools -classrooms in particular- become spaces where the private is both exposed and obscured, where one's identity is open to public scrutiny.

The queer body poses a particular challenge in this public arena. For the self-identified queer youth, the subjective body is already hidden, hyper-sexualized, and necessarily private. By contrast, for the heterosexual student heteronormativism, like whiteness, is rarely discussed or dissected as a politics or identified as a site of oppression. Perhaps because, as Berlant notes:

&S]exual knowledge derives from private experiences on the body and yet operates as a register for systemic relations of power; sexual knowledge stands for a kind of political counterintelligence, a challenge to the norms of credibility, rationality, and expertise that generally organize political culture.

The lack of discussion, or silence, works to reinforce the political status quo within classroom settings. As an identity category within the dominant framework heterosexuality is assumed to be value-neutral and politically innocuous.

165 The notion of competing publics comes from Nancy Fraser. See, Fraser, Justice Interruptus: Critical Reflections on the "Postcolonial" Condition.
166 See: Dei, Anti-Racism Education: Theory and Practice, Sumara and Davis, "Interrupting Heteronormativity: Toward a Queer Curriculum Theory."
167 Berlant, The Queen of America Goes to Washington City: Essays on Sex and Citizenship, 245.
Discursively, it is an unstated point of departure, shaping language (his/her, Mr., Mrs., Ms.) underlining the otherness of Other(s) and maintaining its normative hierarchies. Heterosexuality is the canonical text of normative socio-political ideology; it is the nucleus of dominant culture and the touchstone of individual socio-political identity.\textsuperscript{168}

Heterosexual positionality, then, is not seen as something that needs to be challenged and/or complicated; it simply is. Again, take for example the "average" Canadian K-12 classroom, everyday heterosexual privilege goes unchallenged in standard textbooks, lesson plans, story-times. Heterosexuality as "the norm" is pedagogically reified in the observed "reality" of daily experience. Seemingly unobjectionable stories of heterosexual life routinely emerge, unrecognized as privileged, and ideologically dominant, discourses.\textsuperscript{169} In sum, heterosexual privilege and the ongoing heteronormitization of educational practice is an invisible and culturally pervasive form of oppression. This particular hegemonic construction not only affects queer students and teachers, but all of those who occupy the space of the classroom and whose lives are circuitously affected by the identities forged therein. It is important to clearly state that the ubiquity of heteronormative discourses affects queer students and teachers by positioning them as unworthy of naming, and simultaneously named as the Other through which the dominant gains its privilege. That is, Othering strips queer teachers and students of a place of belonging within classrooms and school spaces.

\textsuperscript{168} Sedgwick, \textit{Epistemology of the Closet}.
\textsuperscript{169} Lee, "The Impact of Belonging to a High School Gay/Straight Alliance.", Quinlivan, "Queer Pedagogy, Educational Practice and Lesbian and Gay Youth.", Sedgwick, \textit{Epistemology of the Closet}. 

The project need not, indeed ought not, be one of revealing the queer body, but rather, revealing the violence enacted on and through its surface. It is not as simple as acknowledging and including the queer body. It is a desire to produce a complicated rendering of how citizenship is denied vis-à-vis the queer body and what it represents. In the classroom, this violence takes many forms, including both the silencing of the queer body, and a sanctioned curricular silence. This is not to say that a silent body is necessarily traumatized or corresponds to a lack of agency. It does mean that in order for a queer or otherwise sexually marginalized student to develop a fluid public/private identity and viable subjectivity, an accessible political space must exist in which to do so. While issues of sexuality and other sites of oppression are intertwined and intersect, it is important to note that they are not the same. For example, the ways in which racialized exclusion acts upon the student body has places of intersection with the sexualized body. However, the historical, political and social contexts are not the same and therefore, cannot be made equal. In fact, the discussion of how race and sexuality function similarly or differently often leads to a molding of the conversation as one citing the hierarchies of oppression.\footnote{See for example, George Dei, \textit{Playing the Race Card: Exposing White Power and Privilege} (New York: Peter Lang, 2004).} Suffice to say that for the purposes of this work, I believe that inferences can be gleaned from the histories of racialized, gendered or dis/abled bodies, and while the intersectionality ought to be attended to, direct comparisons are less likely to aid in the drawing of complicated understandings.
Pedagogical Tools

Citizenship and Social Justice are, or can be, valuable pedagogical tools and naming is the thread, which, I argue, binds the two together in the public space of the classroom. Naming, in this context is not simply synonymous with "labeling," particularly naming associated with ideological dominance. Judith Butler notes that:

One is not simply fixed by the name that one is called. In being called an injurious name, one is derogated and demeaned. But the name holds out another possibility as well: by being called a name, one is also, paradoxically, given a certain possibility for social existence, initiated into a temporal life of language that exceeds the prior purposes that animate that call.  

Thus, while naming as a normative mechanism causes injury, it also holds possibilities and opens up opportunities for reclaiming. In the reclaiming of a name (e.g., queer) the language and materiality of the subject have the possibility of being inverted in ways that disrupt its (hetero)normative meaning. Reclamation is not, however, easily achieved because language itself is deeply embedded in normative discourse, and an attempt to reclaim can easily slide into a reification of dominant meanings.

To control the norms that govern speakability and the hegemony of naming is to consummate one's status as a citizen/subject of speech.  The very act of speaking, naming, and/or censoring, form public understandings of who can/not be worthy of consideration as citizen. Butler argues:

the question is not whether certain kinds of speech uttered by a subject are censored, but how a certain operation of censorship determines who will be a subject depending on whether the

171 Butler, Excitable Speech, 2.
172 Ibid.
speech of such a candidate for subjecthood obeys certain norms governing what is speakable and what is not.\textsuperscript{173}

Thus, to move outside the domain of “speakability” or the possibility of naming is to risk one’s status as a subject and a citizen. If one’s naming is both injurious and unspeakable, then one’s potential as citizen is constrained. Yet, even in constraint there is a possibility of partial agency. This is the marginalized subject that despite silence and invisibility seeks to disrupt.

\textbf{Listen and Learn}

As insights gained from the students I spoke with would indicate, it is imperative that educators begin to acknowledge both the school as part of a larger social system, and the systemic nature of the heterocentric ideology in which it is embedded. In doing so, schools could take the lead on curricular and social reform, instead of merely reproducing the social and political disjuncture that occurs in other social settings. Roxana Ng suggests that:

We need to develop a critical awareness of the power dynamics operative in institutional relations—and of the fact that people participate in institutions as unequal subjects. Working against the grain is to take a proactive approach to understanding and acting upon institutional relations, whether in the classroom [or] in other interactions with students.\textsuperscript{174}

As an activist and educator focused on anti-oppressive and counter-heteronormative curricular and pedagogical reforms, Kevin Kumashiro recounts challenges he faces raising issues such as those discussed above with pre-service teachers. Kumashiro states that while the pre-service teachers with whom he worked embraced the ideals

\textsuperscript{173} Ibid., 3.
\textsuperscript{174} Ng, "Toward an Integrative Approach to Equity in Education," 214.
of an anti-oppressive teaching model, they were also resolute in their desire for "a sense of normalcy and for affirmation of their belief that they do not oppress others." "Normalcy here can be understood as a curriculum that does not challenge the normative cultural and individual comfort zones. Kumashiro found his students unwilling to address "the silence surrounding heterosexism/homophobia." I am suggesting that the invisible politics of sexuality takes a particular form of oppression and silencing in the classroom, challenging students and educators to rethink foundational understandings and normative assumptions of self and Other.

It must be made clear that the notion of altering heteronormative curriculums, pedagogies, and practices, to queer the sexually marginalized body is not a call for student empowerment, per se. A number of scholars fruitfully explore notions of "empowerment" and "voice" within calls for libratory curricular reforms. Although empowerment, according to Jennifer Gore, "has no particular meaning prior to its construction within specific meanings." Likewise, Ellsworth critiques empowerment enacted in classrooms as "the capacity to act effectively." Ellsworth also notes that the project of empowerment is to "give power" or "give voice," to

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175 Kumashiro, Troubling Education: Queer Activism and Antioppressive Pedagogy, 6.
176 ibid.
178 Gore, "What We Can Do for You! What Can "We" Do for "You"? Struggling over Empowerment in Critical and Feminist Pedagogy."
179 Ellsworth, "Why Doesn't This Feel Empowering" Working through the Repressive Myths of Critical Pedagogy," 307. emphasis mine.
students, a pedagogy reliant on notions that instructor power can be lessened through reflection and choice.\textsuperscript{180} Often, traditional conceptions of empowerment also rely on liberal notions of a rational, finalized subject who has ultimate agency and consciousness, all proffered by a knowing teacher agent. Thus, in order for a student to be empowered, it is believed that they must be \textit{given} the critical thinking skills to come to rational, well-argued conclusions, which often mirror those of the educator. Not only does this rely on an Us/Them binary, but it has "normalizing tendencies, or dangers."\textsuperscript{181}

This model of a linear consciousness and attainment of knowledge presupposes an enlightened student as its end point. It is finite and uni-directional pedagogy, treating power as object, rather than a politically contextualized process.\textsuperscript{182} In this model, consciousness is often viewed as linear, and teachers are on a path to take students from what they view as an intellectual form of emptiness to critical consciousness. Educators come to view themselves as the catalyst by which change and agency are to be discovered. This "empty vessel" pedagogy produces a closing down, instead of an invitation for different types of student-initiated agency. And yet, merely exposing dominant ideologies and the need for curricular reform seems too narrow for what should be an on-going process that students and educators can engage together.

Interest in, and concerns about, individual versus collective responsibility and citizenship are echoed in the discussions youth who participated in the study had

\textsuperscript{180} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{181} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{182} Gore, "What We Can Do for You! What Can "We" Do for "You"? Struggling over Empowerment in Critical and Feminist Pedagogy," 56.
about student action and activism, both inside the classroom, and in the larger school community. Although the students I spoke with did not draw a direct link between citizenship and their respective GSAs, they did connect political action and activism to their work within the GSAs. Yet, it is interesting that students had not necessarily thought of themselves as politically active. For example, Billy said he

never thought about it like that. If there is a chance for me to help out something that is like a worthy cause, I totally help out. But I never really consider myself or think of myself that way. I just help out.

It is striking, that to his mind, there must be a delineation between thinking of one’s self as politically active, which likely means having motives or an agenda, and the personal of “I just help out.” In some ways, this is similar to Betty’s earlier comment about “nice people” leading to a “nice” country. Lapis had yet a different understanding of what it meant to be politically active. She defined it as:

someone who knows about politics and governments running in Canada, and then active in, either a politician themselves or doing something toward politicians. But then when I think about it could be anyone who is active in the running of things, like you could help out in school or politics, like the community center or something.

Embedded in their comments is a tension between reluctance to being seen as political or having an agenda, and the very real political work of which they were quite proud. This incongruity is part of what makes clear the conundrum of the stable, “enlightened” student.

For several of the students I spoke with, activism was analogous to movement:

you don’t stand there or sit there and complain. When you actually do something about it. Anyone can be an activist, as long as they are
being active (laughter) in the order, in the running order. Also, just actively doing something instead of doing it passively.

When asked if the students were activists, Lapis reminded us that activism is not an all or nothing moniker. Speaking of her level of engagement, she stated that she was "not always an activist. But I am sometimes." Lapis offered a hypothetical situation to explain what it means to not be an activist or to respond passively:

say if there in class at school and the teacher always, um okay this is a random example, but the teacher always picks on this one student. And the passive person would go off with friends and say "it's really annoying this one person always gets picked on." But they won't do much more than that.

An activist does not stand idling by but "would go to the teacher or go to someone or think of something to DO to change the situation."

For Betty, there is a direct correlation between responsibility, changing the world, political action and her work with GSAs. She states that:

I think that being involved in the GSA would count as changing or being active in changing the order of things. Whether it be society or something like a law. Or even, like going on protests, like an anti-war protest or something.

Betty felt that activism was best expressed as having "an opinion and have different ideas, then it is a voicing of opinion... you can have different levels of participation and different levels of activism." She argued that:

To be active, I don't just not do anything. I try and do something about it. So like, I don't like to hear these comments so I joined the GSA, I try and do something about it. Or, you know, I don't like the fact that people die because they're like, hey let's have peace, or like in some sort of science club so they're put in jail, like hmm, that makes sense to me. My parents have always taught me that you can't sit there and do these things to people or let people do these things to you, or let them go on anyways, because what kind of person would you be then, you're helping those people right by not
saying anything. And I guess that’s an activist to me, someone who
does something about it or tries to.

In most of the students’ descriptions of activism there was a commitment to “change”
or “changing the world,” which included their school community. In this manner,
Shawna considered herself to be an activist “to an extent I think everyone can be if
they are trying to strive for a change in their society.”

Yet, much of the ways they spoke of change, outside Elizabeth’s mention of
protests, was more individual. She noted that part of the motivation for her action
was that:

I really don’t like to see other people upset and I hear like comments
in the classroom and stuff and I just go, “you know that hurts
someone I don’t want to hear that.” And if I can fix that, then I just
feel like wow, I’ve actually done something today and I’ve made a
difference. I didn’t just sit home eating ice cream or something.
Which I can’t do anyways, but...

Student understandings concerning what it means to be socially responsible,
political active or an activist were imbued with notions of doing the right thing. Their
conception of social justice involved treating others well for the good of the whole
community, a sort of “doing unto others approach” to social change. Whatever
their definition, there must be space for youth to be “active in the running of things,”
and, thereby, effect change.

To connect liberal notions regarding social change to the individual sense-
makings of students in relation to GLBTQI issues is contradictory, despite the fact
that their actions are both individual and collective. Instead, as educators, we must
ask ourselves what it means that student actions contradict their own
understandings of what it is that they do. What might it mean that the language available to them leaves them rooted in Liberal notions that individual change leads to greater structural and institutional change? And lastly, what might this mean for the ways in which educators talk about, and enact, ideas of social change, citizenship, and activism in our classrooms, curriculums, and school hallways? These questions are unanswerable in this brief study, but they pose a potentially interesting dialogue for future study.

_I See the Future and It Looks Queer_

A queered classroom politics is fluid, and attentive to the needs of students, student activism, and their ideas of social change. It invites a reading of both the body and the space of classroom interactions, curriculums, and pedagogies as ever changing. This is not to argue against individual student agency; however, agency is not linear, nor is it something that is bestowed from the teacher/instructor to the student body. There simply are no singularly epiphanal pedagogical moments through which to filter systemic change. Agency exists within the political space of the classroom in a recursive manner, which is evidenced by resistance both voiced and silent, and through the many gradations of action and inaction.

There is still much to be gained from a fluid curricular analysis of citizenship discourse, social justice pedagogy, and subsequent implications for the queer body. As Shane Phelan argues, within the greater public imaginary many marginalized groups are understood to be, and are subsequently read as, "citizens." However,
such a reading does not imply that all those publicly read as citizen are equal.¹⁸³ Here, we can take a lesson from anti-racist discourse. Like the racialized body, the non-normative queer body must struggle against both silence and assimilation in order to be visible.

I am arguing that a re-reading of the classroom as a civic space, a queered space, is one where citizenship invites different ways of interpreting the queer body, and all bodies, in the classroom. Such an analysis demands an open rendering of both heteronormative and queer subjectivities. Too often a rush to inclusivity results in a reification of heteronormativity. The result is a discourse that, at best is inclusive through the categorical process of naming, but does not address underlying ideological constraints. A reformative classroom politics inclusive of the queer body would not only accord non-normative bodies the same rights and freedoms of heteronormative bodies, but it would make visible the mechanisms of its subjection.

As a vital component of a reconceptualized classroom, queer theories offer multiple ways to re/read the language of inclusivity and dominant political norms. It is a discourse that seeks to address not only issues of homophobia but also to challenge the silence in which the normative foundation of heteronormative discourse is so deeply rooted.

As demonstrated throughout this chapter, the queer body does not occupy a permanent space in, nor does it have pedagogical access to, many classroom discourses. While some attempts to infuse curriculums with diverse notions of sexuality have been made, the recipe is largely an add-and-stir model. Within such a

model, gay and lesbian "issues" are treated as pedagogical isolates, subtexts within larger dialogues, focused on just long enough to substantiate a politics of otherness. I am advocating for a pedagogical model in which the queer body is always visible, even in its partiality.

**Conclusion**

By way of conclusion, I return once more to social justice; from the standpoint of educational reform, it is the lens through which the socio-political elements of individual subjectivities and concepts of citizenship are realized, understood, and subsequently articulated in the public sphere. For student-citizens, this lens invites multiple viewpoints, offering opportunities to see themselves and others in the curriculum. Fluidly realized, social justice allows students to engage silencing and naming in ways that are less Othering. While the binaries and "isms" of dominant discourse may persist, students of social justice education are given the pedagogical tools to critically challenge these discourses. In the classroom, notions of citizenship remain fluid as the intersectionalities of a diverse student demography play out. Ideally, the classroom becomes a public space where students and educators work together through issues of marginality and privilege. In summary, as both my research and the commentary from the student participants of this study indicate, a re-reading of citizenship and social justice provides both educators and students alternative ways to engage with, critically examine, and alter curriculums, even while acknowledging the recursive nature of such reforms.
Prelude

As I often do when I ride the bus, I am surveying the assorted conversations going on around me. To my left, is an older woman speaking quickly to a younger woman, perhaps her daughter. Somewhere in front of me and to the left is a young man on a cell phone, waxing poetic about his latest automobile acquisition and the virtue of older vehicles. Nothing particularly catches my ear until I hear a rather loud, boisterous teenaged voice say: "You are so flat. Do you have to bind?" I thought, 'there must be some drag king girls on the bus.' I quickly glanced around, and I identified what I thought were four queer girls and two gay boys. I continued to listen to the conversation:

"No, but this is the only t-shirt I have that I can 'do' boy."
"You're lucky you're so small. I have to really bind.... takes forever. None of my t-shirts work"

I wanted to turn around but it was impossible to do without being obvious. Unsure who of was speaking, I hear a male voice say: "I'm so glad I don't have to bind anymore."
Another voice asks, "[name] are you done?"
"No, I still have the bottom bit to go. But I'm a boy up top."
Another new voice speaks. "I'm a boy today -- and I'm packing."
"[Name #2] You'd be a great king... Did you fill out that sex survey?"

I had seen the survey they were referring to at Pride. It was a survey on sexuality. I thought about filling it out, but didn't.
"No, it was so gender-oriented."
"I know, I gave up. I couldn't answer half the questions. I hate the way they try to paint you into a gendered corner."
"What? You don't like being just a boy? (General laughter)
A male voice says: "Oh, that's good, and I can be just a girl and we'll get married.
(more laughter)
Much to my dismay the bus was slowing and I could hear the group getting up behind me. It was their stop. I wanted to get off the bus and follow them. My heart was racing; I was gripped by their conversation and overwhelmed with questions. As I sat there absorbing what I had heard, I realized that within my theoretical “bag of tricks” I had no place to put their conversation.
CHAPTER FIVE: RIDING THE BUS, FINDING THE MAILBOX AND OTHER CONCLUDING DISCOVERIES

Throughout this thesis, I have attempted to open doors to inquiry and discussion. I have developed my own understandings of the issues, and invited readers to draw their own. While it is a project seen through my eyes, categorized by my filters, and shaped according to my desires, I continue to ask the reader to interrogate my analyses and assertions, and the student perspectives rendered through these understandings. Nevertheless, I have also come to some conclusions about activism, agency, citizenship, and the youth involved in GSAs, which I briefly outline below.

The students were quite clear in their beliefs that there ought to be a more fluid connection between the schools’ endorsement of a provincially sanctioned social responsibility agenda, and the development and understanding of citizenship and social justice within a curricular context. What’s more, these ideas should work in concert with GSAs, the needs of students, and the functions the GSAs perform. While GSAs serve an important educational purpose, their position within the school is too often proscribed by an administration that remains largely indifferent to the needs of sexual minority students. This is due, in part, to the fact that critical dialogues around citizenship and social justice are divorced from an thorough understanding of GLBTQI issues. At best, citizenship is given tertiary treatments in classrooms and formal assemblies at the beginning of the year, where it is endorsed through social responsibility and individual acts of goodwill. In most cases, there is little or no relationship drawn by the schools between social responsibility and systemic social change.
The students within this study held no small amount of distain for what the school was promoting as social responsibility. They had a clear idea of social justice, even though that was not the term they used, nor was it a formal idea to which they had been introduced. Rather, as was the case with citizenship, the students possessed a fluid and nuanced understanding of what social justice was or could be, and how these ideas could be played out in their own lives. As discussed in Chapter Four, their understandings were almost completely removed from formal definitions offered in school courses and official curricula.

Rather, the youths I spoke with were focused on issues of community and action. Their efforts centred on recognizing injustice and working against inequities. Yet, they seem to proceed as they did in spite of the school, not as part of a larger school development. It was not that they saw themselves as contrary. Indeed, in many ways, almost all of the students expressed a desire to belong at some level. However, their initiatives went beyond what was sanctioned, rewarded, and encouraged by the school. That is, they were not offered pizza days, or offered lunch out with the principal or given ***** Reward, and yet they continued on.

It was not surprising to me that the idea(l)s of citizenship and social justice circulating within educational circles, and evidenced in the formal curricula, did not resonate with the students with whom I spoke. For example, none of the participants saw a clear linkage between the work they were doing in GSAs with the more formal academic discourses of citizenship or social justice. Their thoughts around these terms were formulated on the generic definitions offered up in school curriculums and textbooks, definitions that did not incorporate their ideas or understandings. While the
formal definitions were not familiar to the youth, a pattern of social-political displacement began to emerge. The students could not relate to the framework of citizenship I had offered them because there was no room within the curricular arena with which they had been associated for their own ideas about citizenship and community to emerge and coalesce.

**Who's Leading Whom**

During the course of the research, I expected youth to be active in the schools around issues of homophobia. However, I was struck by the extent to which the GSAs were almost entirely youth-directed, and the degree to which students were, almost singularly, doing the work of battling homophobia in schools. As noted in Chapter Three, the fact that sexual minority and allied youth are spearheading anti-oppression initiatives at school, and that they are often the only anti-homophobia resource in most schools, is intensely problematic. In many cases, students have taken the lead in educating the faculty and staff in their schools. Thus, the burden of altering and reforming school environments and filling in the gaps left by curricular failings has fallen on the shoulders of the students. From discussions I had with the youth, it seemed that once initiated, the GSAs did not generate widespread interest and support from the teachers at their schools, nor did administrative bodies jump in to take the lead. Rather, with few exceptions, educators, administrators and other governing district bodies have merely followed the students' lead. The persistent lack of active support for GSAs would seem to indicate that schools' view these student-led initiatives as an adequate and self-contained solution for homophobia in the schools. I am arguing that teachers and administrators need to engage in activities alongside and independent of the work
of GSAs and begin to acknowledge the underlying problems of heterosexism and its normalizing tendencies. Schools, in general, need to develop a proactive approach to homophobia, rather than the reactive programs we so often see now. A teacher- and administrator-led movement that had as its goal a revisioning of school culture in substantive ways (including teacher, student, staff and administrator buy-in and capacity building) would be one such possibility. Another would be offering the encouragement, training and time for teachers to re-design curricula from the ground up. However, any substantive reform will require some type of accountability measures so that change will not be viewed as acceptably haphazard.

**Oops, Don’t Trip: Setting the Bar Too Low**

Throughout this work, I have tried to keep what students discussed with me at the forefront of my analysis and theory building. In many ways, schools seem to have underestimated the level of student commitment to social justice and change. The youth I spoke with felt that school had set the bar too low for students. As noted previously, the majority of the youth involved with GSAs recognized the discrepancy between what they felt was vital to altering school climate, how they read their responsibility in relation to this process, and what they believed they were learning in official curriculums. When given the opportunity to explore the issues, these youths were able to articulate how social responsibility ought to extend beyond folding soccer t-shirts or opening doors for teachers. That is, if given the opportunity, students could envision more substantive and systemic social justice reforms, including anti-racism campaigns, ongoing dialogues between different groups, and community projects. The participants in this study had a developed awareness of differing economic needs and
barriers and of the just and unjust treatment of people in society, all of which guided them beyond notions of individualism. The students also voiced a desire for strengthened connections between school and community. What’s more, they seemed to embrace the concept of working on jointly beneficial projects and to raise the idea of community within the school as a central organizing tenant around which change could be fostered. It is with this in mind that I suggest that the implications of listening to what youth say and implementing their suggestions could have considerable impact on wider school reforms.

While I am arguing that listening to youth is vital to this project, I did not return my data or conclusions to the youth themselves. I acknowledge that there may have been a number of advantages in having done so, including offering opportunities for feedback and disagreement, and the potential for the presentation of multiple perspectives within the text. Yet, doing so might have required a less traditional, more data driven, thesis structure in order to represent these multiple and potential conflicting viewpoints most appropriately. My goal was to bridge theories of the political into education; multiple re/presentational forms (e.g. differing fonts or columns) would have made an already complex thesis prohibitively complicated. That having been acknowledged, I was, and remain, cognizant about the practice of reporting back to my participants. During the interviews, none of the youth expressed any interest in reviewing the transcripts or seeing the finished study. However, I told students that if the work were published, I would send them a copy, and I still plan to do so. I believe it is important for them to know the importance of their voice and their potential to be heard. Last, and perhaps most important to me, the practice of member checks can also be an avenue to claim a
type of authenticity and truth in the finished piece that I am resistant to. That is, there is some sense that if I return the data to the students and they tell me that I “got it right,” I can in turn claim to have found the “Truth” in what they said, or in my representations of what they said. I am not arguing that there is no place for reciprocal feedback, but I would suggest that this practice would better serve long-term projects where relationships and trust between interviewer and interviewee has been established.

Curricular Pitfalls

Throughout the interviews, it was clear to me that in addition to the mismatch between understandings of citizenship, the students did not, and could not, relate to the school curriculum. According to the youth, heterosexism and homophobia were rarely discussed in class unless the students involved in GSAs brought it up. The students advocated for these conversations to occur, not only because they felt it would help alter problems of homophobic school culture, but because this type of curricular inclusion, if “sanctioned” by the schools, would offer a space for more meaningful types of activism and social justice reform.

In the course of the interviews, the youths often lacked specificity in discussing their desire for change in the school, outside of changing other students’ language and, to a lesser degree, altering school curricula. However, it was clear that change was important to them. As noted earlier in the thesis, there seemed to be a desire to see their schools as “good” places, and “safe” places. Notably, this articulation of “safe” space was understood as physical safety rather than the absence of verbal abuse or engaging in critical discussions of heterosexism. Yet, the students had much to say about the dangers of pejoratives, and the unchecked usage of terms such as “that’s so
gay." In many ways, this coincides with dominant mainstream understandings of how schools should be, and what is dangerous or important. This is not to argue that students had “false consciousness”; rather, it is an opportunity to point out the complicated, slippery, and often contested terrain that the students traversed. In some ways, in order to be active in a GSA, a student or faculty member must believe that the school is “good”, and not so intransigent that change seems unattainable. This requisite optimism would certainly explain my participants’ articulation of the school, and their fellow students, as merely needing to “understand” the issues for change to occur.

Generally, students felt that their peers should be more active in showing, discussing and finding projects to favorably address their cares and concerns. However, markedly little was said about school faculty in this regard. The youth wanted action, and wanted other students to take action, on social justice issues that were of a concern to them. The absence of a call for educators to become more involved, speaks to the degree to which responsibility for social change within the school had shifted to the students.

**GSAs: More Than Their Fair Share**

The students commented that they felt supported by the schools; however, when pushed the students could not offer substantive examples of how they had been supported. The administrative support was passive, not active. The high schools could tolerate the existence of the GSA, and subsequently, in allowing its formation seemed to wash their hands of the “homophobia” problem. The schools were not doing anything to resist GSAs, but neither were they doing anything to consciously support them. This passive disinterest is, I believe, part of an ongoing problem. Because sexual minority
youth have come to occupy such a marginalized and contested position in the school, the mere fact that the GSAs do not meet with overt forms of resistance is interpreted as, and passes for, support. Students spoke of other schools where the teachers were not supportive of the students, and where youth could not find anyone to sponsor the GSAs. In the case of Gray's GSA, it was enough that a single teacher was involved for the students to argue that the faculty had been supportive. Yet, the sponsor teacher at this particular GSA seldom attended the weekly meetings. To be fair, his lack of involvement seemed to be directly related to a lack of time, than to a lack of interest. The particular faculty member was typically over-extended. However, he was available when the students needed to facilitate their movement and the activities of the GSA in the school. Nevertheless, the fact remained; the impetus for action lay firmly with the students.

Once again, my argument is not that GSAs, in and of themselves, are wholly problematic or flawed. What is problematic is that educators are not questioning why it is necessary for GSAs to form. GSAs develop because students desire change; students recognize the violence of homophobia, the discrimination that they or their peers face on a daily basis in schools. On some level, the youth understand the power of the teacher and the resulting need to educate the faculty and the staff about how best to serve the needs of sexual minority youth. They recognize the necessity of safe space and the importance of community. The students who choose to become most active and involved with GSAs realize that it is, in part, a lack of knowledge that perpetuates the ongoing homophobia in the school system; they are willing to take a public position within the school in order to attempt to change that. The agency and
sense of ownership that GSAs provide the students associated with them is unquestionably beneficial. What I have tried to highlight in this thesis is the lack of response and initiative on the part of the schools. While the education of others is a principal objective for students involved in GSAs, it is also clear that addressing homophobia through knowledge alone is not enough because such an approach fails to address the heteronormativism at its core.

What Is a School to Do?

One approach to altering both curricula and school culture would be for schools to both formally and informally utilize concepts of citizenship in a manner consistent with the conceptualizations offered by the youth in this study. I am arguing that an understanding of citizenship that incorporates individual and collective action, community, belonging, and systemic and personal responsibility would offer productive avenues to engage with heteronormativism, and other normalizing mechanisms within the school environment. Taken as a starting point, such a curriculum would be well suited to contest issues such as homophobia, racism, and class difference the stereotyped polarity of the “good” and “bad” citizen that stem from discourses of Othering.

One way in which citizenship discourses might be utilized to shape the type of school and curricular reform I am advocating would be to focus on fluid discourses of difference, rather than discourses of inclusion. Ironically, within the context of citizenship, discourses of inclusion highlight stereotypes of the “good citizen” or the homogenous citizen, which, in turn, produces a discourse of exclusion. The far-too-simple add-and-stir inclusion of “gay and lesbian” issues to the curricula, with its tip of
the hat to "alternative" visibility is a case in point. Not only is this type of inclusive framing not enough, but its categorizing serves to reinscribe the Otherness of sexual minority youth. In re-reading the students' interviews through the work of Shane Phelan who spoke of sexual minority political positioning in terms of the "sexual citizen," it struck me that these subcategories reified a larger problem. Citizen subcategories or what I have termed, citizen-Others, are a by-product of heteronormativism, not a solution to marginalization. Such categorizations reinstantiate Otherness, rather than offering up a challenge to heteronormativity.

I suggest that a queered classroom politics is fluid, and attentive to the needs of students, student activism, and their ideas of social change. It invites a reading of both the body and the space of classroom interactions, curriculums, and pedagogies as ever changing. This is not to argue against individual student agency; however, agency is not linear, nor is it something that is bestowed from the teacher/instructor to the student body. There simply are no singularly epiphanal pedagogical moments through which to filter systemic change.

While sexuality is ever-present within issues of equality and diversity in the classroom, and while the heteronormativism of pedagogies can easily be made self-evident, educators face various difficulties in bringing these issues to the forefront. The historical separation and relegation of "all-things-sexual" to the private sphere makes it difficult to address issues of sexual diversity and sexual hegemony through public discourses of citizenship, in the public space of the classroom. Even in the exceptional classroom, disrupting normative standards presents educators with markedly similar obstacles.
Even so, schools are accountable to the students for the violence, homophobia, silencing, and for the general discomfort sexual minority youth feel in their classrooms, hallways, and cafeterias. Educators and administrators ought ask themselves why most sexual minority students feel ostracized and excluded from dominant school culture; why they drop-out more often; why they feel unwelcome in after-school programs athletics, and the prom. How might school culture be altered so that sexual minority youth feel “welcome” without assimilating to be “just like” the other kids, or when they perform the difference that many embody as non-heterosexual?

Concerns about heteronormativity and the regulation of sexuality are not just an issue for sexual minority youth. The issue goes beyond educators’ laissez-faire response to heterosexism and homophobia in the classroom. If the school culture is one in which the exclusion of an entire group of people educated within its walls becomes acceptable, Othering becomes the norm. Consequently, it becomes allowable to act out against those found to be different, with or without malice or intent, because the schools perpetuate the very same practices through its curricula. This Othering and acting out is applicable to many groups, not only GLBTQI people. Cultures of intolerance are intersectional and include, race, class, ethnicity, and ability.

What would it mean if educators took a leadership role in fostering greater awareness around issues of homophobia and systemic heterosexism? At the very least, change would be more likely to occur if educators were held accountable for creating a classroom space where sexual minority students are free from blatant forms of discrimination. School administrators might approach this by developing ongoing curriculums and professional development programs that target homophobia and
heterosexism, foster teacher buy-in, and a capacity to address systemic inequities. But perhaps most importantly, as educators, we need to listen to our students, take responsibility for the issues that the youth in GSAs have already clearly identified. We need to stand behind marginalized youth and work with them to facilitate greater social change.

**Back to Basics: Teachers Become Learners**

This exploratory study has laid the groundwork for further study of youth involved with GSAs, and other student organizations whose work involves issues of marginalization. This small study has pointed to directions that additional research might take, and has raised many questions with regard to educational responsibility. To that end, I suggest that teacher education programs provide a good starting place for a broad base of educational and pedagogical reform. What better opportunity to teach more effective ways to talk about citizenship, sexuality and social justice to those entering the profession? What better platform to address and perhaps begin to undo the problems of homophobic violence endemic to our society? Yet, the majority of teacher education programs mirror the schools in relation to what is included and excluded from the curricula. Too often, discussions of community, social change, and the problems facing sexual minority youth are ignored or relegated to a single day. Even when a single day is presented it is rarely in methods courses where student teachers can grapple with the how to teach. Like the youth in GSAs, those who spearhead even the most elementary of conversations are graduate students and professors who identify as sexual minorities or others committed to working with those issues. As accounts from the students I spoke with would indicate, too often the impetus for
change does not emanate from those in positions of authority. Similarly, just as GSA activities do not garner a level of active support within the school appropriate to student needs, thus far, teacher education has not taken up issues of homophobia and heteronormativity with any consistency. Heteronormative assumptions are made on a daily basis and are part of the teacher education classroom, while the dominance of these assumptions is too often not recognized as part of the conversation. While small pockets of resistance from educators and administrators in schools and within teacher education programs require acknowledgment, the heteronormative climate of the educational system writ large remains problematic and underanalyzed.

Just as with K-12 classrooms, change in curricula at the teacher education level must begin at the point of curricular and pedagogical design. The incorporation of the needs and concerns of sexual minority youth must be infused throughout the teacher education program, not Balkanized into a single course. For wholesale changes to occur there must first be an assumption, and an acknowledgement, that the issues belong on the table. Teacher education students, like other students, often need to be taught how to lend a critical eye to controversial issues, and instructed in how to conduct a conversation where heated and difficult exchanges may occur. By extending reforms to the teacher education classroom we begin to relocate and redistribute educational and curricular responsibilities into multiple levels, addressing in-service teachers, early career teachers, as well as students.

Get on the Bus....

As a researcher who is immersed in the fields of sexuality and education, I feel overwhelmed with my own inability to keep pace with the resilient and ever-changing
vision of sexual minority youth, as demonstrated in the bus vignette presented at the opening of this chapter. As I listened to the youth on that bus, I heard discussions of “doing” boy and “doing” girl, of slipping in and out of genders. One individual was transitioning and identified as half-boy, while another stated she was a boy “today.” Gender, for them, was apparently as fluid as the clothes they wore. Their identities far exceeded the boundaries of gender binaries, and moved beyond the polarities constructed by heteronormativism. As an educator, I cannot begin to imagine a curriculum, as curriculum is currently envisioned, where these youth would feel recognized and included. But some day soon I will have to.
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APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- Name, age, grade, how they identify in terms of race/ethnicity, and parents/guardian SES background will appear on a demographic information sheet.

Introduction to participant/school
1. How would you describe yourself to someone who you just met?
2. How do you think your friends would describe you?
3. How would you describe the general student population at your school?
4. Do you define your sexual orientation? If so, how? If not, why not?
5. Do you feel safe at school?
6. Are students and/or teachers teased or harassed because of the way others' view their sexual orientation?

Gay/Straight Alliance
7. How did you first hear about the GSA?
8. What prompted you to get involved?
9. How long have you been a member of the GSA?
10. What has your involvement been with the GSA?
11. What do you think are the goals of the GSA?
12. How successful do you think you and the group has been meeting them? Why?

Return to Self and School
13. Do you talk about your sexual identity with your friends? If yes, what kinds of things do you talk about? If no, why not or do you wish you could?
14. Can you describe a time or event in school when you felt powerful?
15. Do your consider yourself to be “politically active?” If yes, in what ways?
16. What does being politically active offer you?
17. What does the term “activism” mean to you?
18. Have you ever talked about citizenship in school?
19. Do you connect with how citizenship is defined in school?
20. Does citizenship mean different things for sexual minority youth?
21. How do you define citizenship?
22. Is there anything else you would like to add or tell me about before we conclude?